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Linguistic Variation as Social Practice

The Linguistic Construction of Identity in Belten High

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The Social Order of Belten High

Belten High stands on a street that runs all the way through the suburbs and into Detroit. Like most high schools of its era, it is a rectangular structure with large windows, surrounded by athletic fields and parking lots. The far ends of the building are given over to “noisy” spaces – vocational classrooms, music rooms, and auditoriums at one end, and the cafeteria, student store, and athletic and custodial facilities at the other. In the center is a courtyard, an attractive open area with grass, trees, flowers and benches, and paths that afford diagonal shortcuts among the four wings that make up its perimeter. The social world of Belten High is anchored in this locale, and becomes visible in the transformation of meaningless space into meaningful territory.

The physical and the institutional structure of the school – its spaces, schedules, routines, activities, rules – serve as constraint and resource for life within the school. Students come to the school with their own histories and their own sense of trajectory, responding variously to the school’s affordances. Thrown together, they find ways to meet their goals, fulfill their dreams, satisfy their desires, do what they have to do, get through the day, or simply to survive. Collections of people come together around common endeavors: common goals, dreams, desires, jobs, necessities, and/or problems, finding joint responses and strategies for dealing with them in the context of the school. They develop joint practices, joint ways of functioning in the school – they constitute school-based communities of practice. Each individual, sharing different endeavors with different groups of people, is likely to enter into multiple communities of practice, some of which will be more essential to the individual than others. And some of them will work out better than others for a variety of reasons: compatibility with other members, the forms of participation available, and the connections to one’s other communities of practice. It is in juggling the benefits of these various communities of practice that the individual finds a personal path.

2.1 Jocks, Burnouts, and the High School Corporate Culture

While most concern about US high schools focuses on the curriculum, the extracurricular sphere permeates day-to-day life in school. It is primarily around extracurricular rather than academic activities that the adolescent social order revolves – and not around the activities themselves, but around conflict over whether the school’s norms of participation in this sphere should define adolescent existence. The extracurricular sphere of the public high school is commonly seen as the primary site for civic education, and normative citizenship in the school involves at least some participation in this sphere. But extracurricular activities are more than a list of entertaining possibilities that any student might choose from; they constitute a tightly organized, highly competitive, hierarchical social system. In fact, they constitute a corporate setting very much like that of the business or the academic world, within which ambitious students cooperate and compete to develop individual corporate careers. These careers “count” more than (or to the exclusion of) students’ curricular activities in a global status system within the school, and count as well towards admission to the next institutional level, college. Thus the hierarchical popularity cycle that adults tend to attribute to adolescents’ social preoccupations is solidly based in adult-invented and adult-controlled institutional arrangements.

The school year is built around a relatively unchanging sequence of social and athletic activities designed to enhance the social atmosphere in the school and the school’s competitiveness with other schools. School personnel control resources for the development of these activities, and students organize themselves to make use of the resources: to compete for management of the resources and to build careers through the strategic use and distribution of these resources among the student body, and through the organization of successful activities. The distribution of resources is facilitated by a student hierarchy in which the individual’s place is a function above all of corporate roles (cheerleader, student council member or officer, varsity athlete, honor society president, etc.), relations with teachers, and the size and breadth of the individual’s student constituency. And access to roles in the extracurricular sphere is limited by this hierarchy. The work and servicing of networks required to compete in this sphere is an all-consuming enterprise, and for the student building a career in the high school, identity, activity, and social relations come to be built on the institutional structure of the school. The term “jock” has been used for some

time in many areas of the eastern and midwestern United States to refer to such corporate individuals. And while participation in athletics is highly desirable in this enterprise, sports themselves are not criterial for this designation. In fact, a student who participates exclusively in athletics is likely to be called a "sports jock," while one (particularly a boy) who participates exclusively in social activities may be called an "activities jock."

Students who do not care to participate in this sphere can move off to do other things, leaving school at the end of the required day and pursuing activities elsewhere. And students who want to pick and choose among the activities can do so as long as they limit their choices to activities that are not contested within the jock hierarchy – the "less statusful" activities. But nobody can ignore the extracurricular sphere, because of the particular ways in which it enters into other areas of practice in the school. In exchange for their cooperation and work, jocks are granted special freedoms, recognition, and visibility – they attain institutional status, and gain control of many aspects of the daily life of the school. They become public personae within the school, and frequently within the local community. Thus they do not simply dominate the activities themselves, but the school as a whole. It is not surprising, then, that jocks' institutional ascendance attracts resentment both from people who are unable to compete, and from people who do not wish to; and that there should be a fundamental opposition in the school based on the very practices that underlie this ascendance. One can view the burnouts as having emerged in opposition to the jocks – in opposition to their values, their practices, their privilege. But it is just as true that the jocks have emerged in opposition to the burnouts, who never embraced the school but strive to transcend the domination of adults and their institutions, and whom jocks see as simultaneously representing desired autonomy and dreaded failure.

If participation in the corporate activity of the school creates privilege, it is also an extension of privilege, for the students do not randomly filter into the extracurricular sphere. There is a class basis to students' attraction to, and distancing from, this sphere and from other aspects of the school institution. Thus the social categories of jocks and burnouts are not trivial configurations but the very means by which adult social class is embedded in the adolescent social order, hence reproduced. As will be shown in some detail in chapter 5, the jocks and the burnouts come by and large from the upper and the lower half of the local socioeconomic continuum. While parents' class is not a predictor of a student's category affiliation (or lack thereof), there is a highly significant relation between the two. The two categories represent class-based responses to the institutional arrangements of

the school, embodying a trajectory from childhood to adult class. The differences between jocks and burnouts reify class polarization for the adolescent age group, bringing middle class institutional practice into stark contrast with working class personal and local practice. And both the jocks' engagement in institutional practices and the burnouts' objections to these practices clearly emerge from different childhood experiences, from different expectations and ambitions, and from a different sense of what school participation can offer.

Like most suburban schools, Belten High is designed above all to prepare its students for college, and eventually for participation in adult middle class and corporate (broadly defined) practice. As in most comprehensive high schools, the structure of curricular and extracurricular activities is carefully articulated with college requirements, providing a clear and effective trajectory beyond high school. The full range of college preparatory and advanced placement classes, college board examination preparation, and college admissions counseling guarantee the effectiveness of the academic program. The careful management of the extracurricular sphere by a professional student activities director ensures that the various student government and other social activities are competitive on a national level. The articulation of varsity sports with school leagues guarantees the attention of college scouts – in fact, more than one varsity athlete told me of foregoing participation in a better league outside of school both to show loyalty to the school and to gain access to college scouts. For the college-bound student, the school's legitimacy is unquestionable, and while participation in the school's corporate context involves submitting to the ultimate authority of adults and the school, the promise of enhanced future social and economic power may be seen as compensating for the denial of more immediate autonomy.

The burnouts, on the other hand, most of whom are bound directly for the local workforce, see less reason to submit to school authority. While the school boasts a considerable vocational program, between what it provides and the district-wide programs that students can bus to, it provides little support in seeking employment, and incomplete preparation for skilled jobs. And because vocational education is by definition quite skill-specific, students bound for the trades will often need additional education beyond the high school, and vocational students generally feel that many of the skills they gain in the high school are outmoded. The burnouts, therefore, question the school's legitimacy in the most basic terms. And whereas the extracurricular sphere serves the jocks' futures as well as entertaining them in the present, it holds no such promise for the workforce-bound.

Burnouts view the extracurricular sphere of school as an adult-dominated make-believe world with no purpose beyond its own survival. Resenting the school's view of itself as a social institution, and feeling that the school does not offer them the kind of support they need to prepare for the local job market, they feel little responsibility to it, and resent any role it plays in restricting their personal freedom. Rather, they focus on developing a direct relation with the world outside the school, locating their social world in the neighborhoods and the wider urban-suburban area, and seeking both connection to work, and entertainment and excitement, on their own terms.

In a very real sense, then, the jocks are an institutionally oriented community of practice, while the burnouts are a more locally and personally oriented one. While these orientations go a long way towards predicting differences in the use of language, there are other aspects of day-to-day practice that unfold from these different orientations that deepen the differences between jocks and burnouts and fill in the affective side of the jock-burnout split.

An important aspect of the corporate structure of the school is the expectation that students will concentrate their efforts on their own school, and in competition with other schools. While jocks may pride themselves on knowing important "players" from other schools, they stop short of developing time-consuming relationships with them. The one exception may be a cross-school romance. But while the mystery of a partner in another school may add to one's visibility, such romances are considered both inconvenient and limiting, since strategic heterosexual pairing within the school is an important way of extending one's networks and visibility.

Further defining the scope of one's social networks is the age-graded nature of the institution. From the earliest years in elementary school, there is a strong norm that children's friendships should be limited to students in their own school year. Throughout schooling, it is believed that kids who hang out with people in classes below them are socially insecure or "slow," and that those who hang out with people in classes above them are growing up too fast, and are "looking for trouble." Although the passage to secondary school interrupts the strict age-grouping in subject matter classrooms, the age cohort is maintained as an institutional unit in practice. Class cohorts are segregated in separate homerooms, and form constituencies for the governing structure of the student body. Each class has officers and a cabinet, and representatives on the school-wide student council. Many of the activities are structured by graduating class, with each class organizing activities for the entire school, and with regular competitions among the classes. And

while it is expected that heterosexual couples will form across class boundaries (in fulfillment of the cultural norm that women should be not only smaller but younger than their male partners), there is a strong norm that close friendships will not.

By and large, school norms dictate that one's social networks should be restricted to the population of the school, and determined by and large by co-participation in school activities. This means that friendships can be subordinated to school responsibilities, and it is commonly felt that hanging onto friends who aren't engaged in activities is limiting, and reflects a fear to strike out on one's own. Changing friendships, then, is a key part of the social mobility that makes a jock career, and the entire cohort's friendship history shows a period of volatility during junior high school, as kids move towards or away from the extracurricular sphere, and as they begin to build the networks that will serve their particular trajectory.

Closely related to friendship mobility is the fact that participation in the extracurricular sphere involves participation in a consensual status hierarchy. Assessment curves in the academic arena and the small number of key roles available in the extracurricular arena make normative participation in the school fundamentally competitive. Furthermore, to the extent that one's status is based on one's roles in school, one's visibility, and one's associations, social life itself becomes competitive. Friendships can be fluid, as people compete for "the better friends" (a phrase I heard more than once), as well as for visibility and roles. And this fluidity and competitiveness affects the very nature of friendships. Many jocks report keeping their problems to themselves, frequently not sharing them even with their closest friends. There are several reasons for this. On the one hand, the middle class separation of the family and friendship makes confidential family business less shareable in the public arena. In addition, jocks emphasize the importance of maintaining an image of competence and control – an image that could be damaged by the admission of personal problems. And finally, inasmuch as jocks function in a competitive hierarchy, they cannot afford to allow negative information to get into the system. The jocks and the school work for each other. The jocks' careers are built on – and build – the school's extracurricular success. Thus there is a sharing of interests, a collegial relation, between jocks and school personnel. Jock friendships and even jock romances are legitimated by the school, for they are seen as based in school and ultimately functioning in the service of corporate activity. Jocks see their hierarchical and competitive relations as motivated by, and justified by, their corporate activity. While they adjust their social ties to suit corporate requirements, they do not see themselves as personally disloyal, but as acting

on the necessity to set aside personal interests in the interests of responsible institutional participation.

The burnouts, on the other hand, see relations with their own peers as purely informal, and as unfolding around the school rather than in it or as part of it. Thus they do not recognize a corporate justification for jocks' social organization, and view their hierarchies and competition as purely a result of personal preference. Furthermore, they conceive of two kinds of possible relationship with teachers: institutional and personal, and the institutional relationship is fundamentally adversarial. Where burnouts develop friendly personal relationships with teachers, they expect them to transcend rather than reproduce the institution. Thus the notion of collegiality with a teacher has no pride of place.

Burnouts also steadfastly resist age grading, and the school's more general interest in regulating association. The school is for burnouts, as it is for others, a primary place for making friends if only by virtue of the amount of time spent there, but it is not the primary locus of their social activity. Burnout social networks reside in neighborhoods and in the larger urban-suburban continuum, transcending age, institutional, and municipal boundaries. Burnouts' friendships focus on activities outside of school, and joint time in school is spent making plans for after school, and ignoring, escaping, or getting around school. Burnouts are, thus, counter-cultural within the school institution, and they set a good deal of store by successful subversion in school. But while the school sees their behavior as overwhelmingly negative, burnouts embrace strong social values that they see as conflicting with school values.

So far, the discussion of jock and burnout practice has treated burnouts in opposition to jocks and to school practice. This is because the school is the locus of this study, and a neighborhood study would have a very different emphasis, for the burnout side of the story begins in the neighborhood. Some students describe certain of the lower income neighborhoods of the Belten catchment area as "burnout" neighborhoods, associating that social category both with rebelliousness and with low socioeconomic status. A significant number of burnouts do come from these neighborhoods, and to a considerable extent, burnout networks reach back into childhood networks in these neighborhoods. The product of suburban working class and lower middle class migration, Neartown's less affluent neighborhoods are transitional between traditional working class neighborhoods and the diffuse neighborhoods that result from middle class mobility (Bott 1957). Kids from these neighborhoods recall a closeknit neighborhood life in childhood which, for many burnouts, continues into adolescence. With a tradition of

neighborhood, neighborliness, and mutual help, parents in these neighborhoods generally encouraged their children to form strong ties with their neighborhood peers and with their peers' families. Many of Belten's residents of these neighborhoods recall being in and out of each other's homes as children, and many of them still are. Furthermore, with a tradition of sibling care, kids spent a good deal of time with older and younger siblings and their friends, making social networks age heterogeneous. With the intensity of peer activity outside the home in the neighborhood, a peer culture developed early, in which children shared information, guidance, emotional support, and material resources. This egalitarian and open flow of resources frequently compensated for a lack of parental resources, and led to strong peer alliances. Many burnouts point to the loyalty, solidarity, and supportiveness of their networks as the most important thing in their lives, and as what sets them apart from jocks. Where jocks are concerned with image management, burnouts are proud of sharing their worries, their concerns, and their problems. It brings them closer together, and it underscores their engagement in the real world, and their experience with, and acceptance of, real problems.

With its emphasis on age grading, school prescribes a break in childhood networks, and from the beginning of elementary school, the school separates friends of different ages. This creates a tension between kids' and school norms, which does not decrease as the neighborhood-based networks become increasingly heterogeneous as time goes by and the value of urban experience makes burnout networks particularly open to new people from the urban area. Urban mobility brings in more people from Detroit, who maintain friendships from their old neighborhoods and schools, and older members bring in friends from other communities through jobs and urban exploration. But where the school legitimates jock friendships and romances, it sees burnout relationships – particularly those that transcend the school boundaries – as illegitimate. The burnouts' emphasis on continuity and on transcending institutional boundaries of both age and place leads the school to view their relationships as subversive.

