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Borrowed Blackness:
African American Vernacular English and European American Youth Identities

by

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B.A. (Grinnell College) 1990
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Fall 1997

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Borrowed Blackness:
African American Vernacular English and European American Youth Identities

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Mary Helen Bucholtz

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For Jon

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Chapter 1

From center to margin in sociolinguistic theory

Introduction: The nexus of language, race, and identity

"White kids who want to be black." Throughout the 1990s the issue, suitably sensationalized, has served as a rich source of discussion for talk-show hosts across the television spectrum. The decade has witnessed unprecedented media attention to the phenomenon of white-to-black cultural crossing, which has been reflected in music with white rap artists Vanilla Ice and Marky Mark, in film with "Zebrahead," and in television with the situation comedy "Sherman Oaks."[1] There is more to the topic, however, than mere media hype. In 1994, when two European American girls in an all-white town in rural Indiana began to wear baggy hip-hop-style clothes to school they set off a controversy, locally dubbed "the race riots," that included a Ku Klux Klan rally (Carroll 1994).[2]

What these high-profile examples point to is not a new phenomenon but only the newest manifestation of a very familiar pattern in the United States, that of European American appropriation of African American cultural forms. The current interest that many European American teenagers take in hip hop—a complex of urban artistic forms that includes breakdancing, graffiti art, and most crucially rap music—is part of a long history of black-to-white cultural borrowing, or perhaps, as Eric Lott (1993) would have it, cultural theft. As early as 1957 Norman Mailer offered a description of the "white Negro," the existentialist hipster who adopted black styles in music and culture as an expression of his angst. And even long before this time, in the pre-Civil War era, the minstrel show made visible white Americans' borrowing and racist reworking of black culture through the device of blackface (Lott 1993; Roediger 1991a). Music has been a particularly well-mined site of expropriation, from Steven Foster's co-optation of Negro spirituals for white consumers of piano sheet music (Austin 1987) to the emergence of white jazz musicians

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and predominantly white jazz audiences by the 1960s (McMichael 1996). More recently, white cultural borrowing has been primarily a youth phenomenon. Via the black musical genre of rhythm and blues, rock and roll eventually formed the cornerstone of a generalized—that is, whitened—youth culture linked to rebellion through its association with blackness (Lhamon 1990; Lipsitz 1990).

But unlike rock and roll, hip hop still retains its associations with the African American cultural context from which it emerged. European American youth who embrace this style may therefore be seen as rebelling against not only adult institutions but also the hegemonic white youth identity that rock and roll makes available. White rap fans negotiate identities that move between those of other white teenagers on the one hand and of black teenagers on the other. Physical presentation of the self is one means by which such a negotiation is effected, but even more crucially, identity is forged through conscious linguistic choices in interaction, and particularly through the strategic use of African American Vernacular English, or AAVE.

In the chapters that follow, I treat this heretofore little-examined topic from the perspective of those who participate in and witness it. Drawing on evidence gathered during my year-long ethnographic study of an urban high school in the San Francisco Bay Area that I call Bay City High School, I show that the adoption of black linguistic forms is part of the larger phenomenon of white cultural borrowing. Although this social arrangement may appear to be a powerful tool for the demolition of racial boundaries, cultural affiliation does not necessitate racial affiliation, and white hip-hoppers' rejection of a dominant construct of whiteness should not be equated with a rejection of the racial category itself. Like the black cultural forms that accompany it, AAVE use among European American teenagers is a resource for the construction of an avowedly white identity that is oppositional to the identities of mainstream youth, both black and white.

If the pattern of white-to-black cultural crossing has long been a part of American life, so too is its specifically linguistic manifestation, although in its most recent form it

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may have been facilitated by the very structure of the rap genre with which it is closely associated. More than any previous African American musical form, rap is an art of the spoken word, which makes the linguistic form as well as the content of lyrics more accessible to audiences.[3] Thus an observant listener can acquire at least a few basic features of a distinctly African American variety of English without interacting with any actual African Americans.[4]

The motivations of European Americans who undertake such language crossing are just as worthy of study as the means by which they achieve it.[5] To take up the language of the other is part of a larger racial desire to *become* the other, albeit only partially and temporarily, a fantasy that has a powerful hold upon the white imagination.[6] At the same time, such role play also enforces white racial identity by emphasizing black racial difference (Rogin 1996). White middle-class children in the United States are socialized into this linguistic masquerade from an early age by means of summer camp and similar cultural institutions that encourage them to dabble in otherness as part of the process of identity construction (Tillery 1995). Through rituals, chants, and stories, campers learn to appropriate the language of other groups (or stereotyped versions of it), especially Native Americans, who serve as symbols of the "back-to-nature" ideology of summer camp. As Noel Ignatiev remarks, "It has been said that the typical 'white' American male spends his childhood as an Indian, his adolescence as an African American, and only becomes white when he has reached the age of legal responsibility" (1996:289).

By the time they reach adolescence, then, many European Americans are primed to adopt linguistic and cultural elements from other sources.[7] African American language and culture are especially targeted, for the example of rock and roll illustrates that black music, as well as dance, art, and literature—once taken over and stripped of their racial origins—form the basis of a general American popular culture. As the most recent black product to reach white audiences, hip hop and the variety of African American English associated with

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it have become part of this longstanding cycle of uprooting, deracialization, and cultural nationalization.

The process is most visible in commercial rap music, which has spawned a number of European American rap artists. The novelty of white rappers—and of rap itself, which these rappers brought to white audiences—led to considerable commercial success for a few artists, notably Vanilla Ice and Marky Mark. As the name *Vanilla Ice* suggests, white rappers are often conscious of their tenuous claims to cultural legitimacy and thus may select stage names that emphasize race and thereby defuse charges of pretending to blackness. *Vanilla Ice* is a purposeful juxtaposition of the black "cool" aesthetic (cf. the stage names of African American rap artists Ice Cube and Ice T) and the stereotypical association of vanilla blandness and white culture. At the same time, Vanilla Ice, whose real name is Robert Van Winkle, has insisted in interviews on his authority to represent urban street culture based on his experience coming up in the 'hood; these claims were later found to be false (Gresson 1995; *Newsweek*, Dec. 3, 1990:68).[3] Yet faux identity rarely results in commercial failure: witness the Young Black Teenagers, who are neither black nor teenagers (nor particularly young). YBT's rise to success was largely attributable to their promotion on "Yo! MTV Raps," the television show that racially integrated the video channel's programming. In taking the opposite tack from Vanilla Ice and ostentatiously (and somewhat jokingly) asserting an "illegitimate" racial identity for themselves, YBT challenges the racial history of rap and makes the genre more palatable to MTV's largely white audience. Nevertheless, racially loaded and linguistically bizarre song titles like "Daddy Kalled Me Niga 'Cause I Likeded To Rhyme" undermine group member Firstborn's assertion (on a "Yo! MTV Raps" trading card) that "hip hop isn't about color." The skepticism greeting white rap artists has been so strong that Marky Mark addresses it explicitly in his lyrics:

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I'm on a mission so listen as I dismiss

All this talk that's going around

of how I stole the sound from the man in brown

But you're mistaken, cuz I ain't takin or fakin

Feel the power of the music I'm makin!

I make the music for the people! (Marky Mark and the Funky Bunch, *Music for the People*, Interscope Records, 1991)

But despite the dubious critical reception of such performers,[9] the trend has become so widespread that teen television idols who might once have recorded an album of love ballads in order to extract still more cash from an adoring female audience now aspire to join the hip hop nation. Brian Austin Green of the popular teen television show "Beverly Hills 90210," for example, recently dropped his middle name and cut a rap album. Indeed, such behavior has nearly become a hallmark of wholesome all-American youthful high spirits. A decidedly indulgent tone can be detected in an Olympic-season article on gold-medalist Tom Dolan, a European American swimmer whose pierced ear rates a mention along with his rap recording (under the apt moniker MC Mass Confusion).

While the popularity of most European American rappers evaporated several years ago in the face of mockery and dismissal from many in the music industry (Vanilla Ice abandoned rap for boat-racing and Marky Mark has reinvented himself several times, from gay icon and Calvin Klein underwear model to psychotic stalker in the 1996 B movie *Fear*), white fans of black rap have persevered and "crossover" (read "white") audiences have grown, though not without coming in for similar criticism. William "Upski" Wimsatt's satirical profile of the typical white rap fan is particularly merciless:

> The white rap audience is as diverse as the music itself: From the trench-coat hood outside a liquor store in Montgomery who I almost fought because he "dint trust no white repotuh"—to Michael, an effeminate wimp who shrieks "Sang it Sistaaa Soujahhh!" as he traces the cul-de-sacs of suburban St. Louis in his parents' car

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> with the windows rolled up "so we don't get bothered by ignorant people." ... Sporting their rap gear and attitude serves to disguise white kids' often bland, underdeveloped personalities. Unlike the rappers they admire, many are shy and inarticulate. (1994:19)

Wimsatt's scorn is complicated by his own position as hip-hop critic and commentator. As a European American interpreter of African American culture, Wimsatt reconciles his ambiguous status by drawing a line between himself and other white rap fans, in spite of his claim that he does not exempt himself from the charges he levels at others.[10] In calling attention to the language of European American fans of rap music, however, he accurately diagnoses a widespread but underexplored facet of this cultural phenomenon: the extent to which it relies on linguistic practices.[11] This extended discussion of the linguistic and other identity practices of white rappers sets the stage for the chapters that follow, for although such artists are not widely listened to by white rap fans, the complex links between language and legitimacy that they create are also resources for European Americans who participate in hip-hop culture primarily as audience members. As my own research suggests, features—and stereotypes—of AAVE are fundamental to the display of a self that is neither "really" black nor aligned with available white youth identities. The new configuration of race, language, and identity points up the non-essentialized relationship of these dimensions and calls into question central sociolinguistic assumptions concerning fluency, competence, and the authenticity of vernacular speech patterns.

The erasure of race in sociolinguistics

To a large extent, my reassessment of some of the basic tenets of sociolinguistics is a consequence of my revisitation of race, a concern that marks another departure from the discipline as traditionally understood. My own conception of race, which is influenced by anthropological and sociological theory, is quite different from the term's familiar use to designate biological differences among human groups. As I argue below, if sociolinguists

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are to rehabilitate race we must also redefine it as social and political in origin. However, to understand why such a reanalysis is necessary, we must first examine the original definition of *race* and its presence (and absence) in sociolinguistic theory.