As the burnouts' relationships lead them into greater involvement in the local area, the corporate life focuses jocks away from the local community and onto more global networks and institutions. The burnouts' expanding networks will ultimately facilitate their move out of high school and into the workplace and young adult local life. By and large, the jocks plan to attend college away from home, and some of them already expect to leave the local area after college. Many of them lament that they will probably

lose track of their high school friends but consider it inevitable; some of them look forward to starting over with more sophisticated friends from other places. Their connection to the local area is principally a family connection, to be loosened as they move off into their own futures. Graduation from Belten, therefore, represents a major life transition, and a departure from home and local community. Most of the burnouts, on the other hand, see the years after high school as an expansion, not an interruption, of their current local lives, replacing a job for school as their daytime commitment, maintaining their current friends and possibly marrying their current romantic partners. Although in the difficult economic climate of the early 1980s, particularly in the automotive industry, a few burnouts talk about leaving for the sun belt to find employment, most of them intend to spend their adulthoods in the Detroit area. Thus while the burnouts seek continuity in place of residence and social networks, the jocks seek continuity in institutional involvement.

With jocks in charge of legitimate resources in school, the burnouts must struggle to define and control opposing resources in the interests of their own autonomy. The jocks pursue autonomy through adult roles in an adult-dominated environment, and the burnouts pursue it in the transformation of this environment to suit their own needs. If the jocks control much of the legitimate space in the school, burnouts in schools across the country carve out their own territories whether they be in stairwells, breezeways, loading docks. Where the jocks enjoy special legitimate freedoms in school, the burnouts share strategies for getting away with illegitimate freedoms. While the jocks socialize at school functions, burnouts cultivate hangouts in the local area outside of school – in neighborhood parks, pool halls, bowling alleys, cruising strips. And while jocks expand their social networks as a function of their corporate roles in school, burnouts expand theirs along local lines independent of the school – through family, neighborhood, and work contacts and through encounters in public spaces. And where jocks cultivate school information resources, the burnouts cultivate their own resources in the outside community. Job information, drug sources, legal information, access to urban and young adult networks, sexual, birth control, and abortion information, knowledge of the urban area, all flow in burnout networks. Many jocks tailor their needs with care so as not to need much of this information, which is not easily available from adults.

It is a complex development of history, trajectory, and ways of coping that makes the jocks and the burnouts quite distinct and class-based communities of practice. While many of the practices that arise in each of these

communities may be related to class, they are not necessarily tied directly to class for any given individual. Close, trusting friendships are not restricted to the working class, and competitive, hierarchical orientations are not restricted to the middle class. And to any individual, independent of their class origins or aspirations, close friendships or competition may make participation in one or the other community attractive on independent grounds. It is the practices that define the jock and burnout communities, but inasmuch as configurations of practices define class, a middle class kid who adopts burnout practices or a working class kid who adopts jock practices is moving toward class mobility.

2.2 Gender and Social Category

As in the rest of the world, gender is fundamental to any system of social categorization. While the entire discussion above applies equally to boys and to girls, gender and social category are not simply cross-cutting categories, but interact in complex ways. Many of the basic constraints and dynamics are the same, but being a jock or being a burnout is different for boys and girls and even the very necessity of being a jock or a burnout is related to gender. The representation of each yearbook mock election type (e.g. most popular, class clown, most likely to succeed) by one male and one female reflects the fact that there are distinct male and female ways to be popular, to clown, and to show promise for the future. And this is inextricably tied, in turn, to heterosociability, or the social arrangements that support a heterosexual social order. The jocks and the burnouts began as two competing heterosexual crowds in late elementary school, and then emerged in junior high school as alternative ways of being “adolescent,” constituting alternative sites for the heterosexual market. Indeed, it was the heterosexual market that gave the two crowds their visibility. Thus heterosexual discourse is fundamental to these social categories, and participation in these categories constitutes also heterosexual gender practice.

Just as the high school provides the setting for the emergence of an opposition between jocks and burnouts, it also brings an institutionalization of traditional gender arrangements, heterosexuality, and romance. The female supportive role is formalized in high school in the pairing of such activities as girls’ cheerleading and boys’ varsity athletics; and in the feminization of organizational activities such as holding bake sales and organizing dances. There is a gender-based division of labor in activities such as the con-

struction of floats, where girls organize the making of tissue flowers and the boys build the structures. The institutionalization of the heterosexual couple is embodied formally in the dance as the most popular school-based social activity, the election of a homecoming king and queen, and the yearbook's choice of "cutest couple."

If one considers each term of opposition between the jocks and the burnouts, one can see that the categories are entirely gendered. Violence, urban toughness and know-how, and the ability to "rumble" are prominent themes among burnout boys. While some burnout girls may fight other girls on occasion, they do not enjoy the same claim to physical prowess and autonomy, and they do not draw the same admiration for a good fight. Throwing their bodies into the urban arena has different implications and potential consequences than it does for boys. There is differentiation at the other end of the continuum as well – as part of their identity work, jocks consider it important to maintain a clean-cut image, to conform at least publicly to adult norms for their age group, and to maintain an image of control. The clean-cut image for a girl above all involves sexual conservatism, and in opposition, burnout girls are frequently viewed by non-burnouts as "sluts," a label that fuses gender and social category. (See Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1995) for a detailed discussion of such labels.) While a jock girl may engage in sexual relations with a boyfriend, both are bound to keep it private, for anything that contributes to a "slutty" image, including styles of hair, dress, and makeup as well as demeanor, can seriously threaten a jock girl's status and by association, her boyfriend's as well. To be labeled a *slut* is to fail in the school's corporate culture. In general, jocks view the prototypical burnout girl as slutty, and burnouts view the prototypical jock girl as phony and uptight. The crucial difference is not so much in private sexual behavior as in the fact that burnouts, in opposition to jocks, are not concerned with sluttiness – either in image or in behavior. While being "pure" is important to a jock, neither being pure nor being slutty is important to a burnout. Thus while burnout girls do not necessarily flaunt heterosexual engagement, they are not particularly concerned with hiding it. Indeed, to do so would amount to taking on jock airs. Closely related to this is the burnout girls' rejection of jocks girls' popularity orientation, and the jocks' view of burnouts as surly and rude. Because jock girls' success in school depends almost entirely on their networks, they are constrained to cultivate connections and popularity. Thus maintaining a smile and a pleasing demeanor, and extending oneself socially, is a major preoccupation for jock girls. Burnout girls see this networking activity as competitive and "fake," and they take pride in being honest about their feelings. Reserving

their smiles and compliments for occasions that they feel merit them, the burnout girls appear unfriendly to the jocks.

Among boys, jock–burnout hostility centers around issues of masculinity. Burnouts' withdrawal from school sports in junior high school created considerable resentment among coaches and among jocks, since a number of good athletes were lost to school teams. The public association of athletic prowess with success in the school's athletic programs, meanwhile, excluded the burnouts from the possibility of athletic recognition and caused a certain amount of resentment on their part. Jock–burnout competition arises when jocks and burnouts are together in an athletic context – as one burnout boy pointed out:

God, in gym, man, it's jocks against the burnouts whatever you're doing, man.
That's where, you know, it gets let out a little bit.

Male athletic prowess is tied to a wider set of issues that are important to both jocks and burnouts – maturity, masculinity, toughness, power. If the burnouts suffer from a lack of public recognition for their athletic abilities, the jocks suffer from an image, in contrast to burnouts, of being under the control of adults. Cooperating in school, maintaining a clean-cut image, doing their homework, and going to practice – all of these things have a positive side of corporate status and a negative side of docility. Male jocks, therefore, walk a careful line between working with the school and demonstrating their independence from adults. This is facilitated by the fact that they are given more freedom, by teachers, by their parents, and by their peers, to show their independence – to rumble around, get in some trouble, voice their opinions, act "smart." There is also a distinction between tough and preppy jocks, which follows lines of choice of activity. Connell (1995) distinguishes two kinds of masculinity – "technical" and "physical," one associated with technical (e.g. scientific, political) power and the other with physical power. This distinction is recognized in the sports arena in traditional differences between men who play rough contact sports such as football and hockey on the one hand, and non-contact sports such as track and tennis on the other. In the high school, this distinction applies to boys who are jocks by virtue of their athletic engagement (commonly called "sports jocks" or "jock jocks") and those who are primarily engaged in the non-athletic extracurricular activities (sometimes referred to as "activities jocks"). This latter kind of masculinity is fragile, no doubt partially because at this life stage, technical power is confined to the school arena and access to it is dependent on adult cooperation and consent. While physical skill

and power are personal attributes that the individual can exercise (or threaten to exercise) in the here and now, adolescent technical skill and power carry promise primarily for the future.

All of this points to the fact that there is an important component of competition between male jocks and burnouts. This contrasts quite starkly with the nature of the relations between female jocks and burnouts, which have an important element of avoidance – a threat of pollution. One might say that this sums up the different positions of male and female in a patriarchal society. It also points to the fact that the differentiation between male and female depends quite crucially on the terms of differentiation among males and among females. Thus as long as we view gender and social category simply as memberships, it is difficult to deal with their interactions in a study of variation beyond fragmenting the categories. If, on the other hand, we view both gender and social category as organizing possibilities, interests, activities, and forms of participation in communities of practice, we can focus on those aspects of social practice themselves.

2.3 Constructing Difference

The division into jocks and burnouts begins in junior high, and is part of becoming adolescent. The prospect excites some kids, and makes others nervous. Being part of a crowd guarantees protection and wards off anonymity as the cohort moves into the wide open environment of secondary school. It also shows that one is entering into adolescent status. The pressure to affiliate – to participate in jock or burnout practice – is strong, and for many, perhaps most, it constitutes a serious dilemma. The following account of this dilemma is not unusual:

Dave: OK, seventh grade, day one, jocks and the burnouts.

Penny: Boom. Right at the beginning of school.

Dave: That fast. That fast. And I was never a jock and I was never a burnout. I hung around with most, you know, or like there was the jocks and the burnouts who'd sit and give each other dirty looks in the halls, you know. For no reason, you know. And I just thought that was dumb as could be, you know. So I associated with everybody. So that kind of left me right in between everybody else, you know. And so I kind of felt, you know, I was kind of – little bit – I mostly hung around with, I guess you could say the jocks, because most of my buddies were in that group, you know, or classified there. And uh, but I had some friends that

like hung around with the burnouts too, you know. And kind of left me right in between, you know. People said that I was actually, you know, quote, that I was one of the in between persons, you know. I'd just, "yeah, kick ass," you know. And so that kind of made me feel like a slight outcast, you know. Somebody left in between the realms, you know.

The hegemony of the jock–burnout opposition is reflected in the fact that the majority of the school population, who are neither jocks nor burnouts, are commonly referred to as *in-betweens*. In-betweeners frequently describe themselves in terms of characteristics that they share with jocks on the one hand, and with burnouts on the other. Thus while the jocks and burnouts do not constitute the majority of the school population, their symbolic importance is to be found in the ways in which they foreground issues that preoccupy the rest of the population. Thus while the opposition between the jocks and the burnouts may be an appropriate perspective for an analysis of social meaning in the school, the categories themselves are part of the process of the construction of social meaning – a process that is engaged in by everyone in the school.

It is important to emphasize that while the jocks and the burnouts each constitute a clear and relatively homogeneous category, the in-betweeners do not. In a world that focuses on categories – indeed in the view of many kids in school – in-between-ness constitutes marginality. In that case, more than half the kids in the school will have to be viewed as marginal. The status of the jocks and the burnouts as defining the poles of social meaning in school is as much derivative of the range of behavior represented by the in-betweeners, as it is defining for them. Unfettered by the demands for conformity that are part of life in any visible and clearly defined group, the in-betweeners can, theoretically, choose among behaviors that are either required or forbidden for jocks or burnouts. On the other hand, exercising freedom requires social resources: connections, information, company, material. All of these are frequently more abundant in large crowds than in small groups, and while the jocks and the burnouts constitute crowds, many of the in-betweeners are isolated in comparison. Thus the extent to which in-betweeners exercise freedom depends on the nature of their social networks. The in-betweeners, then, cannot be simply interpreted as representing some imaginary "middle," and certainly not as a marginal population. Rather, they represent a variety of ways of being "out there."

In innumerable ways, jocks and burnouts arrange themselves and their lives in mutual opposition, creating and maintaining difference with a broad array of resources. Jocks and burnouts listen to different music, stand dif-

ferently, consume different substances, do different things, hang out in different places, take different courses, decorate themselves differently. A more detailed examination of jock–burnout symbolic oppositions can be found in Eckert (1989). The patterns of linguistic variation to be discussed in the following chapters, and the linguistic styles that they contribute to, are part of a more general stylistic opposition that both defines and separates the cultural extremes of the school. The opposition over local and institutional orientation, and over the legitimacy of adult monitoring of the personal sphere, all come together in a complex array of symbolic behaviors, which are highlighted in school by the radically different “looks” that appear in jock and burnout territories.

2.3.1 *School territory*

Those who plant themselves firmly within the institution (jocks) and those who always seem to be on the way out (burnouts) use space in the school in a way that both symbolizes and facilitates their opposing orientations. The burnouts and the jocks quite dramatically work the margins and the center of the school respectively, and as a result have very different views of the school institution and its preoccupations. The forms of participation that they develop in the institution give them different understandings of the institution and its practices, while their differing orientations to the local and adjacent urban community yield different understandings of the world outside the school. While the jocks and the burnouts both develop powerful kinds of knowledge, that of the jocks is the kind that brings success in (and to) the educational institution while that of the burnouts is the kind that serves in resisting that institution and gaining access to resources elsewhere.

An important aspect of students’ use of school facilities is the relation between these facilities and the school’s *in loco parentis* role. The school provides such amenities as bathrooms, lockers, homerooms, and cafeteria to enable students to live in the building during the day – to establish a kind of home away from home. Jocks’ use of these facilities conforms to the school’s intended use, and signals their legitimate participation in school. Their control of some other kinds of facilities, furthermore, signals their institutional status and ascendancy over the rest of the student body. Burnouts’ transformation of these spaces, in turn, symbolizes their rejection of school authority, and their opposition to the jocks’ terms of participation in the school.

The hallways are lined with lockers, each shared in principle by two students. While the lockers are randomly assigned at the beginning of each year, students swap in order to be “locker partners” with their closest friends. This frequently results in more than two people sharing a locker, and indeed a crowded locker is one way of displaying alliances. The locker is expected to be the student’s “home away from home,” and being locker partners is the closest that kids living at home can come to “rooming” with their friends. Students are expected to leave their outer clothing, paraphernalia, and school books and supplies in these lockers, visiting the lockers regularly between classes and taking only what they need for those classes. Visiting lockers also serves as a way to join one’s friends between classes, and since people know the location of key people’s lockers, it is a way of finding people between classes. Thus there is always a social scene around lockers before school, during class breaks, and after school.

Burnouts, by and large, do not use their lockers. Their claim that they are not safe – that things get stolen from them – contrasts with many jocks’ claims that they rarely even lock their lockers (so safe is the neighborhood). But the locker represents not only a home in school, it is a transitional area between the outside and the inside. It is where students are expected to leave their coats as they begin a day that unfolds within the school. It is also the place where they organize their books and supplies so that they can carry what they need to class, leaving the rest behind. In other words, the locker is a school address, a storage place, a place for social gatherings, a transition point between in school and out, and a locus of academic organization. All of these are reasons for burnouts to avoid their lockers. Burnouts reject an address that is not only in the school but assigned by the school, and they do not publicly sort through their books in preparation for class. Indeed, losing books and papers, and coming to class unprepared and/or unequipped are common forms of resistance in school. And finally, they do not leave their outer clothing behind when they come into school. Wearing jackets in school is part of a powerful and complex symbolic system based on adornment. It allows burnouts to go outdoors at any time – whether they’re sneaking out the back door to leave early or to cut a class, but more important, it allows students to slip into the courtyard between classes and during lunchtime. The jacket announces that the burnout is not in the building to stay.

The courtyard, an attractive outdoor area in the center of the school, is the school’s designated smoking area. The association of the smoking area with burnout territory emphasizes the burnouts’ claim to the adult prerogative of tobacco, and the jocks’ avoidance of this territory and their strong

opposition to smoking clearly set the two in opposition. As implied by their name, the burnouts are known for their relatively open use of marijuana and chemicals. The alternative name for the category, local to Belten High, is “jells,” short for “jelly brains,” and refers to the effects of drug use. However, it is cigarettes that stand out as the burnouts’ key symbol. While there are a few burnouts who do not smoke, most of them do, and cigarettes serve as a key burnout symbol. Many burnouts display cigarettes on their person (sticking out of purses, pockets, or rolled-up tee-shirt sleeves, or behind ears), and offering and exchanging cigarettes is a favored way of making contact and signaling solidarity. Smoking is an important part of the burnout style, and gestures for both holding and moving the cigarette, and for inhaling and exhaling are studied and stylized. Buttons that say “smoking stinks” serve to announce jocks’ attitude towards cigarettes, which is also embodied in one of the most prestigious extracurricular activities, the anti-smoking committee. A number of jocks and in-betweens claimed to avoid the courtyard not because they were “afraid of” burnouts, but because they didn’t want to get cigarette smoke in their hair. A few people around the fringes of the jock network smoke, but never in school, never at school functions, and a number of jocks said that while they would never smoke in high school, they might well start smoking in college, where its symbolic value would be different (Eckert 1983). One girl who was deeply involved in school activities (including the anti-smoking committee), but did not consider herself a member of the jock elite, told me she smoked in secret as her own personal commentary on the jock enterprise. “The people who smoke” is yet another way that many people refer to burnouts.

Just as lockers serve a social function for jocks between classes, the courtyard is where burnouts go before school, at lunch, and between classes to meet their friends, have a smoke, maybe share a joint. One in-between girl, who spends most of her free time in the courtyard, gives her version of the locker scene:

They [jocks] like to take room up in the hallways talking with 50 friends around them, and you can’t get around them, and – If they just – I don’t know, it’s hard, it’s hard to say, but they just don’t come out here [the courtyard] really.

While use of the courtyard is not restricted to burnouts, those in-betweens who do use the courtyard tend to be smokers who are willing to risk being

viewed as burnouts, and many of them are friendly with burnouts. One in-between gave me this explanation for why she and her best friend don’t use the courtyard:

Candy and I are – you might say we party. I mean, there’s jocks and jells like that. But we don’t smoke cigarettes. And I think – I don’t know – I get the impression that if people who don’t smoke cigarettes go out there, everybody automatically thinks, “Oh, they want to be a jell.” So – I wouldn’t want everybody saying, “Oh, what are you, um, trying to be a jell now, or something (laughter) like –”

The courtyard is also a visible alternative to eating in the cafeteria. Many burnouts refuse to eat cafeteria food for the same reason that they refuse to use their lockers – they claim that it is not safe. Denying the school’s right and ability to feed them, the burnouts take their food – primarily chips – from the cafeteria’s fast food line and eat in the courtyard. In this way, even eating habits take on symbolic value, with the jocks eating hot lunches or lunches prepared at home while the burnouts transform junk food into counter-cultural food statements.

The courtyard offers a diagonal shortcut between the four wings of the school that surround it, but despite the convenient access that the courtyard affords between wings of the school, jocks will literally not set foot there. Figure 2.1, which charts the percent of jock, burnout, and in-between boys and girls in the interview sample who use the courtyard, shows this extreme division. Indeed, for some, “the courtyard people” is an alternative way to refer to burnouts.

If the courtyard is burnout territory, jocks control a range of territories in the school, both by virtue of their collegial relations with the adults who ultimately control space, and by virtue of the activities that are associated with many spaces. Lunchtime, when the closed campus policy forces students to stay in the building, is prime time to see the social order unfold in the school, as people gravitate to their habitual lunchtime territories. Most students eat in the school cafeteria, and then move to a specific place outside the cafeteria to hang out with their friends. Most of the areas of the school are off limits during lunchtime. Some students can go to rooms that house student activities that they participate in, such as journalism or choir. Some athletes can go to athletic offices and rooms. The rest of the students place themselves in the area that is open at lunchtime – the long hallway that connects the cafeteria to the courtyard. Where this hallway runs in front of the

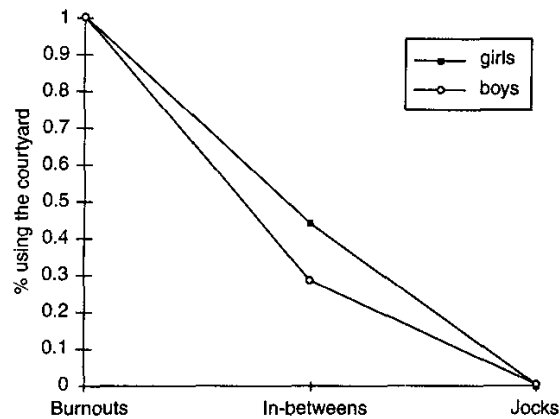


Figure 2.1 Percentage of jocks, burnouts, and in-betweens who use the courtyard

cafeteria is prime jock territory, as this is the area where tables are regularly set up for ticket sales and for bake sales to raise money for school activities. The courtyard and the hallway by its main entrance, on the other hand, is prime burnout territory.

2.3.2 Adornment

These territories combine with dress to yield a rich symbolic display, particularly during lunch hour, when this end of the school is the only free assembly area. Clothing is a particularly important symbolic resource because the wearer has only to be seen to display it, and it can be modified from day to day and over longer periods of time. Clothing style is also easy for the users to analyze and talk about (as opposed, for example, to language) so styles can be constructed in a conscious way. In Belten High, jock and burnout clothing style is differentiated in just about as many ways as possible. Burnouts wear dark colors, with girls wearing dark eye makeup as well; while jocks wear bright colors and pastels, with girls wearing pinkish candy-colored makeup. Burnouts wear rock concert tee shirts while jocks wear oxford cloth or polo shirts. Hair styles, nails, makeup, shoes, purses – almost everything carries category significance. But the most salient of all at the time of this fieldwork was the shape of blue jeans.

At the time of this fieldwork (early 1980s), the 1970s bell bottom jeans wave was coming to an end. A number of people were still wearing wide bells, and some were wearing the slightly more conservative flares, but straight leg jeans had made their way into the center of local fashion, and baggy jeans with pegged bottoms were the latest style. In other words, the ratio of the width of the bottom of the jean leg to the top of the leg was decreasing over time, and this decrease represented a continuum of global stylishness. The burnouts' faithfulness to bell bottoms was rich in symbolism. It associated them with the "freaks" of the seventies, whom they considered their predecessors. But equally important, wearing a style that was outmoded in the rest of the population symbolized lack of material resources – a fundamental term in the jock–burnout opposition. Burnouts pointed to the jocks' following of fashion trends as evidence of their affluence and their easy home lives. They saw their own lack of trendiness as directly related to their relative poverty and, in turn, to their personal problems. Wide bells were always cited as the way to "tell a burnout when you see one." One girl in Belten characterized a school in a poorer and more urban area of Neartown as a "burnout" school, pointing out that people in that school wore bells "this wide," extending her arms apart to their fullest width.

Formal observations showed that the continuum of fashion in jeans from wide bells to pegged baggies – from greatest to smallest ratio of leg bottom to leg top width – is closely related not simply to social category, but to finer gradations of social affiliation.¹ Assigning numerical values to jean styles on the basis of the ratio of bottom to top of the leg (4 = bells, 3 = flares, 2 = straight legs, 1 = baggies) yields a quantitative continuum that allowed me to quantify patterns of this aspect of clothing. Four hundred observations of people walking in the halls during classes (as opposed to between classes) show striking jeans patterns both with respect to location and to association. During class, when mobility in the halls officially requires teacher permission, the average width was 2.6, suggesting that those who have greater access to permission are likely to be wearing narrower jean legs. But in addition, jean width was not evenly distributed through the halls. In the front hall, which passes by not only the highly visible front entrance but the principal's office, the student activities office, and the auditorium, the average jean width was 2.3; while in the back hall, which is less supervised and close to the rear exits, the average jean width was 2.7, and in the middle hall that passes by the vocational classrooms, the average was 2.8. The symbolic significance of jeans leg width is not simply a matter of wide vs. narrow, but is actually continuous, with flares representing a true in-between style.



Figure 2.2 Average jean width in lunchtime territories

If people wearing different jean widths were mixing freely, one would expect all kinds of jeans to co-occur in proportion to their overall frequency of occurrence. There were the same number of flares and big bells in the walking sample, but straight legs occurred twice as often with flares as with bells. And while there were 50 percent more straight legs than flares or bells, flares occurred about equally with other flares, with bells, and with straight legs.

At lunchtime, the choice of where to eat, and where to go afterwards, constitutes a highly visible act of identity. The available area is a social continuum, from the jock territory outside the cafeteria to the burnout territory around the entrance to the courtyard and in the courtyard. Figure 2.2 is a schematization of this area of the school, and shows the average jean width along this territorial continuum, based on 400 observations of jeans during the latter part of each lunch hour over several days. There is a clear and striking continuous correlation between the average jean leg value in the burnout territory of the courtyard (3.7) and the jock territory in the hallway in front of the cafeteria (2.6), and a transition in that value in the middle space inhabited by in-betweens.

Jeans, of course, are only one very important component of a style. Bell bottoms are worn with rock concert tee shirts, displaying musical prefer-

ences and memories of rock concerts attended. Cigarette packs are commonly rolled into the sleeves of these tee shirts or sticking out of small overstuffed purses (nothing big enough to hold a book), and wallets are often attached to the belt loops of these jeans by heavy chains, as a reminder of the urban need to protect one's belongings. Many burnout boys wear jeans jackets over sweatshirts with hoods, in the style of people who work outdoors; and some wear black jackets with "Detroit" written in big white letters on the back. Both boys and girls wear jackets from local automobile plants, carrying car insignias (such as Cobra) on the front. These outer garments signal not only that the wearers are not in school to stay, but suggests where they may go when they leave. Burnouts, both boys and girls, wear their hair longer than jocks, the girls keeping their hair straight in contrast to the feathered hair style popular among jocks and in-betweens. Burnouts also wear dark colors, except for their jeans, and girls also tend to wear dark eye makeup, sometimes with a contrasting light foundation. This urban look contrasts starkly with the jocks' straight-legged jeans, worn with preppy Izod shirts and crew-necked sweaters. These shirts tend to be in pastel colors, as does the makeup on jock girls' faces. School symbols appear in the form of honor society, cheerleading, pompon, color guard, and varsity team emblems worn on chains and letter sweaters, and on jackets hanging in lockers. This clothing style contrasts with the urban style of the burnouts both in the relative "innocence" of the colors and in the use of explicit institutional symbols. On some important game days, jocks wear letter sweaters and cheerleading uniforms to school as a simultaneous reminder of the upcoming sports event, and of the institutional status accorded to people who participate in this event. And during lunch hour, these clothing styles appear to match the general atmosphere in burnout and jock territories. The atmosphere in the courtyard is more sombre and confidential, as people stand or sit in groups, smoking cigarettes and talking quietly and occasionally fooling around. The jock hall has more of a cocktail party atmosphere, with people jostling and shouting, laughing and talking loud, circulating from group to group.

The purpose of this discussion is not simply to show how different and separate jocks and burnouts are; it is to emphasize that their linguistic styles are part of a much broader and deeply meaningful style. The burnouts' style locates them centrally in the urban area and the local, vernacular, linguistic market; while the jocks' style locates them centrally in the institution, and in the non-local, standard, linguistic market. The term *vernacular* is commonly used to refer to the speech variety associated with wallet chains, while

the term *standard* refers to the speech variety associated with the honor society key. Each refers to a linguistic variety not in the abstract but in virtue of social practice.

Note

- 1 The issue of jeans is discussed in greater detail in Eckert (1980).

3

Sociolinguistic Research in the School

The pursuit of social meaning in variation calls for a hybrid research practice, for while we can get at local categories and their meanings only through close qualitative work, the study of variation is very essentially quantitative. Practice in the study of variation correlates aspects of variable linguistic usage with speakers' social characteristics that are believed to be related to linguistic choice. Crucial to this practice, then, is the collection of a speech sample from a population sample that represents the social characteristics under investigation. The survey methodology used in early studies of variation (Labov 1966, Trudgill 1974, Shuy, Wolfram, and Riley 1967) is eminently suited to this endeavor, allowing the collection of a sample according to speakers' membership in predetermined demographic categories such as age, sex, ethnicity, socioeconomic class. The essence of ethnography, however, is its exploratory methodology. Rather than testing hypotheses against predetermined categories, ethnography is, among other things, a search for local categories. Thus while survey fieldwork focuses on filling in a sample, ethnographic fieldwork focuses on finding out what is worth sampling.