Although the concept of race has implicitly informed a great deal of sociolinguistic research, ethnicity has predominated over race as an analytic category since the beginnings of sociolinguistic inquiry in the 1960s (e.g., Labov 1963). This preference has been influenced by the widely held distinction between race as the product of genetics and ethnicity as the product of culture (see discussion in Sanjek 1994). Given such definitions the field's interest in social phenomena might seem to dictate that researchers orient to ethnicity rather than race. However, such discipline-internal concerns are not the only factors involved. In using the concept of ethnicity, sociolinguists are also following the lead of sociocultural anthropology and sociology, which adopted the term and shifted their theoretical focus as a way of disabling biologically based arguments of white racial superiority in the first half of the twentieth century (Omi & Winant 1994). By the 1960s and 1970s, this approach had become the "progressive/liberal common sense approach to race" (Omi & Winant 1994:14) and the notion of race itself was set aside (Sanjek 1994). In privileging social over a putative biological difference, liberal scholars believed they could locate environmental sources of social inequalities, especially between blacks and whites, which could be corrected through government programs. Such a position was particularly well suited for linguists to take up, for the field had come to a consensus early on that biological explanations of linguistic difference were untenable.[12] Thus the very notion of race has been excluded from the bulk of sociolinguistic work. In most cases, this exclusion has been carried out without comment, but Robert Le Page and Andrée Tabouret-Keller, for example, (1985) offer a lengthy discussion of their reasons for rejecting the term *race*. Even more unusual is John Baugh's (1988) explicit use of the word; his decision has the advantage of allowing him to develop a discussion of racism, an area of research that has been underexamined by sociolinguists who consider only ethnicity, for the simple reason

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that the ethnic model cannot account for race-based bias (but see J. Fishman 1985 for a careful discussion of ethnicity and racism).[13]

Moreover, simply distinguishing between cultural and biological causes of difference does not preclude racist interpretations; it merely displaces explanations from one realm to the other. "Deficit" theorists in the United States, many of them inspired by their reading of British sociologist Basil Bernstein (e.g., 1964), argued in the 1950s and 1960s that African American children grew up in a culture bereft of adequate linguistic input and hence were unable to function successfully in the mainstream (e.g., Bereiter & Engelmann 1966).[14] Even attempts to challenge such interpretations and to demonstrate the rich linguistic skills of nonstandard English speakers may be incorporated into the very frameworks that they were intended to refute. Shirley Brice Heath's (1983) excellent book-length study of language use among poor Southern white and black children, for example, launched an attack on "deficit" accounts of these groups while explaining the social and political reasons why their academic performance was below average. Yet despite Heath's carefully developed and explicitly anti-deficit argument, her findings were recently used to support a reactionary theory of biological differences between blacks and whites (Herrnstein & Murray 1994:206-207). Likewise, the claims against which Heath was arguing derive from the work of Bernstein, which he himself insists has been widely misunderstood (Bernstein 1996). Whatever the original intent behind his writings, however, the fact that Bernstein's theory, which hinges on class difference, has earned such a warm reception from archconservative scholars indicates the ease with which theories of difference, whether race-based or not, may be assimilated into racist lines of reasoning, even motivating the institutional practices of segregation at Bay City High, as I discuss in Chapter 2.

Such disastrous misuses of sociolinguistic research are rare, of course, but they are not simply unfortunate accidents, for difference theories share an assumption that makes their misuse possible: the belief that an essential relationship exists between language and

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culture. This premise is found in numerous ethnic-based analyses as well as many that focus on class or gender. Its core is an understanding of social categories as fundamentally cultural in character. That is, differences in language use are attributed to cultural differences that structure individual behavior, and speakers are seen to "play out" cultural patterns rather than to participate in their construction.[15] This is not to say that all research informed by the cultural paradigm is erroneous; pioneering sociolinguistic work used culture-based arguments to challenge deficit views of African American children's language use (Labov 1982; Smitherman 1981), thus paving the way for necessary educational reform that took into account the ways AAVE differs from school English.[16]

The origin of the mechanistic view of language and culture resides in the collapse, in a number of sociolinguistic studies, of the disparate criteria linked to the concept of ethnicity: race, culture, and language. (A fourth criterion, nation, is generally omitted from sociolinguistic research in the United States.) Given the history of the discipline sketched above, the underlying presence of race in sociolinguistics is not immediately evident. Indeed, scholars have taken care to note that racial membership is not a predictor of speech community membership; middle-class blacks, for example, do not necessarily use AAVE (although, of course, many do use AAVE in addition to Standard English). Membership in the speech community and in the culture, however, has been less carefully distinguished. In fact, linguistic ability has been taken as a primary indicator of cultural membership: the social category of the *lame* in some AAVE-speaking communities has been defined by William Labov (1973) as a status of cultural marginality that brings with it certain inevitable "linguistic consequences." Although Labov's research focuses on the linguistic practices of specific peer groups (New York street gangs), he views these groups as participating in a wider culture, the vernacular culture, which he defines in linguistic terms as "the subculture dominated by the vernacular" (1973:84). The *lame* label is therefore implicitly assigned to speakers whose linguistic system differs from that of central members of the culture:

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middle-class African Americans, girls and women—indeed, anyone who does not match the linguistic and social profile of the speakers Labov has taken as prototypical.[17]

It is important to recognize that Labov was writing within a context in which theories of African American speakers' linguistic and cultural deficits predominated. Thus his suggestion that vernacular speakers have a culture of any kind is a crucial rebuttal of earlier, biased work. Unfortunately, Labov did not stop with correcting the record regarding vernacular speakers; instead, he argued that such speakers are actually superior to lames both socially and culturally ("[lames] give up the satisfaction of a full social life and any first-hand knowledge of the vernacular culture" [1973:109]) and linguistically ("...BEV culture is the most verbal subculture within the United States. As a whole, lames have lost out on this ..." [1973:110n.21]). He even suggests that studies of linguistic deficiency among African Americans may have had lames as their subjects (1973:109-110). In Chapter 5, I challenge this negative view of teenagers who do not participate in the dominant trends of youth culture.

The notion of a cultural center in such a theory implies a linguistic center as well, a core of linguistic features that, under one definition of *speech community*, are necessary for community membership.[18] Yet, if ethnicity is linked to language and culture, to be entirely consistent such a model must also maintain that individuals who do not meet these linguistic and cultural criteria are not members of the ethnic group at all or, at best, are less central members of the group—a strong claim that most sociolinguists would be reluctant to put forward. However, to say that such speakers should be classified (and would most likely classify themselves) as, for example, African American, requires a covert appeal to racial status, since language and culture cannot be invoked. In taking up the concept of ethnicity, then, sociolinguists have not so much abandoned as obscured race as an analytic category.

Moreover, the substitution of a culture-based concept of ethnicity does not avoid the problems to which earlier racial theories were subject, and it introduces additional

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difficulties, including diversion of scholarly attention from racism. Most significantly, the replacement of race by ethnicity reproduces the essentialism of biological theories in a new, cultural, domain. Given the incorrectness of the biological model of race and the limitations of ethnicity, it becomes necessary to rethink race as a social category. Before addressing this issue, I turn to the problem of cultural essentialism in sociolinguistics. In particular, I consider how the centrality of culture in sociolinguistics yields a model of language in which the authenticity of speakers becomes a central criterion of speech-community membership.

Mistaken identities: Authority and authenticity in linguistic theory

Theories of language are, at least covertly, theories of speakers. Decisions about which aspects of language to include in one's theory are therefore simultaneously decisions about which speakers to include. Moreover, such decisions are as political as they are theoretical, for they turn on the fundamental question, *Whose voice counts?*. Two competing strands of linguistic thought—often labeled with the historically rather loaded terms *rationalist* and *empiricist*—have weighed in on the matter, and despite the differences that separate them, their answers are in some ways remarkably similar.[19] Indeed, in the same way that the opposing epistemological orientations of rationalism and empiricism are nevertheless both located within the discourse of the Enlightenment, the perspectives sketched here have more in common than it may appear from the rhetoric of participants in the debate.

The so-called rationalist position was given its present form by Noam Chomsky and his followers, whose research program in generative linguistics was premised on the goal of modeling linguistic competence, the intuitive syntactic knowledge of the native speaker (Chomsky 1965). In centering his study of language squarely on competence, the grammatical knowledge speakers have about their language, Chomsky disclaimed the utility of performance, the actual application of grammatical competence in speech, on the grounds that performance is at best an imperfect reflection of competence.[20] The study of

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competence therefore relies not upon observed language use but rather upon the authority of the native speaker, whose tacit knowledge can be tapped by eliciting judgments about grammatical and nongrammatical sentences of the language. However, even consultation with a native speaker involves performance factors (W. Labov 1975), and the informant's intuitions may be faulty as well; in fact, Chomsky expresses doubt that most linguistic rules can ever reach a speaker's conscious awareness. In order to eliminate the stumbling block of performance to the extent possible, the native speaker and the analyst are often coterminous within the generative framework, the linguist acting as her or his own informant (a method, explicitly endorsed in Chomsky 1965:194n.1, that led William Labov to declare that "most linguists are lames" [1973:112]).

Thus for generative linguists, authoritative language data are those produced by native speakers, and the most authoritative data are never uttered at all but introspectively gathered from the linguist's own intuitions about her or his language. Because Chomsky is concerned with an idealized version of any given language, all native speakers are presumed to provide equally acceptable data. To invoke the oft-quoted statement whereby Chomsky stakes out this position, the subject of linguistic theory is an "ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly ... " (1965:3). Thus every native speaker regardless of race, class, gender, age, or other factors, can fairly represent her or his speech community, for in principle the linguist is able to abstract away from variation to the underlying unity of the linguistic system.[21]

This focus on the native speaker's abilities has had an impact on other subfields of linguistics as well, and even scholars who vehemently disagree with Chomsky on nearly every other theoretical issue share his interest in speaker competence. Dell Hymes, for example, who is one of Chomsky's most vocal critics within sociolinguistics, has developed the concept of communicative competence as an extension (and a critique) of Chomsky's notion of grammatical competence. Hymes (1974) argues that a rule-governed

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approach must also be extended to many of those areas of language classified as performance—specifically, rules of the implementation of language—which in effect constitutes their reassignment to the realm of competence.[22] In short, Hymes is committed to describing the native speaker's "competence in performance" (cf. Briggs 1988), a theoretical move first made by generative semanticists that boldly integrates the Chomskyan dichotomy between that which is the proper focus of linguistic study (grammatical competence) and that which is unworthy of linguists' attention (the realization of competence in speech performance)[23]:

> Chomsky's interest is in moving from what is said to what is most abstract and elementary in grammar, and from what is social to what is innate in human nature. That, so to speak, is but half a dialectic. A thoroughgoing linguistics must move in the other direction as well, from what is potential in human nature, and elementary in a grammar, to what is realizable and realized; and conceive of the social factors entering into realization as constitutive and rule-governed too. The present tendency is to ignore factors external to grammar, or to treat them in the same way as formal grammar, reducing most of their interesting features to the status of deviations from a few hypothetically intuitive postulates. Need for observant attention to people speaking, and in general, for the services of ethnography and ethnology, is ignored. (1974:93)

The ethnographic dimension that Hymes introduces here—a reflection of his background as a linguistic anthropologist—brings the standards of authority in linguistic data to a new level. Where Chomsky finds his competent native speaker close at hand, embodied in the linguist himself, Hymes must journey further afield, to the realities of specific speech communities, to uncover the workings of communicative competence. Chomsky, then, privileges the linguistic authority of the native speaker, Hymes the cultural authority of the socially situated speaker, yet the two theoretical perspectives converge in their understanding of language ability as the knowledge of rules, whether syntactic or social.

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In most other regards, however, Hymes fits squarely within the "empiricist" camp, whose adherents in dialectology and sociolinguistics place priority on studying a language in its most authentic form—that is, the form that language takes in performance, not in introspective tests of competence. Such a commitment requires the investigation of language in context, as Hymes recommends. By its very nature, the dialectological tradition takes account of linguistic variability, contrary to Chomskyan linguistics, which views language as the biological endowment of all humans and hence as surprisingly invariant in structure.