A tension of scale is inherent in such work, since the larger the population we study the more superficial our understanding will be; on the other hand, as we shrink our linguistic sample, our quantitative results will decrease in significance, or will cover a minuscule piece of the sociolinguistic picture with no means of linking it to other pieces. The challenge in the study of the social meaning of variation is to find the relation between the local and the global – to find the link between speakers' linguistic ways of negotiating identity and relations in their day-to-day lives, and their place in the social stratification of linguistic variation that transcends local boundaries. Our ability to incorporate everyday local observations, then, depends on our ability to extract from them key elements of social structure, social practice, and social meaning that can be reliably correlated with the variable use of linguistic forms. This requires close familiarity with the commu-

5

Outline of Variation in Belten High

Michigan spreads over the back of a large left-handed mitten reaching out from the northern US into the waters of the Great Lakes. Detroit is at the base of the thumb, its downtown facing east across the Detroit River to Canada. The land that surrounds Detroit to the north, the west, and the south is perfectly flat, and etched with a regular grid of evenly spaced major streets running north-south and east-west. Here and there around the west and the south of this grid, expansive automotive plants and the occasional park or mall interrupt the neatly laid out squares. Class and ethnicity are mapped onto this grid. For the most part, as one moves out of Detroit in any direction, the socioeconomic level rises gradually; and the African American population drops and, to the north and west, all but disappears.

Neartown lies in the midst of this urban-suburban sprawl. During the time I was in Belten High, there were two African Americans in a student population of 2,000. Although a variety of European and a scattering of Middle Eastern ethnic groups are represented in its population, Neartown plays down its diversity. There are no ethnic neighborhoods or businesses, there is little ethnic pride or posturing in the schools. But Neartown does not play down its socioeconomic diversity. Its internal geography reproduces locally the socioeconomic continuum within which the town is embedded, and the neighborhoods run from solid working class at the Detroit end of town to relatively affluent upper middle class at the other. The neighborhood, the town, and the wider urban-suburban area provide a socio-geographic landscape that touches on, and extends outward from, the school. From their particular vantage point in Belten High, students can look outward to orient and identify themselves in relation to that landscape.

The schools of Neartown have somewhat distinct socioeconomic makeups, which figure in students' socioeconomic placement of themselves and their surroundings. Wherever possible, kids orient to other kids, and

high schools are a crucial part of kids' understanding of the local area, as student populations locate themselves in relation to generalizations about the student populations of surrounding schools. Belten's catchment area embraces the full socioeconomic spectrum of Neartown, but with a somewhat smaller population at the ends of the spectrum than the comparably poorer and wealthier schools in town. Kids at Belten also come from three junior high schools, each of which has a different socioeconomic character; and each of these junior high schools is fed by several neighborhood-based, hence quite economically homogeneous, elementary schools. Moving through the Neartown school system, then, brings increasing socioeconomic diversity and an increasing awareness of one's own place in the local socioeconomic spectrum.

Kids at Belten are sensitive to class differences. Many of them have an accurate socioeconomic map of the suburban area, and of the neighborhoods served by the school, and they are aware of many of the socioeconomic distinctions within the school population. However, students' awareness of parents' class is strongly tempered by relations among students themselves. Wealth becomes salient primarily to the extent that people do not assimilate socially to the dominant socioeconomic level of their school. If kids of greater means dress ostentatiously, or drive fancy cars, they will be stigmatized by the general student body not so much for being "rich," but for not conforming to local style. Ostentation is seen as a kind of social incompetence. A person who is visibly poor will be likewise stigmatized on the grounds of incompetence – on the apparent inability to keep up appearances. One jock girl, for instance, told me that she often wore painter's pants because she couldn't afford the appropriate jeans, and chose to strike out in a new but inexpensive fashion direction. She pointed out that a little creativity could overcome a lack of money, arguing that poverty is never an excuse to dress badly. Of course, she was not particularly poor, and it is not obvious whether her clever choice of painter's pants was saving her, or whether she already had sufficient status to set a style.

As school represents the transition from childhood to adulthood, it is also a major locus for the transition from parents' socioeconomic status to one's own. Social category affiliation is an institutionalization, within the school, of this transition. The two life stage elements are manifest in high school: kids still live at home, and in neighborhoods shared with some classmates and far from others. Their parents' socioeconomic status determines, to some extent, what they can buy, where they can go, and what they can do. It also influences their outlook on the world, and on school; their expectations and their desires. And to the extent that they hang out with other kids

from their neighborhood, their friends' backgrounds are likely to have had a similar effect on them, intensifying class-based orientations. What they do in school – what curriculum they follow, what activities they participate in, and what kinds of grades they get – will determine to some extent what they do after they leave school. Thus all high school students are simultaneously coming from and going towards. What they do in high school is a pivot point, and for some it is a continuation of a style of life from home while for others it is a transition to a new style of life.

The first place to look in a study of the salience of class among adolescents is the socioeconomic status of their parents. In order to establish the baseline of the influence of parents' socioeconomic status on the Belten students' patterns of variation, and to ensure comparability with currently existing correlations between variation and adult class, I adopt the general measures of socioeconomic status introduced to the study of variation by Labov (1966). Any correlation between adolescents' patterns of variation and their parents' socioeconomic status could result from one of several possible mechanisms. On the one hand, it is possible that the adolescent speaker acquires class-based linguistic patterns directly from one or both parents. Alternatively, the main influence could be one's early peers. Inasmuch as parents' material possibilities determine the child's neighborhood, they determine the child's earliest and most accessible peers. Finally, it is possible that aspects of parents' socioeconomic status influence adolescents' own orientation to the world which, in turn, affects their speech patterns.

5.1 Measures of Parents' Status

The neighborhoods that serve Belten High cover all or parts of 14 quarter sections on the census map. According to the 1980 Census, the closest to the time of this study, the median household income in Belten's catchment area ranged from \$24,000 in the poorer of the sections closest to Detroit to \$40,000 in the section farthest from Detroit. Table 5.1 groups quarter sections by median income, based on natural divisions into three fairly homogeneous levels. The gap between levels 2 and 3 is particularly stark. Only two quarter sections at the extreme suburban end of the Belten catchment area fall under index level 3, and are generally recognized as "rich" neighborhoods. Correlations between linguistic variables and these levels, constituting a Neighborhood Income Index, could be

Table 5.1 Neighborhood income index

Neighborhood income index	Median income range	Number in speaker sample
1	\$25,806–\$26,750	28
2	\$29,706–\$33,688	33
3	\$39,790–\$40,017	8

Table 5.2 Housing index

Housing index	House value	Number in speaker sample
1	Under \$20,000	5
2	\$20,000–\$24,999	7
3	\$25,000–\$29,000	8
4	\$30,000–\$34,999	23
5	\$35,000–\$39,999	13
6	Over \$40,000	13

taken to suggest a relation between patterns of variation and general neighborhood.

While parents' income was not available for the individuals in the Belten High sample, available information relevant to parents' socioeconomic status includes the assessed value of the family residence, and the occupations and educational attainment of both parents. A housing index, based on the assessed values of the homes of Belten High students, is shown in table 5.2.

The parents of the members of the Belten speaker sample range in education from second grade to the PhD. This study uses an index of education level, based on that used in Labov (1966), but with the addition of a sixth level for parents who have had at least some postgraduate education. This index and the distribution of educational levels of speakers' mothers and fathers are shown in table 5.3.

Figure 5.1, displaying the education indices of the mother and the father of each student in the speaker sample, shows a rough relation between mothers' and fathers' educational levels.¹ The range of fathers' education, however, is greater than the range of mothers' – there are no mothers in the

Table 5.3 Education index

Education index	Education level	Fathers in speaker sample	Mothers in speaker sample
1	Grade school or less	2	0
2	Some high school	4	3
3	Finished high school	23	39
4	Some college or trade school	12	13
5	Finished college	23	13
6	Some graduate school	5	1

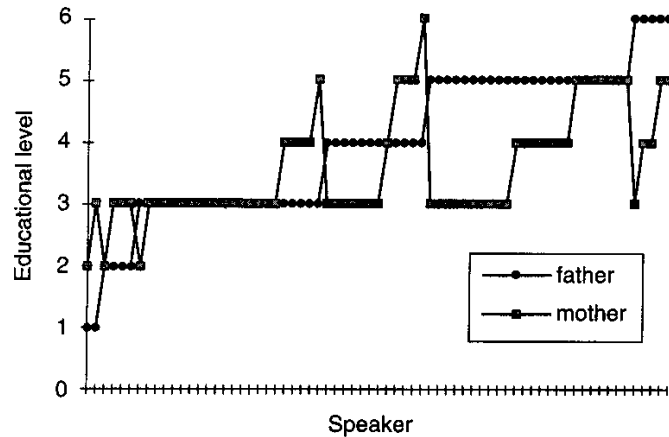


Figure 5.1 Parents' education by speaker

sample who did not finish elementary school, and there is only one who did graduate work. In correlations with education, therefore, fathers are considered both on a six-point scale and on a four-point scale, merging the levels at each of the extremes: levels 1 and 2 on the one hand, and 5 and 6 on the other.

As with education, occupational categories are assigned values according to the system employed in Labov (1966). These categorizations are difficult to apply to men's occupations, and they are even more difficult to apply to

Table 5.4 Parents' occupational index

Occupation index	Description	Fathers in speaker sample	Mothers in speaker sample
0	No employment outside the home	0	41
1	Laborers	3	1
2	Service workers	2	4
3	Craftsmen, foremen and kindred workers	15	3
4	Clerical, sales and kindred workers	14	13
5	Proprietors, managers, officials	13	0
6	Professional, semiprofessional	22	7

women's. I will not dwell on these difficulties here, however, since fewer than half the mothers in this sample work outside of the home, making it impossible to use mother's occupation as an indication of socioeconomic status. Table 5.4 shows the distribution of parents' occupational levels in the speaker sample.

Finally, a socioeconomic index was constructed for fathers, based on a combination of home value and father's education and occupation. The addition of these three indices gives a range from a total of 6 to a total of 18. These were combined to yield six levels with as even a distribution of speakers as possible, as shown in table 5.5.

Table 5.5 Father's socioeconomic index

Socioeconomic index	Fathers in speaker sample
1 (6-8)	8
2 (9,10)	12
3 (11,12)	11
4 (13,14)	17
5 (15,16)	11
6 (17,18)	10

Jock and burnout affiliation correlate with all measures of parents' socioeconomic status: with father's education ($p < .05$), mother's education

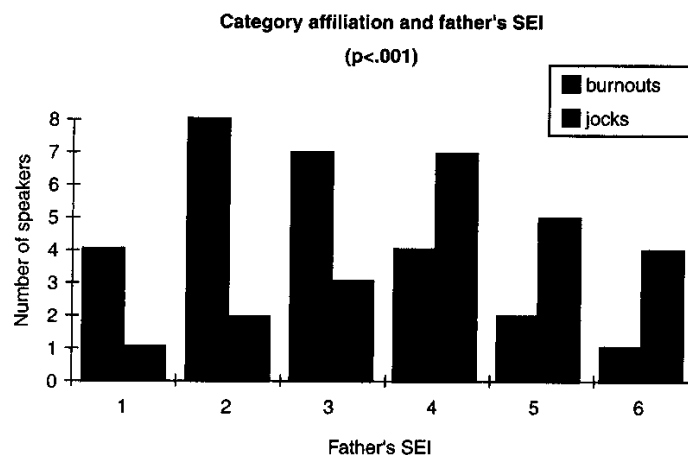


Figure 5.2 Category affiliation as a function of father's socioeconomic class, based on interview sample of jocks and burnouts

($p < .01$), but most particularly with father's occupation and father's socioeconomic index (both $p < .001$). Figure 5.2 shows the clearest of these relations – that between jock and burnout affiliation and fathers' socioeconomic index. It is clear from this figure that there is a certain amount of mobility – a mobility that potentially bleeds the effects of parents' socioeconomic status on adolescents' language. On the other hand, it is clear that there is a trajectory from family origins to adolescent social category. It is notable in this figure that the categories peak to either side of the center of the local socioeconomic range, and not at either extreme. They are based squarely in the significant mass of the population, reflecting the general makeup of the school population.

5.1.1 Variation and parents' socioeconomic status

Perhaps the most important finding of this study is the small extent to which the speech of Belten High students reflects their parents' socioeconomic characteristics. Negation, the one grammatical variable in this study, is the only one that is clearly influenced by parents. This is, in fact, a powerful influence, as there are significant correlations between negation and all

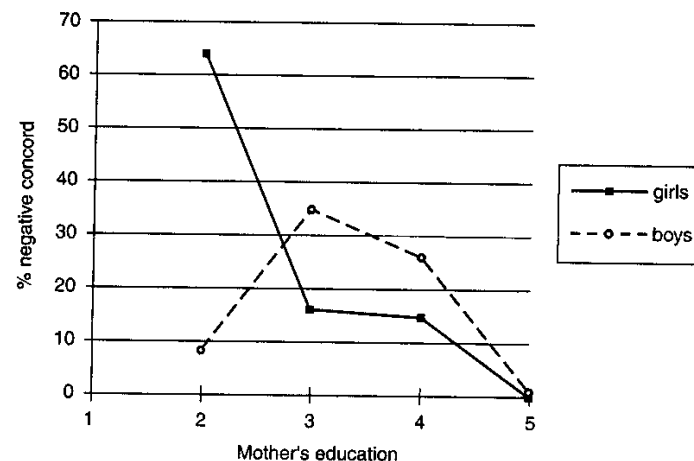


Figure 5.3 Negative concord and mother's education

measures of parents' socioeconomic status. The best correlation overall is with mother's education, and this holds within both gender groups (figure 5.3). If this relation holds up under greater scrutiny, it remains to be established whether it indicates that mothers are more likely than fathers to monitor their children's grammar, or that children are more likely to emulate their mother's grammar. There are some interesting gender differences in this relation. Girls' use of negative concord (mean = 15.057%) is more conservative overall than boys', it is more homogeneous than boys' (mean = 25.500%), and while the girls show a wider range of levels of use overall, their levels are more homogeneous overall (standard deviation = 22.460) than boys' (standard deviation = 32.426). In addition, as shown in figure 5.4, girls' use of negative concord conforms better to mothers' education (and to fathers' education) than boys'.

It should not be surprising that this particular variable reflects speakers' family origins, since of all the sociolinguistic variables in English, negative concord is arguably the most conscious and the most stigmatized non-standard variable, hence the one most likely to be monitored by parents. The fact that the boys' patterns of negation correlate less well with parents' education is undoubtedly related to the fact that boys are less constrained to conform to parents' norms in general. Eisikovits, in her study of working class adolescents' use of non-standard grammar (1987), shows a gender

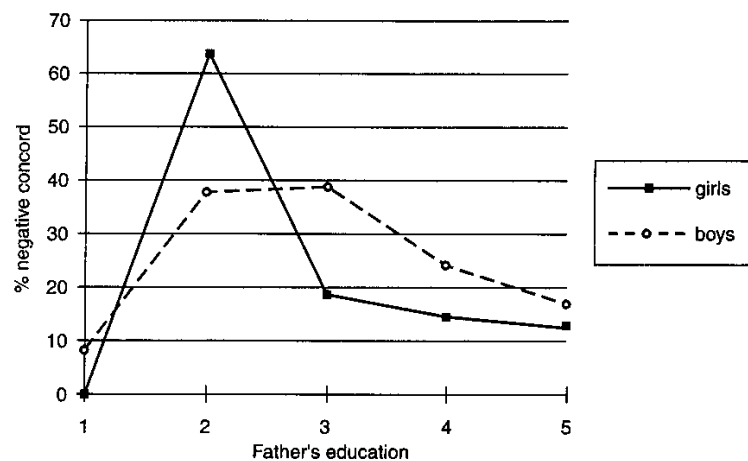


Figure 5.4 Negative concord and father's education

divergence as speakers move through adolescence, with girls' speech becoming increasingly standard and boys' speech becoming increasingly non-standard. She notes that the two gender groups have different senses of maturity, with the girls focusing on "settling down" and the boys focusing on autonomy. The association of non-standard grammar with autonomy makes perfect sense if one considers that children may not distinguish among different kinds of language use that are subject to sanction. This is illustrated in the cartoon "Family Circus" by Bil Keane, in which a girl tattles on her brother, saying, "Jeffy used a bad word! He said 'ain't!'" And just as boys' profanity is tolerated in a way that girls' is not, and indeed is associated with masculinity (through fearless autonomy from authority), so their use of non-standard grammar may have similar associations. The gender patterns of negation to be shown in the following chapters will confirm this.

Among all the vocalic variables, only the raising of the nucleus of (ay) correlates with any of the parents' indices, and only in the speech of girls. Like negation, it is parents' education that shows an effect – both the father's and the mother's. As shown in table 5.6, the correlation with mother's education is stark, with a break between those whose mothers have been to college and those who have not. There is no extreme nucleus raising among those whose mothers have been to college; and among those whose mothers have not been to college, there is an inverse relation between

Table 5.6 (ay) raising and parents' educational levels. Girls only

Educational level	1	2	3	4	5	6	Input	Sig.
Mother	na	.801	.459	(0)*	(0)	na	.016	.000
Father	460	870	627	476	352	357	.010	.000

* Values in parentheses are knockouts, not included in the calculation

nucleus raising and mother's educational level. There are only two girls whose mother's educational level is 2, making the apparent cline less convincing, and producing something more like a dichotomous correlation. There is a fairly smooth inverse correlation between (ay) raising and father's education, with the exception of the lowest educational group. There is, however, only one girl whose father falls in this group – the same girl who shows no negative concord in figure 5.4.

The general lack of correlation between the vocalic variables and parents' socioeconomic indices could be partially due to the sample selection. The speaker sample in the study of Belten High is not a random sampling based on parents' socioeconomic factors. Rather, choice of speakers was based on place in social networks and particularly in relation to social categories, foregrounding the speakers' own socioeconomically related choices. A sampling that did not take social categories into account may well downplay individual social mobility and show a greater correlation between linguistic variables and parents' status. However, the clear correlation of parents' social characteristics with negation suggests that this is not the case, and that the vocalic variables are imbued with peer-based meaning. It is just this difference that forms the heart of this research, which focuses on the transitional nature of adolescence, and particularly on the relation between the speaker's construction of identity and linguistic variation. Indeed, the one girl in table 5.6 whose father falls in educational level 1, but whose nucleus raising value for (ay) is relatively low (and who shows no negative concord in figure 5.3), is a jock, and as we will see below, (ay) raising is typical of burnouts.

5.2 Peer Categories

The depth of the social differences that constitute the opposition between jocks and burnouts is witnessed by the fact that, along with gender, the

Table 5.7 Variables by gender and social category. Jocks and burnouts only

Variable	Girls	Boys	Burnouts	Jocks	Input	Sig.
(aeh) raising	.574	.435	ni	ni	.372	.000
(o) fronting	.589	.410	ni	ni	.277	.000
(oh) fronting	.669	.373	.599	.421	.171	.009
(Λ) backing	ni	ni	.571	.437	.494	.000
(e) backing	ni	ni	.540	.467	.262	.016
(ay) raising	.586	.434	.707	.257	.009	.045
(ay) monophthongiz.	.426	.555	ni	ni	.072	.006
(Λ) fronting	ni	ni	.364	.622	.076	.000
(e) lowering	.583	.437	.405	.580	.035	.024
Negative concord	.412	.567	.709	.306	.238	.000

Secondary social constraint

major determiners of the use of sociolinguistic variables in Belten High are jock or burnout affiliation, and engagement in the practices that constitute those categories. The following analysis of variation will focus on the two polarized categories – the jocks and the burnouts – in order to outline the structure of variation in Belten High. Subsequent chapters will expand the view to incorporate in-betweens as well.

When gender and social category are treated as independent variables, the variables described in chapter 4 fall roughly into two categories of social correlation: those that correlate primarily with gender and those that correlate primarily with social category. I will show below that this typology is oversimplified, and that the key to social meaning in variation lies in the interactions between the two. Table 5.7 shows the overall correlations for the main variants for each of the vocalic variables, among the jocks and burnouts only.

The variables fall into three rough groups: those constrained solely by gender (and these are divided into female and male leads), those constrained solely by social category (and these are divided into jock and burnout leads), and those constrained by a combination of the two. The older changes in the Northern Cities Chain Shift (raising of (aeh) and fronting of (o)) correlate only with gender,² with the girls leading in both cases in the use of advanced variants. The monophthongization of (ay) is also constrained only by gender, and is the only vocalic variable in which boys lead across the board in the use of advanced variants. The newer changes in the Northern

Table 5.8 Negative concord: mother's education, gender, and social category

Primary constraint						Secondary constraint		Tertiary constraint		
Mother's education						Category		Gender		
2	3	4	5	6	Jocks	Burnouts	Girls	Boys	Input =	Sig. =
.729	.680	.589	.034	.418	.321	.693	.383	.590	.170	.000

Table 5.9 Negative concord: mother's education and social category

Mother's education						Category			
						Jocks	Burnouts	Input	Sig.
Girls	2	3	4	5	6	.110	.746	.184	.000
Boys	.134	.741	.531	.041	.421	.355	.705	.199	.000

Secondary social constraint

Cities Shift (backing of (Λ) and (e)) correlate only with social category, with the burnouts leading all groups in the use of advanced variants. (oh) fronting, lying at the intersection of the two series, correlates with both, but with gender a stronger social constraint than social category affiliation. (ay) raising correlates with both gender and social category as well, with girls and burnouts leading. Finally, the reversals of (Λ) and (e) backing show a reversal of the category constraint, with jocks leading. In the case of (e), the category constraint is secondary to gender, with girls leading.

In the discussion of parents' class characteristics above, negative concord and (ay) raising were the only variables to correlate with any aspect of parents' socioeconomic status, particularly mother's education. In the face of social category, this correlation breaks down completely for (ay) raising, and begins to break down for negative concord. When boys and girls are combined (table 5.8), mother's education is the primary constraint, and shows a relatively fine-grained correlation with negative concord except for the higher value at educational level 6. However, there is only one person represented in this cell. When boys and girls are examined separately (table 5.9), mother's education retains its effect for girls, but is demoted to sec-

ondary constraint. Among the boys, while mother's education emerges as the primary constraint, this status is due to differences among education levels, and the hierarchical relations are interrupted. Thus social category takes over in both cases.

Although most of the variables are constrained primarily by gender or social category, it would be a mistake to view them as "markers" of one or the other. As Brown and Levinson (1979) have discussed in some detail, the notion of sociolinguistic variables as social markers implies a one-to-one correlation between variables and social characteristics. In particular, they note that if most variables, such as (oh) in this corpus, correlate simultaneously with several social factors, there is no way to determine which is being marked when a speaker uses extreme variants of (oh). If we are to take interactions among social factors seriously, we have to think of variables as performing their symbolic function in more subtle ways than as markers of individual factors or factor groups. An additional problem with the markers view, as we will see below, is that a factor group such as gender or social category may have an important effect on variation and not show up in across-the-board correlations. The search for social meaning in variation, therefore, only begins with figures such as those shown in table 5.7. The cross-cutting variables point to areas to explore, but do not in themselves provide explanation.

As discussed in chapter 2, social category and gender are closely intertwined in the social order of Belten High, as throughout society. The interaction between gender and social category is clear when gender is opened up with social category, yielding four groups – male jocks, female jocks, male burnouts, and female burnouts. While the differences among the four new speaker categories are not all significant, some suggestive patterns emerge. Of all the variables, (oh) fronting and negation are the only ones in which gender and social category appear to actually function independently. I do not take this statistical independence to be an indication that the two are actually independent markers in practice, however, since I cannot conceive of speakers as separating the two – as, for example, "doing jock" and "doing male" separately rather than "doing male jock." Each person's gender is deeply intertwined with the particular style of male or female that he or she is pursuing. The variables show a range of interactions between the two factor groups, with a consistent change in gender/category patterns as we move through the Northern Cities Chain Shift and into (ay) and negation, with a gradual transition from variables in which girls lead in the use of advanced variants, through variables in which burnouts lead and boys gradually begin to lead as well. Overall, the variables fall into three

patterns, described by the factor weights for each combination of gender and social category.

5.2.1 Pattern 1

The oldest participants in the Northern Cities Chain Shift, the fronting of (aeh), (o), and (oh), show a pattern primarily of gender differentiation, in which girls lead boys overall in the use of advanced variants. In the case of the oldest variables, (aeh) and (o), gender is the only robust correlation. Figure 5.5 charts the factor weights for the four gender/category groups for these two variables. For both of these variables, the gender difference is not equally robust across the population, but is greater among burnouts than among jocks. Indeed the statistical significance of the gender difference for (aeh) for the entire jock–burnout population shown in table 5.7 is actually a result of the polarization between burnout girls and burnout boys, whose use of advanced variants constitutes the two extremes for the entire jock–burnout population. The difference between jock girls and boys, falling between the two, has a low statistical significance ($p < .078$). The pattern in figure 5.5, which I will call Pattern 1, shows an overall female lead in the use of advanced variants, with the burnouts defining the envelope of variation.

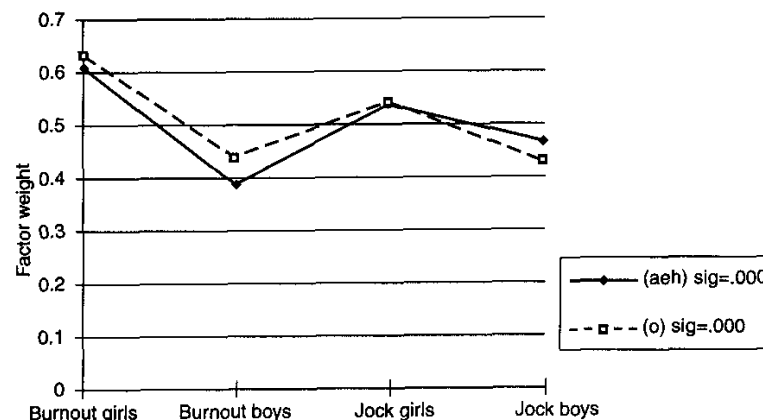


Figure 5.5 Pattern 1

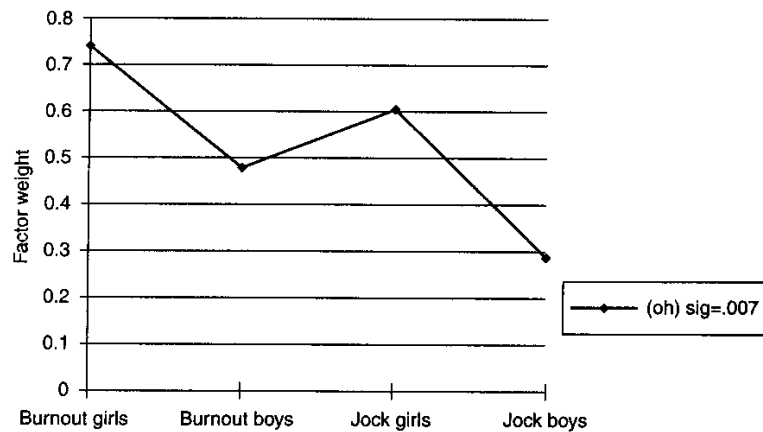


Figure 5.6 Pattern 1a

There is no robust social category pattern in the use of either (aeh) or (o). However, viewed in relation to patterns to follow, the pattern that does exist is worth pointing out. Specifically, the jock–burnout relation is reversed in the two gender groups. The burnout girls lead the jock girls slightly in the use of both of these variables ((aeh): $p < .071$, (o): $p < .045$), while the jock boys lead the burnout boys slightly in (aeh) raising ($p < .049$) and there is only a negligible difference in the boys' use of (o).

As one progresses through the early stages of the Northern Cities Chain Shift, from (aeh) to (o), and then to (oh), the jock boys' values gradually lower in relation to the other groups, until the burnouts lead the jocks in (oh) fronting among both boys and girls. This development also yields a gender difference for jocks that exceeds that among burnouts. Thus this decrease in jock boys' values for (oh) simultaneously increases overall gender differences, and increases a difference between jock and burnout boys, introducing the overall category difference for (oh) that makes gender and social category appear to be independent variables. I will refer to this pattern, in which both girls and burnouts lead in the use of advanced variants, as Pattern 1a (figure 5.6).

The reversals of (Λ) and (e) backing (figure 5.7) show a pattern similar to that of (aeh) and (o), but diverging from Pattern 1 with a change in the status of categories, as jocks lead burnouts across the board. The lowering of (e) shows a gender pattern similar to (aeh) and (o), with girls leading boys

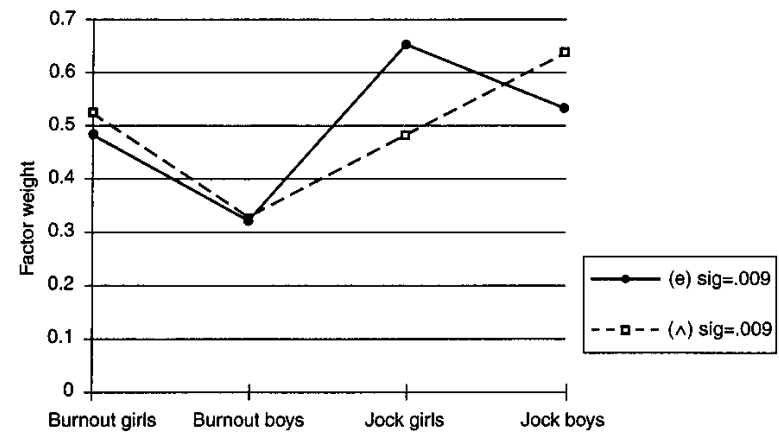


Figure 5.7 Pattern 1b

in both categories. (Λ) fronting shows a similar pattern, with the exception that the jock boys take a strong lead over the jock girls. This pattern, in which jocks lead burnouts, is Pattern 1b.