The field of dialectology emerged in response to the Neogrammarians' claims about the regularity of language change; turning to living speakers for evidence to test this hypothesis, dialectologists have developed survey methods that have uncovered remarkable regional variation within a single language. This interest in variability, however, has its limits. Methodological constraints and theoretical presuppositions have conspired to restrict the focus of most dialectological studies (see critiques by Pickford [(1956) 1975] and Rickford [1986]). Due to the field's connection to historical linguistics, for example, researchers have tended to seek out a region's oldest, most rural speakers as informants—men more than women, whites more than blacks (other groups have not been widely interviewed)—in the belief that such speakers are repositories of the most authentically archaic form of the language. Moreover, the reorientation to what has been dubbed *urban dialectology*, the quantitative sociolinguistic paradigm developed by William Labov, introduced a number of methodological innovations but—at least in his work on AAVE—did little to dispel the earlier research tradition's preference for informants considered to be the most authentic speakers of a given linguistic variety.[24]

In his early studies, Labov (1963, 1966) demonstrated that the variability of natural speech which had been documented by dialectologists was not random but rather was structured according to social patterns.[25] Thus by the time he undertook his most influential and politically charged work (W. Labov, Cohen, Robins, & Lewis 1968), the study of

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African Americans' speech, he was already prepared to discover a great deal of structured variation in language use. Nevertheless, Labov attempted to reduce the degree of variability in his study by limiting much of his research to a single variety of African American English, termed the *black English vernacular* (BEV). He also restricted the range of speakers who could legitimately be included in such a study, for he defined BEV as the "relatively uniform grammar found *in its most consistent form* in the speech of black youth from 8 to 19 years old who participate fully in the street culture of the inner cities" (W. Labov 1972a:xiii; emphasis added).[26] The message was clear: sociolinguists who wished to investigate the most systematic form of BEV must turn to the speakers most likely to produce that variety. It seems reasonable to suppose, however, that Labov's decision to limit his study in this way was more politically than theoretically motivated: his work was intended as a rebuttal of linguistic deficit theories (e.g., Bereiter & Engelmann 1966; Bernstein 1964), and by demonstrating the linguistic proficiency of those whom deficit theorists perceived as exemplars of "alingualism"—preadolescent and adolescent male gang members in impoverished communities—he aimed for a decisive defeat of such theories. Yet in spite of Labov's success both in debunking the notion of language deficit and in revolutionizing the study of language in society, his focus on a narrowly defined group of speakers was entirely consistent with the prior tradition of dialectology, as well as with early work in creole studies that privileged very young speakers over all others (e.g., Dillard 1972)ß.

This overview suggests that the putative "rationalists" and "empiricists" within linguistics, as different as they are, have in common a relatively restricted range of linguistic analysis (see also Rickford 1987a). Both admit into their theories only ideal versions of speakers and both, by implication or declaration, remove from the pool of candidate informants those whose language is viewed as inadequate, non-ideal, intractable, and whose voices, as a result, will not be heard. In Chapter 3, I explore alternatives to the competence/ authenticity framework in sociolinguistics by considering how nonfluent

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speakers achieve partial membership in the AAVE speech community with limited linguistic resources.

Marginalia: The challenge to authenticity

As a consequence of the dominant theoretical position outlined above, some kinds of speakers are overrepresented in sociolinguistic studies, their language made to stand in for a much wider speech community. In particular, sociolinguists have focused disproportionate attention on a small subsection of the African American community, that group whose language is deemed most "authentic." A number of scholars have found fault with this outcome, pointing out that the cultural essentialism of much research results in exclusionary practices. Such objections to authenticity in sociolinguistics are part of a wider critique among social scientists. Increased attention to groups that were rendered invisible in earlier scholarship has led some theorists to rethink the criteria for cultural membership and to replace a priori assumptions with individuals' own understandings of their relation to social categories.

The most sustained critique of authenticity within sociolinguistics has been mounted by African American scholars concerned about the direction that research on AAVE has taken. In a comprehensive early discussion, Richard Wright (1975) observed that the prevailing research trends of the day—which have not greatly shifted since his article was published—overemphasize authenticity at the expense of other topics, such as the linguistic practices of the African American middle class. The continued relevance of this charge is evident: although there have been some isolated studies (e.g., Hoover 1978) of Standard African American English, the variety often spoken by middle-class blacks, over a decade later the situation was so little changed that Arthur Spears (1988) found it necessary to reiterate the call for greater attention to middle-class speakers.[27] Marcyliena Morgan's (1994) survey of AAVE scholarship represents one of the most recent attempts to enjoin sociolinguists to be more inclusive of the entire range of African American language use.

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These scholars argue that the black middle class's relationship to AAVE is unknowable until it is investigated, and that the consequence of setting the bounds of membership in advance is that such questions cannot even be asked. Spears's (1988:111) proposal to incorporate middle-class African Americans into sociolinguistic models opens up new possibilities for research; as he notes, AAVE speakers' language socialization into Standard English may then be accounted for within the speech community, as the contribution of middle-class members, rather than being attributed to community outsiders such as European American schoolteachers (cf. Vaughn-Cooke in NWAVE 1987).

In the rare instances when middle-class speakers have been discussed in AAVE studies, it has usually been assumed that they are unwilling (Speicher & McMahon 1992; but cf. Hoover 1978) or unable (W. Labov 1973) to use the vernacular. William Labov's own example has given the imprimatur to other researchers of AAVE: his disdain for "lames" is obvious not only in the 1973 article in which he introduces the term but also in his comparative analysis of the reasoning abilities of an AAVE speaker and a Standard English-speaking African American (1972b). Labov's decision to analyze the language of a *black* Standard English speaker results in an implicit cultural evaluation: the "lame" speaker is not only declared to be illogical but, one may infer, he is culturally inauthentic as well.[28]

Only a few studies (e.g., Etter-Lewis 1993; Foster 1995; Morgan forthcoming a; Stanback 1985) have ventured beyond stereotypes of the black middle class as either culturally inept or "self-hating" (to paraphrase Morgan's [1994:137] criticism) or both to inquire seriously into the linguistic attitudes and practices of middle-class African Americans. These scholars have made a doubly significant contribution by redressing the balance with respect to both class and gender. The frequent conflation of AAVE use and masculinity—which I critique at greater length in Chapter 5—has resulted in an outpouring of research on boys and men to the exclusion of girls and women. In making African American women, and especially middle-class women, central to their work, researchers demonstrate the inadequacy of defining authentic African American speech community

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membership in ways that either erase or misrepresent women (cf. Blake & Kortenhoven forthcoming; McNair-Knox 1994; Mitchell-Kernan 1971; Rickford & McNair-Knox 1994). And John Baugh (1983) and John Rickford (e.g., 1987b) have both extended sociolinguistic research on AAVE and creole varieties to speakers of a much wider age range. As a corrective to dominant research trends, these studies enrich sociolinguists' understanding of class, gender, and age and deeply unsettle the central role of authenticity in studies of AAVE.

A natural extension of these revisions to sociolinguistic theory and method is offered by recent innovations in the theory of race. This body of work complicates the notion of racial authenticity by examining the newly constituted social category of "mixed race." Previously, individuals of mixed racial heritage were classified according to their specific background—"mulatto," "Amerasian," and so on—which enforced their marginal membership in all racial categories. Proponents of mixed-race theory (see, for example, Root 1992; Spickard 1989; Zack 1993) interrogate this arrangement and demonstrate, as critics of sociolinguistics have done for class and gender, that race does not determine cultural membership. This theory therefore directly challenges the American racial ideology that blackness outweighs whiteness in the classification of mixed-race individuals, an ideology that has its most potent form in the "one-drop rule" that for centuries dictated racial categorization in the United States (Zack 1993; for the linguistic reflex of this rule see Chapter 4).[29] The "neither/nor" categorization of earlier approaches has given way to a "both/and" classification that also includes membership in the "mixed race" category. Research has revealed that mixed-race individuals may assume a variety of racial positions from moment to moment using the resources of physical presentation and language to move among racial categories to which they "belong," into the category of "mixed," and even into temporary affiliations with other racial identities (see Bucholtz 1995 for further discussion).

The formation of a unified racial category that definitionally includes individuals of varied racial backgrounds has thus significantly destabilized not only the notion of racial

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authenticity but the concept of race itself. The fluidity and flexibility of racial categories, which may be highlighted by the social practices of those of mixed race, are no less characteristic of the practices of other groups, despite their lesser visibility. The production and naturalization of racial positions is largely unseen, and by bringing these practices to light, mixed-race scholarship has facilitated the theoretical shift from race to racialization.[30]

Race and racialization

Debates concerning racial and cultural authenticity have highlighted the numerous ways in which traditional views of race, whether the concept is rendered a biological phenomenon or euphemized as ethnicity, are theoretically impoverished. An alternate perspective rejects the claim that race and ethnicity are characterized by an enduring genetic or cultural essence. This framework takes race to be a historically contingent social construct that becomes naturalized over time. As defined in the influential work of Michael Omi and Howard Winant, racial formation (also termed *racialization*) is "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (1994:55). Although Omi and Winant acknowledge the role of daily practice in this process, their primary focus is on large-scale political trends that shape the terrain of U.S. race relations. I therefore enlarge the scope of *racialization* to include more centrally the everyday interactional practices that bolster such racial formations in order to emphasize how habitual social activity contributes to the racialization project. Thus racialization cannot be located in any single historical moment, although its starting point, and perhaps end point, is specifiable. Instead, it is iterated and strengthened through ongoing social action. In particular, racialization efforts may be redoubled in periods of racial crisis at both the national and local levels. The transformation of the demographics of Bay City High School, which in turn is part of a larger shift in California's racial makeup as a whole, precipitated one such crisis, the effects of which continue to be felt in the daily lives of its students.

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The move from race to racialization, unlike the earlier shift from race to ethnicity, has not merely replaced one term with another (ethnicity for race, culture for biology) while leaving the theoretical framework largely intact. Rather, it explores the social origins of the notions of both race and ethnicity and determines what political work was accomplished through the emergence of each concept. Arguments from the 1960s against the biological theory of race are being repeated with renewed vigor, but with greater attention to the historical events that gave rise to biological racism in the first place (Outlaw 1990; Sanjek 1994).

For some theorists, the discrediting of earlier biological claims has engendered a loss of faith in race itself. This skepticism is quite literally visible in the titles and texts of a number of edited collections of essays on race, in which the word is set off by quotes (Donald & Rattansi 1992; Gates 1985a; Outlaw 1990). In at least one case this politicized punctuation was arrived at only after intense debate among authors and editors (see Gates 1985b).

Indeed, quite a few theorists of race advocate doing away with the concepts of race and ethnicity altogether. This argument is made from a number of perspectives. For Tzvetan Todorov (1985), who initiated the punctuation debate alluded to above, race is an entirely social construct and hence cannot be maintained as a coherent category. Yehudi Webster (1992) hypothesizes that race exists because scholars study it; to eliminate race, he argues, the study of race must be eradicated. In such writers' view the ethnic alternative is no better, however; Walter Benn Michaels insists that "the modern concept of culture is not ... a critique of racism; it is a form of racism" (1995:60) and postpluralist David Hollinger (1995) calls for the substitution of a cosmopolitan universalism for the present "ethnocentrism" wrought by racial/ethnic categories. Somewhat different is the theoretical strain that advocates what might be termed "post-whiteness," the annihilation of the white racial category and with it, presumably, white privilege. Under the rallying cry "Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity," this group of scholars and activists publishes the "new

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abolitionist" journal *Race Traitor* (see Ignatiev & Garvey 1996; cf. Roediger 1994). Such work is often Marxist in orientation; the hope is to build color-blind labor solidarity (it goes without saying that treason to capitalism too is loyalty to humanity).[31]

The danger of these theories lies precisely in their urge to "get past race" for whatever reason, just at the point at which political coalitions among nonwhite groups are becoming a significant social force. The "white philosophy" (Gordon & Newfield 1995) of racial eradication thus fails as antiracism. As Omi and Winant point out, race can be recognized as a social strategy that draws on biological resource, but to argue for its elimination is misplaced (not to mention overly optimistic about the impact of academia on the wider society): "we should think of race as an element of social structure rather than as an irregularity within it; we should see race as a dimension of human representation rather than an illusion" (1994:55). Once this is acknowledged, attention to race is precisely the point: what is needed is "more careful and complex race consciousness rather than less" (Gordon & Newfield 1995:400). "Race" must be understood as the outcome of a process of "racialization" that is brought into being by complex social and political struggles. The question then becomes not *What are the differences among races?* or even *How can we get rid of race?* for neither question makes sense. Instead, we must ask: *How is racialization produced and reproduced?*.

Up to this point, very few studies have sought to answer this question, because the investigation of racialization thus far has emphasized institutional over interactional phenomena. But Omi and Winant's definition of the "racial project," which enacts racialization at the everyday level— "an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines" (1994:56)—makes obvious the role of interactional practices, and especially language, in this process. Indeed, it is primarily through language that racial projects are carried out.

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One place to look for the creation of race, then, is the history of racial labeling. A glance at this history quickly affirms the social and political centrality of race: definitions of racial categories have shifted to accord with white interests (Almaguer 1994; C. Harris 1993), from the struggle over labels for African Americans (Baugh 1991; Smitherman 1991), Latinos (Oboler 1995), Native Americans (Hinton 1994), and Asian Americans (Takaki 1989), to the shifting classification of individuals of other backgrounds (Morsy 1994) or mixed heritage (Domínguez 1986; Forbes 1993). In fact, the category of "white" itself cannot be understood as existing prior to the constitution of these other categories, to which it always stands in opposition. White interests can become *white* interests only through the invention of whiteness.

Less recognized than this overtly racializing discourse, however, are the far subtler social practices that work to build or undo associations between linguistic forms and racial categories. Within the context of Bay City High, such practices can be seen in the process whereby particular slang terms take on or lose their particular racialized meanings. Chapter 3 notes that as words become progressively more "deracialized"—separated from their African American origins and linked to a general youth culture—they also become more "white." Thus the investigation of racialization not only reveals precisely how race comes to be socially constructed but also makes visible the often unseen category of whiteness.

Whiteness: A marked identity

Through the influence of racialization theory, at the same time race is being deconstructed among scholars of color, it is being reconstructed among some white researchers. As part of the movement to rethink race, white social theorists have begun to call attention to the formation of whiteness as a racialized category. This project, which spans several decades, has received its greatest impetus from African American writers (Baldwin 1985a; hooks 1990, 1992; Morrison 1990). Beginning in the 1980s, a parallel line of thought developed in feminist circles mainly among white radical lesbians, who were grappling with racism in

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the feminist movement (Frye 1983; Pratt 1984; Russo 1991). The present consolidation of a field of "whiteness studies" is therefore not so much a new phenomenon as a recognition among white male academics of a conversation that has been sustained for many years without their input (although important exceptions do exist; e.g., Fredrickson 1981; Kovel 1970). These earlier discussions share with more recent work a profound skepticism regarding the popular understanding of whiteness as simply another identity in a multicultural world. Whereas other racial configurations—such as black, Asian, native, and Latino—require study in order to dislodge racist beliefs about them, whiteness, as the dominant social configuration and the source of such beliefs, requires *scrutiny*.

In addition, this new body of scholarship also integrates the central insights of research on racialization by calling attention to the social and political construction of whiteness. Such a focus can be seen in the primary lines of inquiry in current whiteness studies: (1) the reinterpretation of whiteness as a racial, rather than raceless or unmarked, category; (2) the analysis of the fragmentation of whiteness into multiple social identities, especially along lines of ethnicity, gender, and social class; and (3) the discovery of the emergence of white identities in particular historical and social texts and contexts. The first area of research has documented how whiteness has come to be seen as the absence of race, of how it has come, in fact, *not* to be seen at all (e.g., Dyer 1988).[32] Hence the mere act of examining whiteness is the first step in making it visible and denaturalizing its unmarked status. And because the hegemonic view of whiteness-as-nothingness can be maintained only as long as the category is understood as monolithic, scholars have also focused on the multiplicities of whiteness as part of their efforts to undermine the dominant position. As part of this project, a group of researchers working within what might be termed a "neo-ethnicity" framework have described the extent to which white ethnicities are not straightforward reflections of cultural background but rather choices to claim membership in particular ethnic cultures (Alba 1990; di Leonardo 1984; Waters 1990). Other scholars have shown how gender inflects whiteness; Ruth Frankenberg's (1993)

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groundbreaking work on white women's identities deserves special notice, and a small body of research on whiteness and masculinity is also beginning to emerge (e.g., Pfeil 1995). Finally, the classed dimensions of white identities have been delineated by scholars working within Marxist and other traditions (Roediger 1991b; Saxton 1990). A crucial contribution of the latter research is its demonstration of the extent to which class mobility enables racial mobility in the U.S. context. Moving into the middle class has facilitated a concomitant move into whiteness for many ethnic groups formerly categorized as nonwhite (Ignatiev 1995; Roediger 1991c; Rogin 1996; Sacks 1994).

Such studies reveal the fluidity of racial boundaries by tracing the movement of entire groups across racial lines. Invaluable as they are, however, they provide only a partial glimpse of the complex workings of whiteness. Largely driven by the theories and methods of cultural studies, they offer a "top-down" view of how whiteness is constituted by means of such macrolevel institutions as the government, the media, and popular culture. The textual approach favored by many investigators of whiteness assumes that white subject positions can be read off from cultural products like films, song lyrics, and other "texts." As a consequence, such scholars slight the possibility of individual and conflicting relationships to whiteness that can be uncovered only through attention to emergent cultural processes. It is also important to recognize that in many contexts whiteness may in fact be a marked—that is, nonnormative—identity not only for theorists but for participants as well, a point that has been overlooked in most research.

Additionally, studies of whiteness do not often pay explicit attention to one of the primary resources for the production of white identity: language. Such an oversight is especially surprising to discover in textually based research founded on the postulate that social reality is constructed through discourse. Although the theory insists upon the centrality of language, in practice the details of language are generally overlooked.

The rich resources of ethnography are well designed to fill the first of these gaps, an undertaking that has begun only very recently: one must look to doctoral dissertations

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for extensive, detailed, and grounded analyses of white identities in particular contexts (Hartigan 1995; Perry in preparation). The second omission has for the most part remained unaddressed. Perhaps because of the ever-widening chasm between linguistics and other social sciences as well as the humanities, scholars in other fields lack both the methodological resources and the theoretical interest to investigate the details of language use. The result, when it comes to discussions of language and race outside sociolinguistics, is often superficial and anecdotal, outcomes that would be anathema to these scholars in the practice of their own disciplines.[33] It therefore falls to sociolinguists, drawing upon the tools of recent race theory, to demonstrate the pivotal place of language in the construction of racialized identities, and especially of whiteness. Chapter 4 illustrates the benefits of careful linguistic analysis for scholars of white identity in other fields by unpacking how European American students racially differentiate themselves from African Americans through the quotative and mocking use of AAVE in discourse.

Language as a site of white racialization

Language may constitute racial categories in numerous ways: not only through the legally recognized definition of racial terms, as noted above, but also through discursive practices that situate racialized groups within ideological frameworks (T. Labov 1990; van Dijk 1987; Wetherell & Potter 1992) and through the production or representation of racially linked language in literature, music, film, and other cultural forms (Brasch 1981; Fishkin 1993; North 1994; R. Potter 1995; Smitherman-Donaldson & van Dijk 1988; van Dijk 1993). In people's day-to-day lives, however, the most immediate linguistic issue is one's choice of speech variety. Although this problem has been central for many social theorists of color, who recognize the political stakes of language choice, especially between English and another language (Anzaldúa 1987) or between the standard and a nonstandard variety (Baldwin 1985b; hooks 1994; Jordan [1972] 1981, 1985), the same recognition among researchers of white identity has been slow in coming. Even research on European

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American ethnicity frequently minimizes the role of language in the formation of identity, despite the availability of important studies linking ethnic identity to linguistic practices (e.g., J. Fishman 1977; Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985).[34]

The extensive work of sociolinguists on nonstandard white varieties and on white bilingualism in the United States (e.g., Buchheit 1988; Correa-Zoli 1981; Feagin 1979; Henzl 1981; Huffines 1980; Wolfram & Christian 1976) is thus an invaluable corrective to research that overlooks language. Such research also breaks down the false equation—common among nonlinguists and occasionally present in linguistic writings as well—between Standard English and "white English" (NWAVE 1987). This conflation is fostered by the normative status of both Standard English and whiteness in the U.S. context, although some recent work has attempted to denaturalize this arrangement by recovering its historical origins (Frazer 1993) and by critiquing its political effects within linguistics (Walters 1995).

In addition to the study of white speakers' linguistic varieties, a large body of research has emerged that investigates European American language patterns in relation to those of African Americans. The history of this scholarship has two central stages, the first dominated by dialectology and the second by quantitative sociolinguistics. In keeping with the disciplinary traditions that ushered in each of these periods of research, scholars in the earlier stage cast their gaze backward to the origins of Southern white varieties of English and the possible influence of black linguistic forms upon them; those in the later period, which extends to the present day, look to the future, examining current trends in black and white language use for evidence of divergence or convergence of AAVE and white dialects.

In the earlier studies, the debate over the relationship between the speech of black and white Southerners was a battle over the degree of African American linguistic influence. Although some of the leading dialectologists of the day demurred on the point, maintaining that similarities were primarily due to the effect of white speakers on blacks (Kurath 1949; McDavid & Davis 1972; McDavid & McDavid 1951), the evidence in favor

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of African Americanisms in white Southern language varieties was substantial (see Dillard 1972).

At the same time, many dialectologists, steeped as they were in the traditions of British dialect studies, resisted the notion that African American varieties of English might have a separate history from that of adjacent European American dialects. This theory had gained currency as the "creole genesis hypothesis," the controversial claim that not only the relatively creolized Gullah language but also AAVE was structurally of African origin.[35] Attention to the relationship between black and white speech varieties now devolved on differences in order to support the hypothesis. To examine similarities between the dialects could jeopardize—or at least complicate—the theory. Thus researchers, regardless of their theoretical perspective, had very little incentive to examine points of linguistic convergence across racial lines. Only with the advent of a second wave of research within quantitative sociolinguistics that offered contradictory evidence on this issue did scholars again seek to compare the varieties (Bailey & Maynor 1987, 1989; Butters 1987, 1988; W. Labov & Harris 1986; NWAVE 1987). The emphasis lay primarily in statistical and textual analysis of cross-generational and, increasingly, historical data (Bailey, Maynor, & Cukor-Avila 1991; Schneider 1989; see discussion in Rickford 1991), with the bulk of scholarly activity focusing on the linguistic "movement" of AAVE toward or away from white vernaculars. As in the earlier dialectology studies, most scholars were interested in the influence of white speakers on blacks, not the reverse. The study of the impact of African American Vernacular English on European Americans is therefore long overdue, both because of what it can contribute to the linguistic debates just described and for what it can reveal about the phenomenon that implicitly underlies such discussions: the process of identity construction through language use.