5.2.2 Pattern 2

In Pattern 2, it is social category that dominates, with the burnouts leading. The backing of (e) and (Λ), and nucleus raising in (ay) (figure 5.8) show a pattern primarily of social category differentiation, with burnout boys and girls leading jock boys and girls in the use of advanced variants. All of the gender differences are statistically insignificant except the burnout girls' lead over the burnout boys ($p < .018$) in (ay) raising. However, there is a noticeable pattern by which the gender relation is reversed between the burnouts and the jocks. While the burnout girls lead the burnout boys in two of the three variables, the jock boys lead the jock girls in all.

5.2.3 Pattern 3

The monophthongization of (ay) (figure 5.9) shows a complete reversal of Pattern 1, with gender once again the primary term of differentiation, but

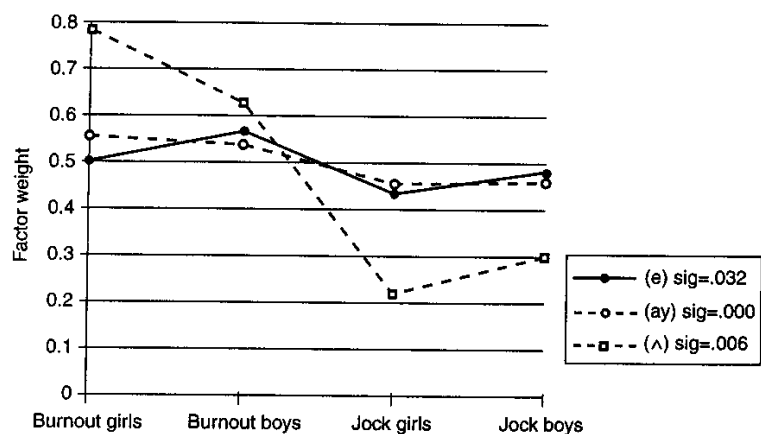


Figure 5.8 Pattern 2

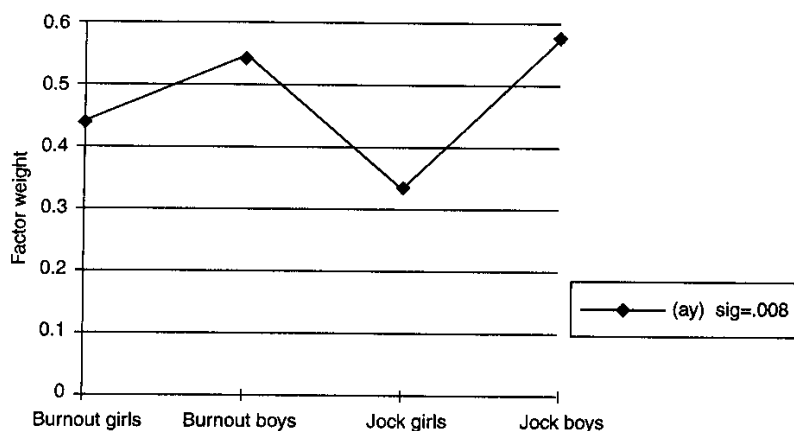


Figure 5.9 Pattern 3

now with the boys leading the girls. The difference between jock girls and boys, furthermore, has increased, and the category difference among boys has disappeared. The burnout girls' lead over the jocks girls in monophthongization has a low statistical significance ($p < .069$). I will call this pattern, in which boys lead girls, Pattern 3.

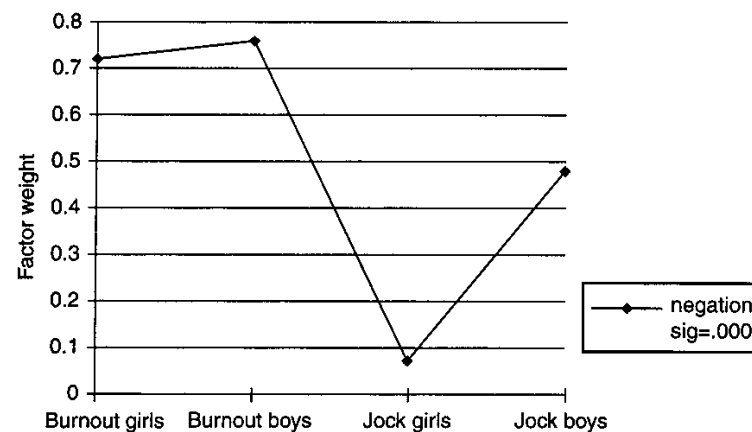


Figure 5.10 Pattern 3a

Negative concord (figure 5.10) displays Pattern 3a, conforming to Pattern 3, but with the addition of a category difference with burnouts leading in both gender groups. The relation between negation (Pattern 3a) and monophthongization (Pattern 3) is similar to the relation between the fronting of (oh) (Pattern 1a) and Pattern 1, inasmuch as it shows a clear pattern of both gender and social category difference. In this case, however, the gender difference among burnouts is small, while it is extreme among the jocks.

Taking all of the variables together, the speaker groups differ considerably in their use of linguistic resources. Table 5.10 shows the order in which each speaker group uses each of these variables. This table shows the gradual shift in social constraint as the variables move from the jock-dominated reversals of Pattern 1b through the female-dominated Pattern 1, through the burnout dominated Pattern 2 and into the male dominated Pattern 3.

Table 5.10 shows that the burnout girls lead everyone else in the use of advanced variants for half of the variables: Pattern 1, Pattern 1a, and two of the Pattern 2 variables. Furthermore, they do not lag in the use of any variables, making them the most comprehensive users of advanced variants. At the opposite extreme, the jock girls are the most conservative users of advanced variants, leading only in the use of the reversal of (e) backing, and lagging behind all other groups in the use of all Pattern 2 and 3 variables.

Table 5.10 Use of extreme variants for each variable

Patterns:	1b		1		1a		2		3a		3
	(ʌ)	(e)	(ach)	(o)	(oh)	(ʌ)	(ay)	(e)	neg	(ay)	
	front	lower				raise				mono	
Jock girls											
Burnout girls											
Burnout boys											
Jock boys											

Darkness of shading represents degree of use of advanced variants (black = highest, white = lowest)

Jock and burnout boys each lead in the use of advanced variants in two of the ten variables: the burnouts lead in the use of the remaining Pattern 2 variable and Pattern 3a, and lag in the use of Pattern 1 variables. This gives them a pattern that contrasts maximally with girls and with jocks. Jock boys, finally, split their lead between the one variable that is clearly a male variable, monophthongization, and the reversal of (ʌ) backing.

5.3 Variation, Gender, and Social Category

The common observation that female speakers tend to lead in the use of “prestige” variants (e.g. Trudgill 1974) would lead one to expect an inverse correlation between an overall female lead in the use of extreme variants on the one hand, and a burnout lead on the other. In these data, negative concord and (e) lowering are the only variables that conform unequivocally to this pattern. This is not accidental, however, for these two variables have a particularly iconic status within the inventory of variables studied here. (e) lowering is the clearest case of a change “from above” in these data, not simply reversing a current sound change but changing its direction altogether. There is plenty of evidence that this is a somewhat intentional reaction to the predominant direction of change. Lowered (e) is the only advanced variant in the entire corpus whose occurrence is favored by emphatic stress and length (see table 4.11). It is also the only variable

Table 5.11 Combinations of gender and category constraints in Belten High

	Jocks > burnouts	Mixed	Burnouts > jocks
Female > male	(e) lowering	(ach)	(o), (oh)
Mixed		(ʌ) fronting	(e) backing (ay) raising (ʌ) backing
Male > female			(ay) monoph. negation

for which the social constraints outweigh the internal constraints in the regression. Thus this links the female lead to the clearest case of what one might call a “prestige” (or more aptly, “anti-vernacular”) variant. Negative concord, on the other hand, is unquestionably the most consciously stigmatized of the variables in this study. While I would argue that most claims of women’s general conservatism are exaggerated, there is overwhelming evidence that women are more conservative than men in general in their use of grammatical variables (Eckert 1997a). These two variables, then, represent the extremes of social meaning in this study: the most consciously vernacular variant (negative concord) and the most consciously anti-vernacular variant ((e) lowering) can serve as benchmarks for consideration of the relation between gender and social category. However, it should be kept in mind that they represent the extremes and while they can frame the discussion of gender they do not tell the whole story.

Another way of viewing the pattern shown in table 5.10 is shown in table 5.11. In gender correlations and social category correlations, there are variables in which each dichotomous group (male–female, jock–burnout) leads across the board and there are variables in which the relation is mixed (e.g. girls lead among burnouts but boys lead among jocks). Table 5.11 plots these categorizations, with the nature of the correlation with social category across the horizontal axis and the nature of the correlation with gender across the vertical axis. Thus a variable in the upper left hand cell (in this case (e) lowering) is a variable for which girls lead in the use of extreme variants among both jocks and burnouts, and in which jocks lead in the use of extreme variants among both girls and boys. The criterion for placing a variable in a corner cell is that at least one of the correlations in each case be

statistically significant. In other words, in order for a variable to appear in the column defined by jocks > burnouts, the jocks must lead the burnouts in the use of the extreme variant of that variable both among the boys and among the girls, and the correlation must have a significance level better than .050 in at least one of the two cases. If the category relation is not the same in both gender groups, or if it is the same but not statistically significant in at least one case, the variable will be listed as "mixed." This table differs from the patterns shown in figures 5.5–10 because they take into consideration the consistency of gender and social category relations rather than their overall statistical significance.

The social use of all the variables in table 5.11 falls along the upper right diagonal of the table, so that three cells are never filled: the intersections of a male lead and a jock lead. While all cells that include a female lead are filled, the only male lead cell that is filled is the one that intersects with a burnout lead. The female lead shows no such specialization, and certainly does not show a tendency to bundle in the cells diagonally opposite the male lead cell. That is, boys favor variables in which burnouts lead, but girls do not favor variables in which jocks lead; on the contrary, the one female lead cell that contains two variables is at the burnout lead end. Thus while there is evidence that boys avoid non-vernacular variants, there is no evidence that girls seek non-vernacular variants or avoid vernacular variants. While girls may be more conservative in the use of the most stigmatized variable (negative concord) and the most frequent users of the clearest "prestige" variable (e lowering), the rest of the variables do not support an overall view of girls as conservative or "prestige oriented". While a few variables may show an overall conservative female pattern, most variables show tremendous diversity among girls. It is this diversity above all that characterizes the girls' speech, contrasting with boys' relatively smaller intra-gender differentiation. With the exception of (e) lowering, monophthongization, and negative concord, girls show greater dispersion for all variables, as shown in the standard deviations for each gender group (table 5.12).

The most consistent gender-related pattern across variables is the relation between the social categories within gender groups – between jock and burnout girls on the one hand, and jock and burnout boys on the other. With the sole exception of (aeh), whenever female burnouts lead female jocks, male burnouts lead male jocks; and whenever female jocks lead female burnouts, male jocks lead male burnouts. The degree of gender differentiation within either category, however, may vary sufficiently to prevent an across-the-board social category correlation. I have argued elsewhere (Eckert 1990b, 1997a) that the primary importance of gender lies not in dif-

Table 5.12 Mean values and standard deviations for each variable by gender group

	Girls		Boys	
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
(aeh)	.474	.126	.313	.110
(o)	.389	.161	.217	.115
(oh)	.329	.216	.107	.120
(A) backing	.426	.122	.451	.111
(e) backing	.383	.157	.365	.098
(ay) raising	.015	.054	.020	.043
monoph.	.059	.064	.117	.081
negation	.151	.225	.255	.324
(A) fronting	.047	.050	.037	.045
(e) lowering	.053	.037	.029	.040

ferences between male and female across the board, but in differences within gender groups. In developing patterns of behavior, in assessing their own place in the world, and in evaluating their progress, people orient above all to their own gender group. Gender creates such a profound identity divide that while people may be able to compare individual skills and, rarely, characteristics across gender lines, such an assessment of the whole self is difficult. Furthermore, a general constraint against competition across gender lines leads people to compete, hence evaluate themselves, within their gender group. A teenage jock girl does not measure her social success in relation to male jocks; a burnout girl does not measure her coolness in relation to male burnouts; a male jock does not measure his athletic ability in relation to female jocks. And while there is no question that people contrast themselves to the other gender, I would argue that they do it with reference to their own gender group.

The relation between gender and social category in relation to language use lies in differences in how boys and girls go about being jocks and burnouts. The constraint on jock girls to be squeaky clean seems to be reflected in their across-the-board lag in the use of Pattern 2 and 3 variables, all of which are associated entirely with burnouts (Pattern 2) or partially with burnouts (Patterns 3, 3a). By the same logic, the burnout boys' lag in the use of Pattern 1 variables suggests that they, in turn, are constrained to avoid variables associated with girls. Many have speculated that

certain men's low rate of use of "women's" variables is a function of their eagerness to differentiate their speech from that of women. Haeri's (1997) discussion of palatalization in Cairene Arabic offers a very strong argument against this view of gender difference, supported by data on a very clearly "female" and potentially "feminine" variable which is used by very non-stereotypical women and very "masculine" men. I would follow Haeri in arguing that if some boys are avoiding female-identified Pattern 1 and 1a variants, what they're avoiding is some characteristic associated with girls rather than simply femininity. This is supported by the fact, similar to Haeri's case, that while girls may dominate in the use of Pattern 1 variables, there is no evidence that these variables are avoided by boys who wish to foster a "masculine" image. If Pattern 1 variables were simply associated with femininity, then one might expect jock and burnout boys to avoid their use equally. This is true in the case of (o), but the jocks have a noticeably higher level of use for (aeh) than burnout boys. It is still possible that boys are avoiding variants that will detract from a "masculine" image, but only if one keeps in mind that there are many kinds and aspects of masculinity. By the same token, if the Pattern 1 variables simply connote femininity, it remains to be explained why the burnout girls make greater use of them across the board than jock girls. Certainly traditional femininity involves the kind of obedience and squeaky cleanness embraced by the jock girls, so if femininity is what is driving girls in the use of Pattern 1 variables, the burnouts are embracing a kind of femininity that has so far not been identified – and that I will discuss in following chapters. What will become clear is that "feminine" and "masculine" are constituted of characteristics and behaviors that have meaning independent of gender (Ochs, 1991).