Given the trajectory of sociolinguistics within the United States, it is perhaps unsurprising that the issue of the European American use of AAVE features has come to the fore only as a byproduct of a dispute over the concept of speech community within creole

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studies. Previous to this discussion, the sole documented instance of AAVE use by non-African Americans in sociolinguistic research appears in Walt Wolfram's (1973) study of the English of Puerto Ricans in New York City, where he notes that some speakers acquire AAVE due to the influence of neighboring African Americans. As Wolfram and Fasold put it in their summary of this research: "Those [Puerto Ricans] with extensive contacts with blacks will speak *authentic* Vernacular Black English ..." (1974:91; emphasis added). This conclusion contrasts with the one drawn by William Labov (1980) in the later creole-studies debate. Here he made use of data gathered by Eileen Hatala (1976) for a study of white children in predominantly black environments to argue that even European American speakers who are heard as black by AAVE users may not be fluent, and hence are not members of the speech community. Ronald Butters (1984) has since challenged Labov's position, and John Rickford (1985) also offers evidence that the black/white boundary is the result of social as well as linguistic factors. Until recently, however, little additional work has been done in the United States to explore the issue from speakers' and community members' own perspectives.

Partly as a result of the publicity Hatala's work received, however, within the past few years several studies, many of them master's theses, have been undertaken to re-examine the questions raised by this research. Where Labov employed Hatala's data to argue for a particular definition of *speech community*, her own research focus was how a white girl, Carla, formed her racial identity in a setting in which she was a racial minority. Hatala's analysis of this question—or "problem," as she terms it—is couched in the language of "adapting," "struggling," and "coping." She goes so far as to assert that "Carla's problem may be neatly parallel to the plight of Blacks in the 50's" (1976:26). More recent work that replicates components of the Carla study offers revisions of both Hatala's and Labov's conclusions. Lanita Jacobs-Huey's (1996) investigation of the African American-influenced speech of a white college student critiques Labov's strictly grammatical definition of *speech community*; both Jacobs-Huey and Cecilia Cutler (1996)

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emphasize that, *pace* Hatala, the white use of AAVE is more a problem for African Americans whose language is appropriated than for European Americans who carry out this appropriation. In addition, Adrienne Lo (1996) extends the work of Wolfram (1973) by examining the use of AAVE among Asian Americans (see also Chapter 4).

These studies share a concern with ethnographic methods and analysis that is also found in similar work conducted in England. Roger Hewitt's (1986) extensive study of black-white friendship and language use in London takes a strongly anthropological approach, which Ben Rampton (1995) also follows in his own exhaustive investigation of black, white, and Asian language crossing. The work of Hewitt and Rampton represents the most substantial inquiries into the subject of cross-racial language use, for both focus on groups rather than single individuals as in much of the U.S. work. Their broad research scope and respect for ethnographic specificity offer an anthropological model for the systematic investigation of white speakers' use of black linguistic forms.

My own fieldwork and analysis are based on a similarly ethnographic sensibility. However, my work differs from Hewitt's and Rampton's in several ways. Unlike in Hewitt's research, where Creole is a second variety for both white and black speakers, I focus on a context in which black speakers have a prior claim to AAVE on both cultural and linguistic grounds. And unlike Rampton, who describes crossing as a transitory phenomenon overlaying a more usual variety, I consider primarily speakers who "cross" into AAVE as part of their ordinary speech. Finally, where both Hewitt and Rampton isolate a "multiracial youth vernacular," I have not found such a category in my own research. Instead, I have found a complex collection of partially overlapping codes that are always racialized in terms of the black-white dichotomy.

Cross-Racial African American English: The BEST in the WEST

The intricacy of the linguistic positions detailed in this study necessitates the introduction of some new terminology and some clarification of familiar terms. To begin with, I use *AAVE*

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to designate the vernacular variety used by many African Americans of all backgrounds in some contexts. It is distinct from Standard African American English, although the two varieties share numerous features. I will use *AAVE* as a cover term for all nonstandard speech varieties associated with African Americans, but at some points in the discussion it will be helpful to refer to a more specific variety within AAVE which John Baugh has called *Black English Street Talk*, or BEST.[36] BEST is a fluid, informal, use-dominated variety characteristic of youth. It is distinguishable from AAVE largely on a lexical basis; many slang items wrongly thought to belong to AAVE are actually specific to BEST. This distinction is both linguistically and socially important, for despite the wide linguistic repertoire of AAVE speakers, many outgroup members (especially European Americans) assume that the usual variety spoken by all African Americans is BEST (or a stereotyped version of it). Strictly speaking, it is BEST rather than AAVE more generally that underlies the linguistic crossing of the white teenagers in this study.

Among European Americans in California, the counterpart to AAVE is a variety I term *Western European American Vernacular English*, or WEAVE. It is important to distinguish this dialect from other regional white U.S. vernaculars because numerous features of WEAVE will become relevant throughout the discussion. Likewise, the white counterpart of BEST is *White English Street Talk*, or WEST.[37] Like BEST, WEST is a subset of a larger vernacular and is primarily characterized by lexical differences. Finally, in order to highlight the fact that the white use of AAVE (or BEST) is neither linguistically nor socially isomorphic with the black use of this variety, I term the use of AAVE among European Americans *Cross-Racial AAVE*, or CRAAVE. This acronym is especially apt because it captures the element of desire that motivates European Americans' appropriation of African American cultural and language resources. CRAAVE borrows elements from both BEST and WEST.

Figure 1.1 broadly represents the relationships among these varieties. Note that the diagram presents the social rather than the linguistic relationships between WEAVE and

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AAVE. Hence the substantial linguistic similarities between these two dialects are not reflected in the figure, but their symbolic social separation is indicated by the non-intersection of the two adjacent circles representing each variety. Likewise, although WEST derives many of its elements from BEST, these are stripped of their racialized social associations in the transmission process and therefore the two circles again do not intersect. Only CRAAVE socially links what are viewed as distinctively black and white varieties, and it is equally assignable, in social terms, to both sides of the racial divide. Thus the circle representing CRAAVE overlaps with all the other varieties. In preserving the crucial distinction between linguistic and social factors in racial identity formation and privileging the latter, the diagram is a useful reminder that the social realities mirrored in (and created

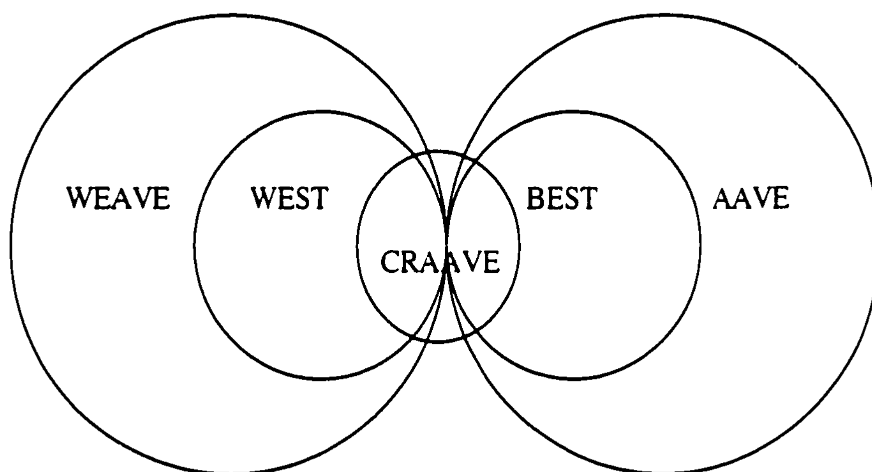

Figure 1.1: The social organization of linguistic systems used by European American and African American students at Bay City High School.

by) linguistic arrangements are as worthy of attention as sociolinguists' traditionally language-centered topics.

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Overview of the dissertation

I have sought in this chapter to situate the phenomenon of white-to-black linguistic crossing within its historical and theoretical context. I have argued against the ethnic paradigm that predominates in sociolinguistic conceptualizing of "African American" and "European American" and in favor of a framework in which race—understood as a socially constructed category rather than a biological given—is central. This position entails a shift away from the sociolinguistic search for the most genuine version of a linguistic variety as a reflection of speech community membership. It moves us instead toward the investigation of apparently marginal linguistic practices as crucial sites for the construction of identities and communities.

The notion of "racialization" as a social construct rather than "race" as a biological fact also structures my account of the ethnographic setting of the study (Chapter 2). The high school has an extremely diverse student population with no racial majority. Yet descriptions of the school in the community and the media as well as among students themselves are organized around a black-white dichotomy. The belief that the school is racially polarized has some basis in fact, as is evident from the racialized meaning of space whereby particular groups can be mapped onto certain regions of the school grounds. But the prevailing discourse of "self-segregation" greatly exaggerates the extent of these social divisions. Purportedly rigid racial boundaries are much more fluid in practice, crossed by large numbers of students daily. At the same time, such transgressions serve to reinforce racial categories by highlighting the normative separation of African Americans and European Americans.

In Chapter 3, I consider in greater detail the linguistic practices of white participants in hip hop, who display their affiliation with African American culture through the use of the syntax, phonology, and lexicon of AAVE and BEST. Such speakers overcome their lack of fluency in the dialect by means of "black-inflected" idiolects, or individual linguistic systems, that incorporate various combinations of a few strategically selected features of

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AAVE. Teenagers who use CRAAVE as their ordinary linguistic variety are classified locally as speakers of AAVE not by native speakers of the dialect but by mainstream white teenagers who negatively sanction such practices. This classification extends the scope of the speech community to include outgroup perspectives. In addition, the role of idiolect in constructing social identity reasserts the significance of the individual in sociolinguistic studies.

The meanings of AAVE among European American teenagers, however, are not exhausted by the practices described in Chapter 3; as I demonstrate in Chapter 4, mainstream white students and even those who affiliate themselves with black culture use the speech event of "marking" (or linguistic mocking) to distance themselves racially from African Americans. For students in the mainstream, marking involves the jocular use of linguistic stereotypes of AAVE, while among black-affiliated white speakers it involves an increase in CRAAVE features when reporting the speech of African Americans, especially in stories of racial conflict. Racial stereotypes expressed in such stories coincide with linguistic stereotypes of African American speech. These processes produce a shared white identity that racially unifies members of diametrically opposed social categories.

The relation of white identity, gender, and AAVE is the subject of Chapter 5. Because nonstandard linguistic varieties are stereotypically linked to masculinity and toughness, one might expect that nonblack speakers who employ features of AAVE in their everyday speech would be motivated to do so in large part by considerations of gender. However, white boys who use CRAAVE do not fulfill dominant expectations about masculinity and are not motivated by gender considerations. Instead, their use of CRAAVE is part of their construction of an oppositional white youth identity. I contrast their identity with another oppositional white youth identity that also has gendered and racial dimensions: the nerd identity. I argue that for girls, a nerd identity allows a greater degree of empowerment than traditional femininity permits, but at the same time nerd identity is predicated on the rejection of black youth culture and language because of their link to

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coolness. For both white social categories, coolness mediates between gender in the construction of racialized youth identities. The conclusion summarizes the dissertation and suggests directions for future research. I conclude that studies that recognize the interaction between racialized linguistic varieties may enable sociolinguists to make significant advances in our understanding of the complex relationship between race and language.

Notes

[1] I am indebted to Lanita Jacobs-Huey for bringing this television show to my attention.

[2] The terms *black* and *white* are used interchangeably with *African American* and *European American* throughout the dissertation. Although these pairs are generally thought to distinguish racial (*black/white*) from ethnic (*African/European*) categories, I argue below that this distinction and the concepts of race and ethnicity themselves as usually understood are theoretically untenable. The terms are maintained as a convenience, not as an index of adherence to such paradigms.