5.4 The Geographic Context

The patterns that emerge in Neartown are not isolated, but fall into a wider social and geographic pattern within the urban-suburban continuum. The original intention in collecting the geographic sample was to plot the distribution of variables, and trace the spread of change, in the urban-suburban area of Detroit. For this reason, I selected communities to the north and the west of Detroit, and close in to and farther out from the city. The relation between urban and social geography, however, complicates the purely spatial interpretation, because each school has a distinct social makeup, resulting in a distinct social category situation. These social differences also have an interesting relation to the data of variation.

Along the western axis is Neartown at some remove from Detroit, and Urban City, which lies near the western boundary of Detroit. Urban City is a solid working class community, but with enough of a middle class presence to create noticeable socioeconomic differences between jocks and burnouts. There were distinct territories in school, and the opposition was similar to that in Neartown. However, because of its overall higher socioeconomic level, Neartown was a well-known destination for the upwardly mobile segments of border cities like Urban City. As a result, there were a number of kids in Belten High who had been born in Urban City. Those who moved to Neartown after elementary school sometimes found it difficult to fit in – one burnout who moved from Urban City in junior high told me that he had been a jock in Urban City, but since a jock there acted and looked more like a burnout at Belten, he had been unable to fit in with the Belten jocks.

Crane City is a relatively small suburb, located directly to the north of Detroit. At the time of this research, the population of Crane City was suffering considerable financial stress because of automobile plant closures, and there was a fairly high unemployment rate. This was reflected in a high level of stress among the students themselves and the considerable care that the school was taking to deal with it. A number of kids were living with friends, because their parents' financial stress was creating unbearable family difficulties, both financial and emotional. Others were striking out on their own. The school had been gradually reworking its practice in order to provide a safe place for kids, and a number of kids who were on their own were coming to school and possibly finding their only square meal there. The nurturing attitude of school adults was reflected as well in the student population, where there was less conflict between social categories than I'd seen in any of the other schools. The Crane City population is more homogeneous, and the socioeconomic differences between jocks and burnouts are not as extreme as in any of the other schools, and in keeping with this relative homogeneity, the split between jocks and burnouts at Crane City High had a different quality from the other schools. The social distance between the two categories was smaller, the jocks and the burnouts knew each other, and rather than manifesting much hostility to each other, they considered each other to have different interests, perhaps to be somewhat misled. The closer relation between jocks and burnouts was also aided by the relatively small size of the school. Some of the jocks, however, felt that the low socioeconomic level of their school was depriving them of an optimal institutional experience. Attendance at regional events had brought home to them the fact that more affluent schools provide opportunities for jocks to engage in more, and more sophisticated, activities than their school,

and they feared that they would not be able to compete with people from such schools in college.

Athens, unlike Neartown, Urban City, and Crane City, is a new suburb. It is near the extreme northern rural edge of the suburban area, where rapid building and expansion of the suburban area has juxtaposed an affluent yuppy population to the community's fairly depressed working class rural population. The jock-burnout opposition in Athens High School involved a far more extreme socioeconomic opposition than in any of the other schools. The economic differences were stark, and underlined a conscious opposition between old and new, and urban and rural, residents. And while many of the jocks spent their summers in Europe and were headed to elite colleges, many of the burnouts had friends and relatives in prison and were preoccupied with very different concerns than travel and college. The distance between the two was emphasized in the school by the physical isolation of many of the burnouts in the separate building that housed the support program for at-risk students.

With a few exceptions, the variables examined for Neartown show statistically significant social correlations across the suburban sample. Figures 5.11-19 show the percentage use of advanced variants by town and social category for each of the phonological variables. In these figures, the solid lines and symbols represent the towns that are at the suburban end of the geographic array (referred to hereafter as suburban schools), and the dotted lines and empty symbols represent the towns at the urban end (which I will refer to as urban schools). Circles represent the northern suburbs and squares represent the southern suburbs.

Two of the Pattern 2 variables in Belten are sufficiently more advanced in the urban area to be unequivocally considered "urban variables." Overall (ay) raising, shown in figure 5.11, is more advanced in the urban schools than the suburban ones, and common raising is socially salient in the other schools, while only extreme raising is salient in Belten. Nonetheless, it is clear that overall raising is higher in the urban schools, where it is male-led across the board, but with no consistent social category pattern. It is notable that although burnout girls lag behind burnout boys in overall raising to a tiny extent in Crane City, and although they lag behind jock girls as well in Urban City, the use of extreme raising (figure 5.12) tells a different story. Burnout girls in Crane City lead the rest of their cohort overwhelmingly in the use of extreme raising, and in Urban City, the burnout girls remain behind the burnout boys but lead the jocks in the use of extreme raising. This suggests a pattern more similar to that in Neartown, where extreme raising has special status. Extreme raising involves more backing and

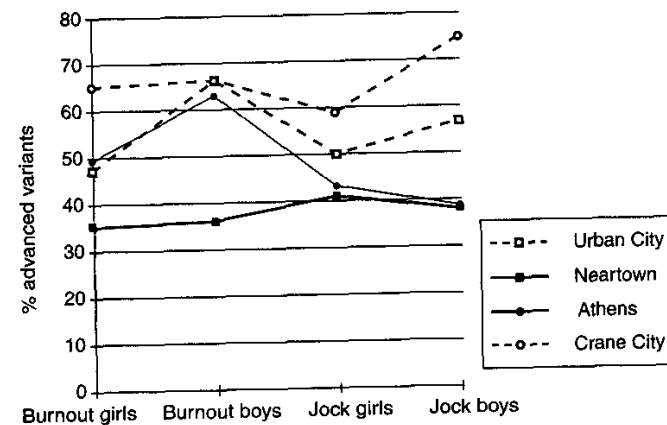


Figure 5.11 Percent common + extreme (ay) raising by suburb and social category

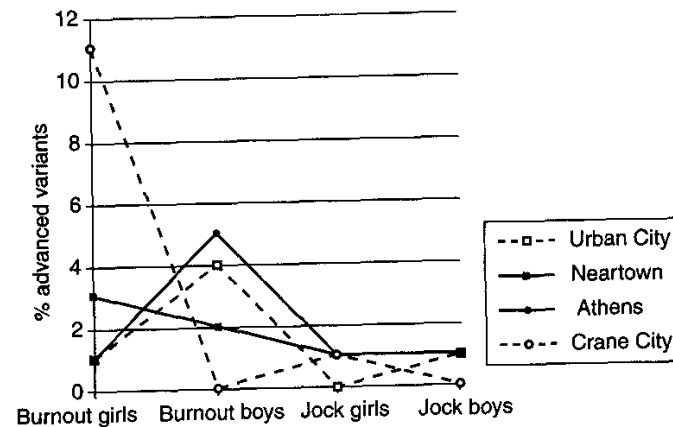


Figure 5.12 Percent (ay) extreme raising by suburb and social category

lip rounding, and stands out from common raising. Thus a relatively infrequent use of extreme variants may well be more noticeable than the more frequent use of common raising. This raises a question about the relation between quantity and quality in variation, which will be discussed further in chapter 8.

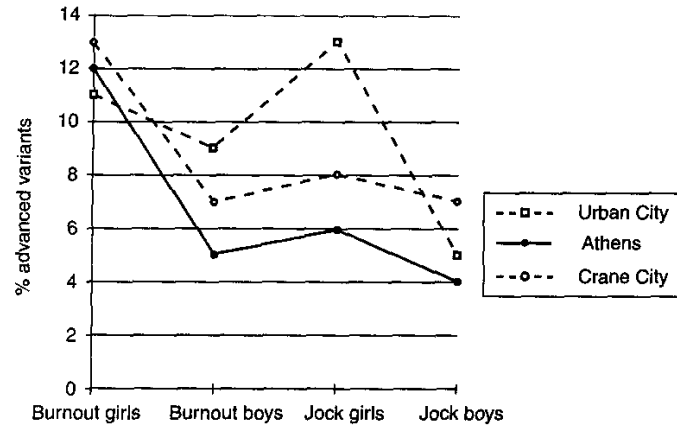


Figure 5.13 Percent advanced variants of (e) backing by suburb and social category

While Belten (e) backing cannot be included in the geographic sample (as discussed in chapter 4), the figures for the urban communities (figure 5.13) show a lead over Athens in the use of advanced variants for this variable. (e) backing shows Pattern 2 in Crane City, and something approaching Pattern 1a (due to the high usage of jock girls) in Urban City. If one considers the northern and western suburbs separately, the remaining Pattern 2 variable, (Λ) backing, shows an urban lead, particularly in the western suburbs (figure 5.14). Belten's burnouts' lead in (Λ) backing is magnified in the urban schools. In Urban City, this is expanded with an additional male lead, creating a Pattern 3a variable, with boys and burnouts leading across the board. The boys in all three schools far exceed the Belten jock boys in their use of advanced variants. On the other hand, the Urban City jock girls dip way below the rest of the Urban City speakers, and are even more conservative in their use of extreme variants than the Belten jock girls. Athens shows Pattern 3, while Crane City shows Pattern 2, with the urban-suburban difference occurring only among the burnout girls. The Crane City burnout girls are the most extreme speakers in their cohort by far for all these urban variables except common raising.

The status of Belten High's Pattern 2 variables as urban variables establishes the link between burnout speech and urban speech. The mixture of male and burnout leads among these communities further confirms a link

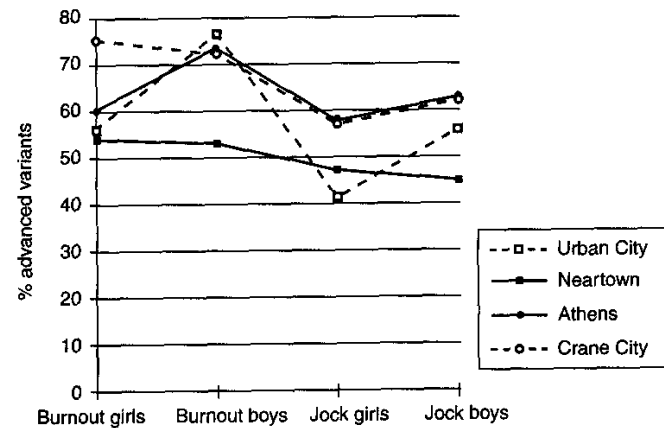


Figure 5.14 Percent advanced variants of (Λ) backing by suburb and social category

Table 5.13 Combinations of gender and category constraints for urban variables across the suburbs: (e) backing, (Λ) backing, (ay) raising

	<i>Jocks > burnouts</i>	<i>Mixed</i>	<i>Burnouts > jocks</i>
Female > male		(e) Urban City	(ay) Athens (e) Athens (Λ) Crane City (e) Crane city
Mixed			(ay) Urban City (ay) Neartown (e) Neartown (Λ) Neartown
Male > female		(ay) Crane City	(Λ) Urban City (Λ) Athens

between male speech and urban speech. Table 5.13 is similar to table 5.11 above, showing the gender and category patterns for each of the urban variables, all of which show Pattern 2 in Belten. The bolded variables are those that show statistical significance for at least some social variable. What is

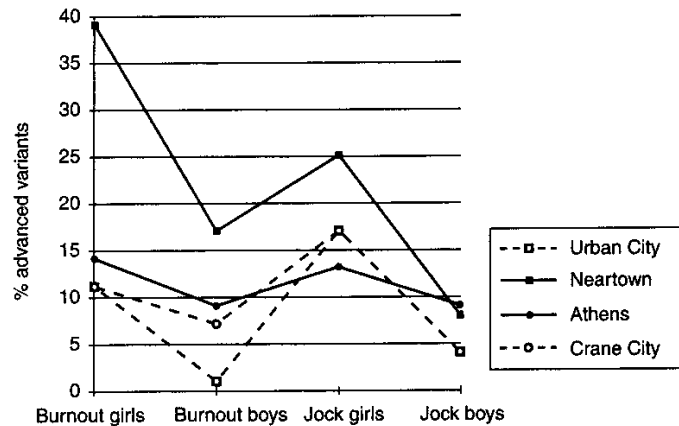


Figure 5.15 Percent advanced variants of (oh) by suburb and social category

most striking about this table is that there are no urban variables in which jocks lead burnouts in the use of advanced variants. And while the male lead, as in table 5.11, corresponds with a burnout lead, most of the variables show either a female or a mixed gender lead. Both the figures and table 5.13 show clearly that burnout girls are quite commonly in the lead in the use of urban variables.

Across the schools, burnouts lead in the use of advanced variants of urban variables in all but two cases. The exceptions are Urban City (e) backing, in which girls lead but the category is mixed, and Crane City (ay) in which boys lead but the category is mixed. The mixed status of the category difference is due to a low statistical significance for a burnout lead among both boys and girls. In the case of Crane City (ay) raising, the jock boys are the clear leaders in the cohort in the use of advanced variables, and the burnout lead among the girls is negligible. It comes close, therefore, to filling the lower left hand cell.

While the Belten High Pattern 2 variables are more advanced in the urban communities, most of the Pattern 1 variables are either more advanced in the suburbs or spread evenly throughout the area. Three variables, (oh), (o), and (Λ) fronting, show a suburban lead. (oh) shows the same female lead as Neartown across the board (figure 5.15). However, the two urban communities show a reversal of the jock-burnout pattern, with the jock girls leading the other groups. (oh) is clearly a suburban variable, and it is notable

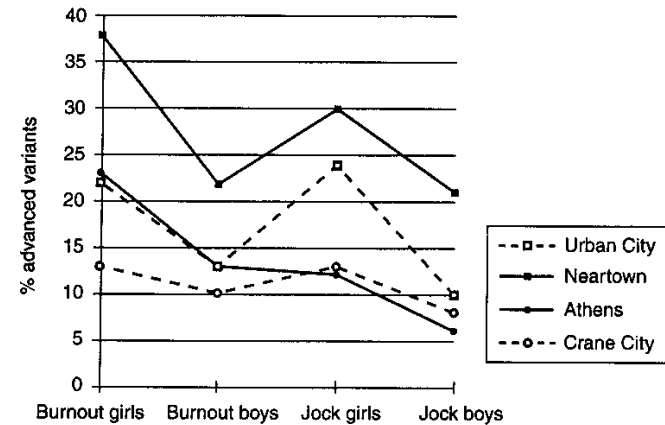


Figure 5.16 Percent advanced variants of (o) by suburb and social category

that the jock girls in the urban schools take a clear lead in the use of advanced variants in their schools and that these urban jock girls are the only group to use these variants at the same level as any group of suburban speakers. It is possible that speakers in the urban schools are sensitive to the suburban lead in this variable, and that the jock girls, feeling their jock status threatened by their involvement in less affluent, hence less "active" schools, are using suburban variants as a way of enhancing their jock identification.