[3] The reduced role of melody in rap may also make lyrics more understandable. See Leanne Hinton (1984) for a discussion of an analogous musical genre among the Havasupai.

[4] It has long been hotly debated within sociolinguistics whether the media have any appreciable effect on language use (other than lexis), with most analysts siding with the skeptics (see, e.g., Milroy & Milroy 1991). However, the position is based on the observation that audience members have powerful affiliations with local communities and identities that override the prestige of linguistic forms transmitted by the media. This line of argument suggests that audience members who affiliate more strongly with identities presented by the media than with those locally available will be influenced by the former; such a situation appears to obtain in the present case.

[5] The concept of language crossing, which is taken from Ben Rampton (1995), is discussed more fully in Chapter 4.

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[6] The limits of this desire are evident in Andrew Hacker's (1992) much-discussed finding that European Americans, when posed with the hypothetical question of how much financial compensation they would want if they were somehow to become black, stated that one million dollars would be fair recompense. Nonetheless, the white desire for some aspects of African American culture is so powerful that, far from demanding payment, whites are willing to pay top dollar for them.

[7] European Americans are not unique in this regard, of course, but because of their political dominance this group warrants special attention, as I discuss below.

[8] A joke circulating among sports fans a few years ago went as follows:

Q: What do Bo Jackson and Vanilla Ice have in common?

A: Artificial hip. (*Sports Illustrated*, March 29, 1993:10)

Steve Martin's 1979 movie *The Jerk* is a send-up of European Americans' claims to African American authenticity.

[9] African American music critic Armond White is an exception to this trend, for he has commented approvingly on Marky Mark's puppylike efforts to keep up with the big boys of rap, but he too withdrew much of his admiration after the rapper's personal history of racism and homophobia were publicized. However, White offers no condemnation, finding in the revelations yet more evidence for the naïveté that he first extolled: "Marky Mark conveys the dumb innocence of probably most white rap aficionados" (1996:208).

[10] One may object that perhaps white rap performers and fans simply like how the music sounds. Such an explanation, however, assumes that taste is natural and unproblematic. Research has shown that in fact it is socially constructed (e.g., Bourdieu 1984; see also Bucholtz forthcoming a, b).

[11] Wimsatt makes explicit the link between language and cultural crossing in the quotation that serves as the title of his essay: "We Use Words Like 'Mackadocious.' " The quotation comes from Wimsatt's interview with two white hip-hoppers from Kentucky. The speaker

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intended it to illustrate the close affinity that he and his friend had for hip-hop culture, but Wimsatt puts it to just the opposite use.

[12] See, for example, Franz Boas (1974), Leonard Bloomfield ([1914] 1983), and Edward Sapir (1921); Julie Andresen (1985) gives an account of their positions, as well as those of other linguists of the period. Later, Noam Chomsky's reorientation of the discipline, with its new emphasis on biologically based universals of linguistic structure, rendered marginal any discussion of variation in language. Chomsky implies that such concerns show inappropriate attention to incidental differences which are dwarfed by the astonishing similarities across languages.

[13] It is also worth noting that *race* usually means 'blackness' in popular—and even scholarly—discourse, an equation that simultaneously constructs whites as nonracial and allows other groups, such as Asian Americans and Native Americans, to be more easily classified as white for certain purposes. Thus work on African Americans more often uses the word *race* (as opposed to ethnicity) than work on other groups.

[14] William Labov's (1972b) critique of this research has had a lasting influence on education. Norbert Dittmar (1976) provides an exhaustive survey of deficit and its flaws; he also finds fault with Labov's approach on political grounds.

[15] This assumption may be understood as an inverted version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which proposed, in its strongest form, that language creates culturally shared cognitive categories (Whorf 1956). However, the role of culture in sociolinguistics is not viewed so deterministically; the problem is less that researchers insist on cultural explanations for language use and more that they often fail adequately to consider alternatives to such explanations.

[16] The difference/deficit debate in studies of nonstandard English has been largely paralleled by events in the adjacent sociolinguistic subfield of language and gender, in which deficit arguments (e.g., Jesperson 1921) were combated by invocations, often celebratory, of

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women's linguistic difference. However, regardless of the analyst's intention, any difference can always be seen as deficient by those hostile to the social group in question, as Robin Lakoff (1990) has observed. Yet where differences do exist it is important to describe and analyze them. The necessity of highlighting such differences for practical reasons, as in the above-cited cases, must not be overlooked; see Bucholtz (1996a) and Bonnie McElhinny (1993) for development of this point.

[17] This use of *lame* does have ethnographic validity insofar as it reflects a locally meaningful category of analysis. However, it does not necessarily reflect the identities of so-called lames themselves.

[18] The definition is Labov's, as operationalized in his 1980 article on the subject; a useful critical analysis of Labov's often oblique discussion is found in Donald Winford (1988).

[19] The intellectual genealogies provided here are the versions endorsed and promulgated by each of the linguistic schools under discussion. The labels *rationalist* and *empiricist*, by contrast, reflect Chomsky's (1966) efforts to construct both his own intellectual pedigree and that of his detractors, a clear example of the aphorism that history is written by the victors. For an unabashedly pro-Chomsky account of the debate, see Frederick Newmeyer (1986a, b); for an unabashedly anti-Chomsky account, see Gregory Sampson (1980); for a relatively even-handed assessment see Randy Harris (1993).

[20] Chomsky does not include social factors under performance, but it is difficult to imagine where else he might classify them, and most commentators (e.g., Guy 1988; Hymes 1974) have interpreted performance in this way. More recently Chomsky (1995) has reclassified *all* linguistic phenomena as performance, reserving *competence* for what he holds to be the biologically determined structures of Universal Grammar. This solution runs counter to the proposals of many sociolinguists, who had hoped to incorporate their field's subject matter into competence. See the discussion below for details of this goal.

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[21] *Speech community* in this context is construable in the broadest possible terms. That is, Chomsky's idealized speech community would contain all speakers of English, not merely all speakers of a variety within English.

[22] It is unclear whether all the elements of Chomskyan performance would belong to a Hymesian communicative competence. Even pauses and disfluencies, the strongest candidates for classification as performance phenomena, have been shown by conversation analysts to be much more principled than originally thought (e.g., Atkinson & Heritage 1984; Goodwin 1981).

[23] Research in generative semantics, despite its very different methodology, shares Hymes's theoretical concerns (Lakoff 1989). In fact, Hymes (1974) offers a discussion of the relation of syntax to social factors that explicitly builds on the generative-semantic work of Robin Lakoff (1969); he earlier explored similar issues from a more rhetorical standpoint (Hymes 1962).

[24] This is not to deny the revolutionary impact that Labov's work had on the field as a whole. Certainly, no other single individual has had such a tremendous influence on the theories, methods, scope, and style of current sociolinguistic and dialectological investigation.

[25] In this regard Labov followed well-established theoretical principles of linguistics, namely, that language is systematic and rule-governed. Building on the work of John Fischer ([1958] 1964), Labov showed that this systematicity also extended to quantitative data and that social as well as linguistic constraints are at work in language patterns.

[26] Labov's assumption that the vernacular is the most systematic and fundamental linguistic style emerged from his work on New York's Lower East Side (W. Labov 1966). Ronald Macaulay (1991) has noted that within sociolinguistics the term *vernacular* has two meanings: 'idiolect, mother tongue' and 'basilect'. Labov's work uses the first definition.

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[27] Early work in the field did not share this bias; Walt Wolfram's (1969) study of AAVE in Detroit included both middle-class and working-class speakers. Later work, however, did not often follow Wolfram's example.

[28] Compare, for example, the following descriptions:

> Larry is a paradigmatic speaker of black English vernacular as opposed to standard English. ... Larry also provides a paradigmatic example of the rhetorical style of BEV: he can sum up a complex argument in a few words, and the full force of his opinions comes through without qualification or reservation. He is eminently quotable, and his interviews give us many concise statements of the BEV point of view. *One can almost say that Larry speaks the BEV culture.* ... (1972b:215; emphasis added)

> Charles M. is obviously a good speaker who strikes the listener as well-educated, intelligent, and sincere. ... His language is more moderate and tempered than Larry's; he makes every effort to qualify his opinions and seems anxious to avoid any misstatements or overstatements. ... Charles M. succeeds in letting us know that he is educated, but in the end we do not know what he is trying to say, and neither does he. (1972b:218, 220)

[29] This situation contrasts with the relative fluidity of race in Brazilian society. The class structure is much more rigid there, however, and thus wealth can symbolically "whiten" dark-skinned Brazilians (Degler 1971). Such variability between the United States and Brazil further undermines the notion of race as biological rather than social.

[30] See also Shirley Brice Heath and Milbrey MacLaughlin (1993), who argue that in the youth clubs they and their colleagues studied ethnicity and gender were often less salient than more local identities.

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[31] The connection between the eradication or redefinition of a particular social category and the eradication or redefinition of its associated lexis calls to mind the feminist attempt to eliminate sexist language from English (see Vetterling-Braggin 1981). Although such efforts have not entirely succeeded (Baron 1986), they have managed to raise awareness of the problem at a societal level (Livia forthcoming). Perhaps the greatest benefit of the post-racial movement will be in the attention it calls to the issue of race.

[32] The normalization of whiteness is part of the same urge that produces "anti-p.c." (politically correct) rhetoric; both seek to define the dominant group as normal. Not surprisingly, both are linked to conservative ideologies.

[33] Thus, for example, in two otherwise excellent treatments of white identity, one author devotes a mere two pages of her nearly two-hundred-page book to the role of language in white ethnicity (Waters 1990), and another limits her discussion of the "language of race" to a paragraph about how white women use racial labels (Frankenberg 1993).

[34] It must be recognized, of course, that racialization is only one kind of identity project achievable through language. Identities based on class (Labov 1966), nation (Blom & Gumperz [1972] 1986), gender (Fischer [1958] 1964), and local categories (Labov 1963) were all described early on in sociolinguistics.

[35] Partly as a result of this debate, the field of pidgin and creole studies exploded into several competing—and complementary—research programs. For the range of positions see Salikoko Mufwene (1993).

[36] Lecture to Linguistics 55, "The American Languages," University of California, Berkeley, Fall 1991.

[37] Thanks to Irina Shklovski for suggesting this term.

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Chapter 2

Race and space: Researching language and social division

Introduction

On October 16, 1995, the day of the Million Man March on Washington organized by Louis Farrakhan, most of the African American students, and many non-Black students, were absent from the required sophomore-level course on social issues taught by Olivia Stein at Bay City High School.[1] Although it was impossible to know how many students intended their absence to symbolize support for the goals of the march—namely, to focus attention on the problems facing African American men—the white, fortyish teacher interpreted the absences as indicating such support and remarked on the empty seats in each of her classes; up to fifteen of the thirty desks were vacant. With as few as half or a third of her students in school, Ms. Stein elected to spend class time discussing racial issues at the high school. The students' daily journal assignment was to write about some aspect of race in their lives; "I always try to tie this into Martin Luther King Day or Malcolm X's birthday," she said, "or today, the Million Man March." This equation of race with blackness was not limited to Ms. Stein, as soon became evident. In each class, after the students had spent several minutes writing, Ms. Stein asked for volunteers to read or describe what they had written. In the fifth-period class, which had the fewest absentees and the largest number of white students, Fade raised his hand. A tall, solidly built white boy with long fluorescent pink hair, wearing heavy black Doc Marten work shoes and a T-shirt emblazoned with the name of a local punk rock band, Fade seemed the least likely student in the class to express fear of African Americans, or of anyone else, but he did so: "I avoid blacks based on personal experience," he said. "A group of black guys beat up my friend because they said he looked like a faggot, and, well, I look just like him."[2] As was her practice, Ms. Stein did not comment on Fade's report of his journal entry, but moved on to what another student volunteer had written.

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Fade's brief story was only one of many that white students told about race that day, and like most of the other stories it was about more than race. Fear, anger, frustration, and resentment permeated many white students' narratives. On this day of national attention to the experiences of black men, what social conditions—in the classroom, the high school, the community of Bay City, and the nation—enabled white teenagers to tell such stories so openly and un-self-consciously in a racially mixed setting? The displacement of black concerns by white concerns was not limited to this particular occasion or to this particular classroom. Instead, the stories white students told on October 16, 1995, participated in a larger set of discourses about race at Bay City High, and in the nation, that shape (and in turn are shaped by) the relationships of black and white students at the high school. The unremittingly anti-black tone of these discourses may suggest that any black-white alliances are impossible, but nevertheless some students have managed to forge friendships that cross the racial boundary that such rhetoric has created.

In this chapter I discuss how racial rhetoric impinges on and emerges in students' daily lives at Bay City High and how the contested ground of the high school structures my study of black-white friendship and language patterns. Although language is not a primary focus of this chapter, the racial discourses that revolve around the school and social relations in the school must be understood in general terms before specific linguistic practices can be meaningfully examined in subsequent chapters.

Speaking of race

Bay City High School is a multiethnic, multiracial urban high school of over 2,000 students located in the San Francisco Bay Area. Because of its demographics it is a microcosm of U.S. race relations, and the discussion of race at the high-school level mirrors the central concerns of the national debate: segregation, economics, and violence. In each of these discussions, strategies of displacement—rhetorical techniques for shifting the terms of the discourse—set aside black concerns in favor of a white perspective.

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Although as subsequent chapters will show, there is no single white perspective at Bay City High, in certain contexts white students unify around a shared racial identity. These unifying processes are achieved in part through the discourses discussed below.

A primary source of racial anxiety in the community of Bay City is the perceived segregation of its high-school students along racial lines. The school was one of the first in the nation to institute racial desegregation, and the present state of race relations at Bay City High has been the focus of intense scrutiny and criticism from the community and the media. Critics charge that the school has failed to achieve integration because, they assert, students divide themselves into racially and ethnically homogeneous social groups. The most prominent examples of this alleged self-segregation center on the separation of African American and European American students, although other racial groups have been said to exhibit similar patterns of self-isolation.[3] This emphasis on the relationship between black and white students is partly historical, rooted in the high school's past as a white institution and in the city's past as predominantly European American but with a large African American community. A second and related reason is that while no race has majority status at the school—itself a significant fact in understanding its racial dynamics—blacks and whites constitute the two largest racial groups at Bay City High, as determined by student self-report (see Tables 2.1 and 2.2).[4]

Table 2.1. Racial/ethnic breakdown for Bay City High School student population, by grade (1994)*

	MALE						FEMALE						
grade	AmI	As.	Fil	His	Bl	Wh	AmI	As	Fil	His	Bl	Wh	TOT
9		44	4	45	130	145	1	32	1	37	149	132	720
10		37	2	38	130	125	1	40	2	37	126	133	671
11	1	15	2	17	86	108	1	31	2	33	103	114	513
12	1	21	3	18	67	122		25	2	30	82	106	475
other		1		3	36	5	1	1		1	11	6	65
TOT	2	118	11	121	449	505	4	129	7	138	491	496	2444

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Table 2.2. Racial/ethnic breakdown for Bay City High School student population, total percentage (1994)

Amer. Indian	Asian	Filipino	Hispanic	Black	White
0.3%	10%	0.7%	11%	38%	40%

The 1995 figures, which were not yet officially available as of this writing, are similar to those of the previous year, according to unofficial reports.

The racial separation of Bay City High School students is generally represented in community and media discourse as the outcome of students' own choices.[5] Some of the school's courses on racial and ethnic topics are also widely believed (by white students, parents, and community members) to promote segregation by guilt-tripping white students (one European American student described her ethnic studies class as "Guilt 101") and by fostering black nationalism and other separatist ideologies among students of color. Such arguments are frequent at the national level as well, for example when the popular press associates multicultural curricula with the "Balkanization" of college campuses.

In fact, classrooms are important sites for the shaping of the high school's racial arrangements, but the effect of race in course content is far less important than the controversial practice of tracking, which places students in courses according to perceived academic ability and produces highly segregated classrooms, with ninety-percent white classes at the advanced level and mostly black, Latino, and Asian students in remedial and vocational classes. Although the school has begun to phase out tracking, many European American parents are vocal opponents of its abolition, which they fear will bring about a decline in standards that will endanger their children's academic performance and prospects for college admissions.

A second component of public debate about Bay City High involves the question of whether many of its black students should legitimately be at the school at all. Because students from outside the school district may petition to attend Bay City High, some parents and members of the Bay City community fear that "our" tax dollars are being spent

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to educate "their" kids—many of whom come from nearby cities with large African American populations. In a conversation with Ursula Chambers, a parent who performs volunteer services for the high school, I discovered how such students are viewed by some white parents and community members. Ursula's son was in private school until eighth grade, when she enrolled him in a multiracial public junior high school in Bay City. "[Bay City] kids are being driven out," she lamented to me, and then added in a telling slip of the tongue, "The nature of the kids who are coming is changing the— not complexion, that's not the white word, but the composition and abilities of students."[6] She went on to say that the students who come from outside Bay City often need "additional services"; for example, she explained, many are "free-lunch kids."[7]

Finally, alongside these discussions has developed a related but separate discourse concerning the safety of students and teachers at Bay City High, or, more accurately, the safety of white students and teachers. Rumors of black-on-white violence are widespread among white students and their parents, and a common explanation for the perceived division between the two groups is that whites stay away from blacks out of concern for their own safety, as exemplified in Fade's story above.[8] This ideology of fear, which permeates media discussions of Bay City High and influences community attitudes toward the school, bears little relation to the actual everyday life of the high school. In a year of intensive fieldwork I saw only one incident of violence; it involved two white girls and took place several blocks from the school. This is not to say that violence or the threat of violence does not occur. But a single incident may become the source of widespread panic, often due to sensationalistic news coverage. For example, a conflict between two boys over a girl, which ended with one boy setting off a firecracker, was widely reported in the media as a battle between rival black and Latino gangs that involved gunfire. In addition, acts of violence are subject to what Robin Lakoff (1995) has called the "undue attention test," in which even minor incidents are granted heavy media attention, a pattern that

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reveals the underlying anxieties of the community: in 1993 and 1994, fully a third of all news coverage of the high school in area newspapers focused on violence or racial conflict.

Negative media attention and students', parents', and community members' fears and assumptions about the high school are mutually reinforcing, and together they create a caricature of Bay City High as a racially divided school in which underachieving black students from outside the city menace white students.[9] This image influences students' own images of their school, and some describe Bay City High in exaggerated terms that correspond only loosely, if at all, to my own observations of the high school.

The racialization of social space

To the casual observer, racial self-segregation at Bay City High School is immediately apparent in the way students arrange themselves into groups on the school grounds at lunch and before and after school. The evidence for racial division seems incontrovertible, the boundary dramatically delineated by students' own bodies. This easily available analysis, however, ignores the racial complexity of the school. Most white Americans—and it is primarily members of this group who write news articles, attend school-board meetings, and complain to school administrators—tend to see whiteness and blackness first, and this limited focus renders invisible the many Asian American and Latino students at Bay City High, as well as the sizable mixed-race population. It also ignores the significant numbers of students of all races who cross boundaries of race and ethnicity in their friendships and school activities. Moreover, it is often difficult to discern the race (or races) of individual students, and I made many wrong guesses in the course of taking inventories of students for my fieldnotes, an exercise that clearly highlights the socially constructed nature of the supposedly biological category of race. Perhaps because many—even most—students on campus are racially ambiguous to observers, it is easier for those who write and talk about race at Bay City High (and, indeed, at any racially diverse school) to focus on the "obvious" cases: black and white.

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Admittedly, students of different races, and especially European Americans and African Americans, are far from fully integrated. Positioned at the extreme ends of the school's social continuum, as imagined by the students I talked to, are two almost entirely racially homogeneous groups, one black and one white. The dichotomy maps geographically onto the school grounds, with some white students and some black students polarizing to opposite ends, whites to the north in "the park" and blacks to the south on "the slopes," to use students' own terms for the regions.[10] These social spaces in turn reflect geographic divisions in Bay City itself: the northern part of the city is predominantly middle-class and white and the southern part has a larger black population and is lower-middle-class to working-class.

The racial division of space is illustrated in some of the maps I asked students to draw of the high school, expanding on a method used by Dennis Preston (1989, 1993) in his work on folk dialectology. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 are two examples of such maps.[11] Although both purportedly represent the same geography, they offer very different visions of the social world of the high school. In Figure 2.1, drawn by John Doe, an African American boy in a mixed-race friendship group that centers on graffiti and rap music, the racial composition of each group is explicitly labeled: "the slopes (African American)," "senior steps (white)." Significantly, he does not even indicate the existence of the park; the senior steps are the northmost point of his mental map of the high school. A vast expanse separates this area from his own hangout, which is aligned physically with the slopes: "the [classroom building] steps (diverse, us)." In contrast, Figure 2.2—which was drawn by Erin and Iris, two white girls whose activities center on performing arts and school athletics—the park takes up a full corner of the map, and social groups there and on the predominantly white senior steps are carefully distinguished: "crew people," "juniors," "sophomores," "seniors."[12] Other racial groups are not mentioned, with the exception of the "Mexican gang" on the left side of the map, which corresponds to the "XIV hangout" on John Doe's map.[13] The slopes are drawn but their population is not described, although

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Figure 2.1: Map of Bay City High School social space by John Doe