(o) (figure 5.16) also shows a suburban lead, if one takes the northern and western suburbs separately. As in the case of (oh), the jock girls in the urban schools lead their cohorts, once again suggesting that speakers in these urban communities are sensitive to the suburban lead.

If we continue to consider the northern and western suburbs separately, (e) lowering and (Λ) fronting are also suburban variables (figures 5.17-18). It is important to point out, however, that the very small rates of occurrence of these patterns extremely tentative. The jock lead in both of these variables that was found in Belten High is continued for the most part in the other schools.

Table 5.14 shows an array similar to tables 5.11 and 5.13 for the suburban variables. Unlike the previous two, this one shows some variables in the lower left diagonal half. However, it is notable that every cell below the top

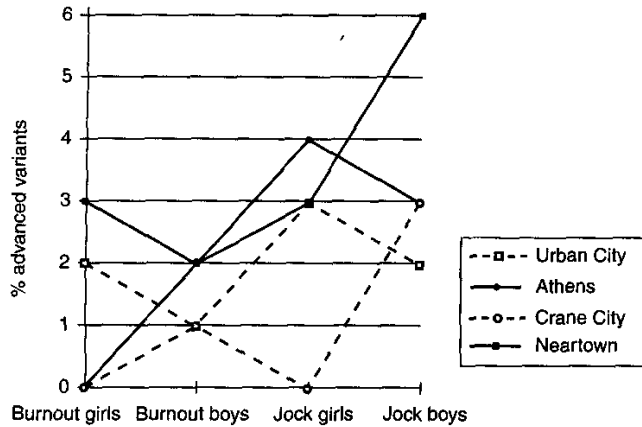


Figure 5.17 Percent (Λ) fronting by suburb and social category

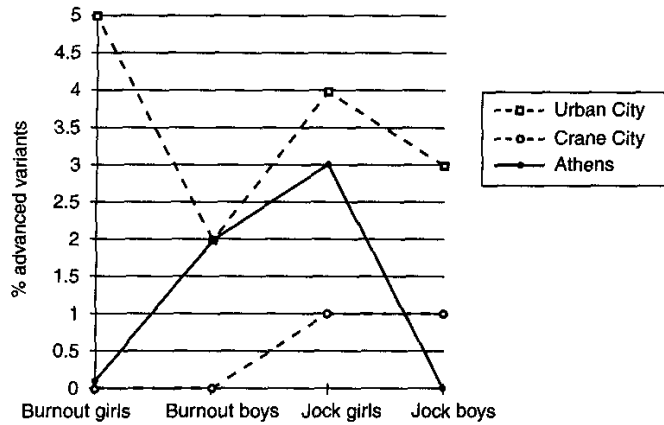


Figure 5.18 Percent (e) lowering by suburb and social category

row contains exclusively the reversals of the urban changes (e) and (Λ) backing. Of these, only half show statistical significance, and given the relatively low rates in all cases, it is possible that this distribution reflects an unsettled pattern. Also, these figures are not controlled for internal constraints. However, I will not dismiss these cells, but simply point to the fact

Table 5.14 Combinations of gender and category constraints for suburban variables across the suburbs: (o), (oh), and (Λ) fronting

	<i>Jocks > burnouts</i>	<i>Mixed</i>	<i>Burnouts > jocks</i>
Female > male	(e) Neartown (oh) Urban City (Λ) Urban City	(o) Crane City (oh) Crane City (oh) Athens (o) Neartown (e) Urban City	(o) Athens (oh) Neartown
Mixed	(Λ) Athens	(Λ) Neartown (e) Crane City (e) Athens	
Male > female		(Λ) Crane City	

that while the overwhelming pattern continues to exclude the combination of male and jock leads, these new reactions to urban changes, or “prestige” variants, do not appear to be necessarily female property.

(e) lowering (figure 5.18) shows a clear suburban lead in the north, but since we cannot compare the western suburbs, and since Urban City leads Athens in lowering, I recognize that its assignment to the suburban category is somewhat problematic. (eah) shows a completely mixed pattern, with an urban lead in the northern suburbs, and a mixed lead in the west (figure 5.19). Urban City and Athens’s pattern 2 contrasts with Neartown and Crane City’s pattern 1 and 1a.

Monophthongization (figure 5.20) is not a clear urban or suburban variable in either the western or the northern suburbs. Within the communities, boys, burnouts, or both lead in the use of extreme variants. In Crane City, monophthongization shows Pattern 2, with burnouts leading, and with girls leading within each of the social categories. In all the other communities, the boys lead the girls across the board in the use of monophthongization, and in Athens and Urban City, the burnouts lead the jocks as well, yielding Pattern 3.

Table 5.15 displays these two variables, which continue to favor the upper right half, with the exception of the one case in the entire corpus that falls in the lower left cell, the monophthongization of (ay) in Athens.

Table 5.16 is another representation of the geographic relations among the patterns in the four suburbs, this time focusing on the patterns across

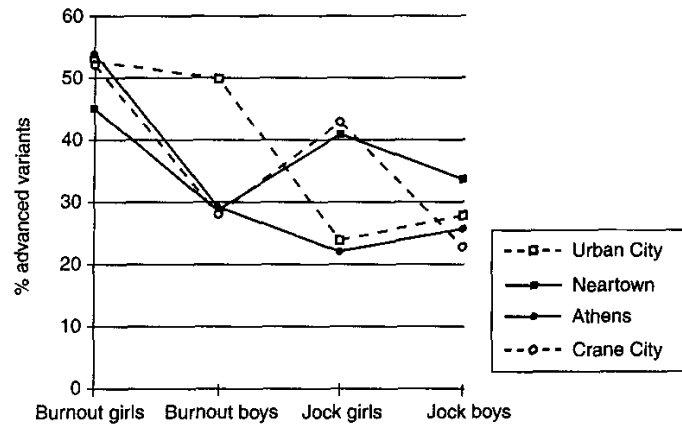


Figure 5.19 Percent advanced variants of (aeh) by suburb and social category

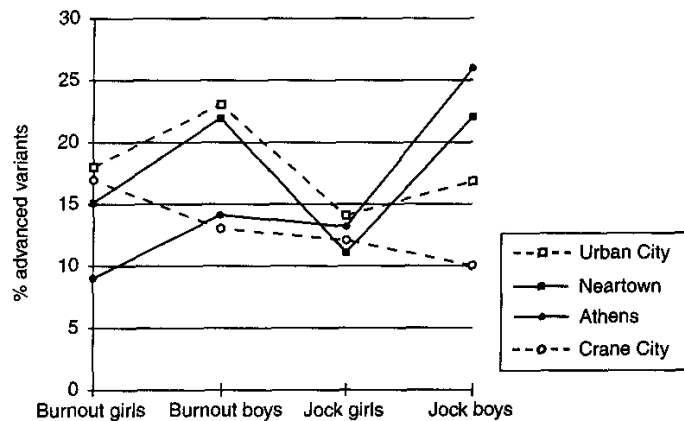


Figure 5.20 Percent (ay) monophthongization by suburb and social category

suburbs. The table shows that while the pattern of a given variable may differ across suburbs, there are constraints on that differentiation. No variable shows all patterns. Furthermore, while a given variable may show a female lead (Pattern 1) in one community and a burnout lead (Pattern 2) in another, or a male lead in one community and a burnout lead in another, no

Table 5.15 Combinations of gender and category constraints for generalized variables across the suburbs: (aeh), (ay) monophthongization, (e) lowering

	Jocks > burnouts	Mixed	Burnouts > jocks
Female > male		(aeh) Neartown (aeh) Crane City	(ay) Crane City
Mixed		(ay) Urban City	(aeh) Athens (aeh) Urban City
Male > female	(ay) Athens	(ay) Neartown	

Table 5.16 Variable patterns across the suburban schools

	Urban City	Crane City	Athens	Neartown	
(e) lowering	Pattern 1b			Pattern 1b	Suburban
(A) fronting	Pattern 1b			Pattern 1b	Suburban
(o) fronting			Pattern 1b		Suburban
(oh) fronting	Pattern 1b				Suburban
(aeh) raising			Pattern 1b		Mixed
(e) backing		Pattern 1b			Urban
(A) backing	Pattern 1b				Urban
(ay) raising	Pattern 1b				Urban
(ay) monoph	Pattern 1b				Mixed

- Pattern 1b: Jocks lead
- Pattern 1: Girls lead
- Pattern 2: Burnouts lead
- Pattern 3: Boys lead

variable shows a female lead in one community and a male lead in another. Finally, except in the highly insignificant case of (e) backing in Crane City, a jock lead combines only with a female lead across suburbs.

As we move down from suburban to urban variables in table 5.16, the pattern combinations shift from 1a, 1, and 2, to 2 and 3. The association between urban, burnout, and male status in the social meanings of variation, therefore, is clear, as is the association between suburban, jock, and

female status. However, while the male, urban, and burnout association is quite stark, the female-led variables run the gamut from jock to burnout, and from suburban to urban to mixed.

5.5 Jock, Burnout, Urban, Suburban, Male, Female

The findings of this chapter indicate a relation between the use of variables in a given community and their distribution in the urban-suburban continuum, integrating gender and social category in the process.

Two main geographic patterns have emerged in this examination of patterns of variation in the wider suburban area. The newer sound changes, (e) and (ʌ) backing and (ay) raising, are more advanced closer to the urban center. If one takes these geographic patterns to be evidence of geographic spread, then these new changes appear to be spreading outward into the suburbs from the urban center. And in schools across the suburban area, burnouts are leading locally in these changes. This could be taken as an indication of greater access to these changes stemming from the burnouts' urban-oriented life style. It can also be taken as an indication that these urban-led changes have urban-related social meaning that gives them positive symbolic value for burnouts, and possibly negative symbolic value for jocks. At the opposite extreme, the reversals of (e) and (ʌ) backing are more advanced in the suburban than the urban schools, suggesting that they are suburban in origin. And in each suburb, jocks lead in the use of advanced variants, suggesting that the suburban, or non-urban, association has positive symbolic value for jocks and negative value for burnouts. While social category is the major factor in the use of the new changes and their reversals, gender comes into play as well. Jock girls lead in the use of the suburban variables, while depending on the suburb, burnout boys or burnout girls may lead in the use of the urban variables. Thus one could claim an association between female and suburban, and male and urban, but this is only true to the extent that it is mediated by social category.

The association of burnouts and urban variables, and jocks and suburban variables, sets up an opposition of social meaning that appears to be at work in the older changes as well. These changes show a more variable geographic pattern. The intermediate change in the NCCS, (oh) fronting, shows a suburban lead, while the older (o) and (aeh) fronting show no overall urban lead. With no strong urban symbolic value, older changes may be eligible for some negotiation in social value. These older changes show greater

variability in social use across the suburbs than the newer changes, but one pattern that stands out is that girls lead across the board in the use of all of them. The non-urban significance of these variables shows up in the fact that in the urban schools it is the jock girls who lead their entire cohort in the use of (oh) and (o), while the burnout girls lead in the suburban schools. This suggests that these variables have lost their urban symbolic value in the urban center. (aeh) raising, on the other hand, is led by girls, but by burnout girls. In the northern suburbs, this is clearly a burnout variable, while in the western suburbs it is not. There is sufficient variability in the patterns across the suburbs to prevent delicate conclusions about the relation between the age of a change and its geographic and social distribution in the older changes. The newer changes have a very clear urban-suburban significance, which is no doubt related to the urban spread of the changes and probably to age differences within communities as well. The greater variability of the older changes suggests that as changes lose stark geographic and age differences, and hence their value as an urban adolescent symbol, they become more fluid in their symbolic potential, showing greater local variability in use.

We can conclude from these data that gender in variation is not about being "male" or "female" so much as about being a male or female jock or burnout in a particular place in the urban-suburban continuum. And when we look at it from this perspective, one of the most striking findings of this chapter is the fact, and the nature, of boys' conservatism. Boys lead in the use of very few variables across the suburbs, and girls lead their cohorts overall more than boys in the use of advanced variants in urban, suburban, and mixed variables. In those cases where boys do lead, it is almost exclusively in the case of urban variables, and girls are the exclusive leaders in the use of suburban variables. This draws a picture of male speech as both conservative and vernacular. Female gender, on the other hand, corresponds to greater use of advanced variants of all kinds, and in two ways. In the case of suburban variables, all girls tend to make high use of advanced variants. In the case of urban variables, girls make greater use of the variables by displaying a greater category difference, with burnout girls taking a large lead over jock girls. Gender, then, has to do not only with differences in rates of use between male and female, but with the kind of differences within groups.

In the next chapter, we return to Belten High, in order to explore further the use of variables, this time across the broader student population. The purpose is to transcend the category view of variation and prod at the possibility that at least some of these variables are related to the aspects of social

practice that permeate the school and that contribute to, as well as derive from, the significance of the social categories.

Notes

- 1 It is interesting to note, as an aside, that when the father's educational level is lower (4 and below), the mother's educational level can be higher; but men with an educational level of 5 or over all have wives with the same educational level or lower. This middle class pattern, admittedly based on a small and unrepresentative sample, appears to illustrate the kind of pairing that Goffman (1976, 1977) discusses as part of the reproduction of the gender order. The systematic pairing of larger men with smaller women masks the actual size range of the sexes, confirming the belief that women are indeed the "weaker sex" and maximizing the physical power differential between men and women as well. A similar pairing of women with men who are older, earn more, and are more educated, foregrounds other aspects of the gender order.
- 2 *ni* marked in a cell indicates that the factor group in question is not included in the analysis represented in the table.

6

We Are What We Do

If linguistic variables are simply indices of category membership, one could expect category members to stand out in the population by their conformity to category-related linguistic patterns. On the other hand, if the variables are more generally related to the practices and orientations associated with the polar categories, then one might expect similarities of speech among people engaging in similar practices regardless of their category affiliation. Expanding the corpus to include a diverse set of in-betweens provides a more textured analysis of the use of the variables in relation to speakers' engagement in the practices that constitute the Belten High adolescent social order.

Table 6.1 shows the results of the analysis of the variables, with the in-betweens included as a residual category. The in-betweens pattern differently in relation to the jocks and burnouts from one variable to another, in some cases falling in between, but usually lagging behind the jocks. This should not be surprising because in-betweens in this linguistic sample were not selected according to particular characteristics they shared with jocks or burnouts, but according to their place in the overall social network. It is only when we break open the categories and examine the kinds of behavior that constitute the categories that we can compare the in-betweens with the jocks and the burnouts. At this point, then, we turn from a focus on what people are to what they do – from their affiliation with categories to their participation in practices.

6.1 Forms of Engagement

Students spend about six of the best hours of each weekday in school. Some of them remain for several hours after school, engaged in extracurricular activities, and some of them spend several hours on homework. The school's