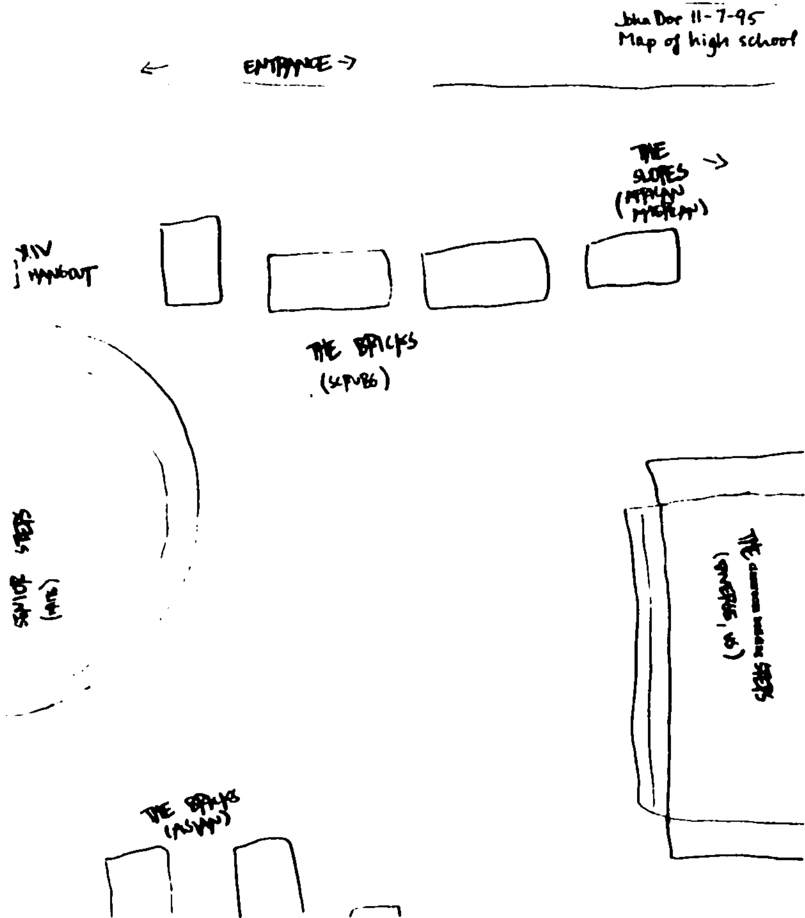
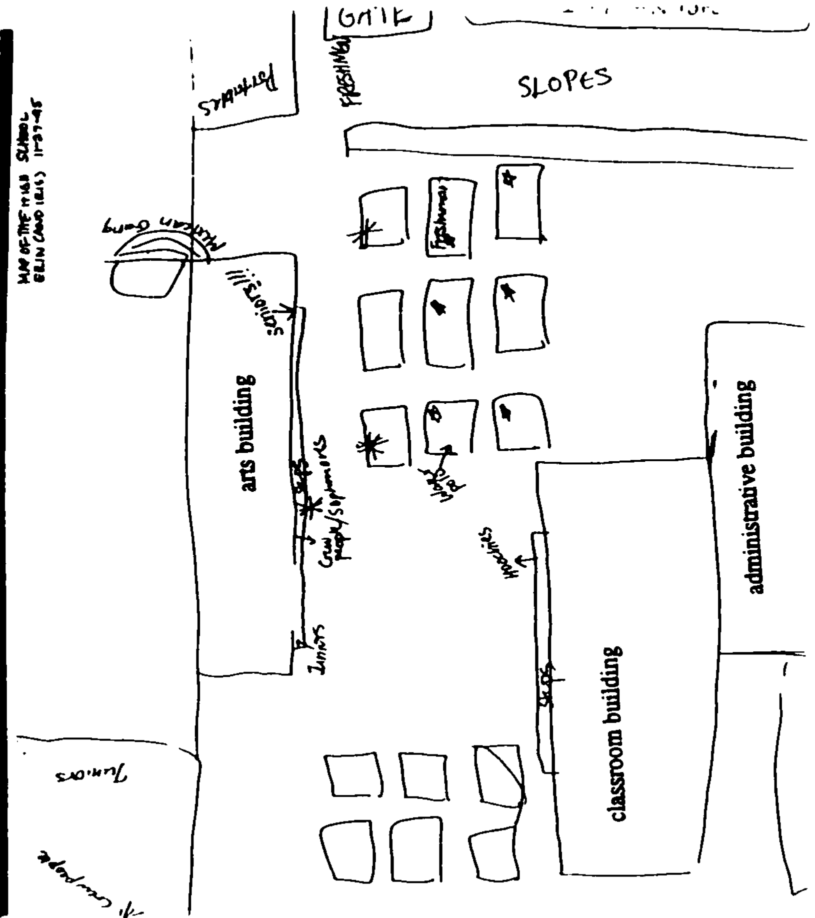


Figure 2.2: Map of Bay City High School social space by Erin and Iris



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in response to my query about this omission the girls told me that "gangs" hang out there: their failure immediately to supply this information, regardless of the reason, suggests that the world of the slopes is very distant from their own social world. Finally, it is striking that the steps of the classroom building, which John Doe identifies as his spot, are designated by Erin and Iris as the hangout of the "hoochies." They define this term as follows:[14]

(1)

```
Erin: They're um (.)
      hoochies are kind of like the (.)
      overly trendy (.)
      like or like they st-
      they wear lots of Adidas stuff and they slick their hair back.=
      =They belong in San Jose basically.
Mary: They belong in San Jose?
      Why do you say that?
      [Is that where-]
Erin: [Ratted hair:, ]
      like high ponytails,=
Iris:                    =Whatever's in style.=
Erin:                                         =But overdone.
```

This assessment is confirmed by Acme, a European American boy, in a separate conversation with me: "They're white girls—well, they don't have to be white—who slick their hair back." After his friend, a white girl, adds that they wear "trendy clothes," Acme elaborates, "Their jeans are so baggy that the backs get all to' up."[15] The "hoochies," in short, are the girls who associate with John Doe and his friends; many of them are white girls who don't act white. Like John, they move on the border between African American

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and European American students. And although such students come in for sanctions by some of their classmates, many cross this symbolic border, either temporarily in friendly exchanges with acquaintances from classes or student activities, or—less often—permanently, as part of longstanding friendship groups.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that race relations at Bay City High are far more complex than public discourse about the high school would lead one to believe, the ideology of fear can have powerful effects on the workings of the school as an institution. Beginning in the 1995-96 school year, the administration—led by a new principal with a strong law-and-order stance—has instituted a number of strict security measures, including fencing in the entire campus and locking the entrances during school hours, assigning staff members to patrol school grounds and buildings with walkie-talkies, requiring staff and visitors to wear photo IDs at all times, and collaborating with the Bay City government to bring a highly visible city police presence onto the campus.[16]

This martial atmosphere carries over to lunchtime, when gates are unlocked and students are free to buy lunch at downtown shops and restaurants a few blocks away. Students stream from campus to the downtown area under the watchful eyes of strategically positioned police officers and private security guards hired by downtown merchants. These security measures are disproportionately in evidence in establishments frequented by black students; as many as three guards may be stationed in the cramped space of a fast-food restaurant popular with African American students, while several blocks to the north, at a much more expensive café whose student clientele is mainly white, no security guards are present.

Race and the researcher at Bay City High

The salience and painful sensitivity of the issues of racial separation and fear, exacerbated by negative national media attention to Bay City High, inevitably affected my approach to language and black-white friendship at the high school. One of the first issues that arose

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was the question of my personal safety. This issue had not occurred to me until it was brought to my attention by others: at the beginning of my research I received numerous warnings from friends, colleagues, and even casual acquaintances that I was putting myself at risk.[17] Likewise, when I spoke to the principal of the school to ask for permission to conduct my research, he agreed on the condition that I meet with students only in public places. When I asked in surprise why he would impose this restriction—I wondered whether he perhaps feared that I would molest or harm the students—he told me it was for my own safety: "You don't know who you're dealing with," he explained. The degree to which these ominous messages affected my attitude toward my research is perhaps most vividly illustrated by my purchase, during my first week in the field, of a book entitled *Dangerous Fieldwork* (Lee 1995), which addresses topics including war, terrorism, genocide, and imprisonment.[18]

If I felt apprehensive about my relationship with students at the beginning of my fieldwork, the feeling was shared, and no doubt with far greater justification, by the students themselves. Most students at Bay City High feel betrayed by the media's representation of their school, and many are skeptical of journalists and other adults who ask questions. However, this problem is mitigated to some extent by the fact that the school, like many in the San Francisco Bay Area, has been subjected to more than its share of researcher scrutiny because of the proximity of several colleges and universities. Thus academic researchers are part of the background at Bay City High and do not generally excite much student interest.[19] Nevertheless, given the school's precarious racial situation I did not want to call attention to my research as particularly focused on issues of language and race, which would have also limited my interactions with students to those who saw themselves as fitting into my project. Furthermore, to make explicit my interest in white speakers of African American Vernacular English at the beginning of my research would have inevitably led to problems with data collection, as captured by William Labov's dictum concerning the "observer's paradox" of sociolinguistics: "our goal is to observe the

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way people use language when they are not being observed" (1972c:61). On the other hand, I did not want to deceive students about the purpose of my project and leave them feeling betrayed once again by outside observers. My compromise solution was to tell the students initially that I was studying "the language of friendship," a topic that accurately captured my research interest but was sufficiently vague that those I talked to did not become extremely self-conscious about their language use. After students got to know me better through interviews and other interactions, I gradually introduced my more specific research interest .

Because my initial request for interview volunteers—which took the form of announcements in Ms. Stein's classes—was not directed at any particular group, it garnered responses from students of diverse backgrounds.[20] This series of early interviews at first seemed to me to be a mere necessary digression from my main task of investigating friendship and language patterns among African Americans and European Americans, but they served the important function of preventing me from narrowing my attention too soon. My interactions with Erin and Iris, for example, were invaluable in ways I could not have anticipated at the beginning of my research.

After the individual interviews, I asked students to invite one or more friends to participate in a group interview;[21] their friends were then asked if they would meet with me for an individual interview, which all were willing to do. In addition to these open-ended interviews, I also requested that students draw a map of where they and other groups congregated at lunchtime and before and after school, and I asked them to define a set of words I had collected from interviews and conversations—including current slang, terms for social activities, and labels for various groups at the school—and to indicate how each term related to their friendship group, if at all.[22]

Finally, I carried out participant-observation in a variety of locations in and around the high school: I attended all five sections of Ms. Stein's course three days a week for its entire nine-week duration,[23] and I observed regularly in several other courses that allowed

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for student interaction and included a range of students, such as journalism, art, drug-prevention, and computer-skills classes. I also observed and participated in student life outside class, at lunch, and after school. In all these situations I took notes either at the time or immediately afterward. Along with tapes and notes, I collected a wealth of artifacts of high-school life: transcripts of bathroom graffiti, small stickers bearing the tags of graffiti artists, school newspapers, bulletins, classroom worksheets, student notes to one another and to me. Only a small portion of the material I gathered in such ways is directly incorporated into these pages, but all of it informed my analysis.

This somewhat scattershot research method was necessary both because the group under primary study was initially quite strictly defined and because of the multiple goals of the project: (1) to investigate the details of white speakers' use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE); (2) to understand speakers' purposes in using this variety; (3) to situate their linguistic choices within the larger context of the high school and the surrounding community. In trying to fulfill these goals I found methodological inspiration in sociolinguistic and ethnographic literature, especially in studies involving participant-observation in schools.[24]

In contrast to the present study, traditional sociolinguistic studies (e.g., W. Labov 1966; Trudgill 1974; Wolfram 1969) have tended to focus on a limited set of linguistic (usually phonological) variables across a wide range of social groups and in a restricted number of contexts, and their research design therefore aims to elicit target forms as efficiently as possible. The favored method for this purpose is the sociolinguistic interview, which is meant to simulate a range of speech situations in a single interview session and thereby trigger style-shifting across the span of a speaker's linguistic repertoire, from vernacular and informal to standard and formal.[25] However, these early sociolinguistic surveys have been criticized for their sampling and other statistical weaknesses (Davis 1983; Romaine 1980) as well as for their tendency to categorize speakers into a priori social divisions that lack motivation in the lives of the individuals

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under study. In response to such concerns, other variationist sociolinguists have taken an approach more informed by ethnographic considerations. These newer studies view speakers as individuals rather than as aggregates (Milroy 1987b) and base analysis in social categories that have relevance in speakers' own lives and are discoverable only through more open-ended and longterm research techniques (Cheshire 1982; Eckert 1988; Macaulay 1976; Rickford 1986). It is also important to focus on how these categories take on greater or less significance for speakers at different moments and at different stages of life. Such a perspective is also vital to linguistic investigations of discourse, in which the context of talk figures centrally in the social meaning of particular discourse forms or speech events (Goodwin 1990; Gumperz 1982; Hymes 1974; Mitchell-Kernan 1971).

The ethnographic turn in sociolinguistics (e.g, Gumperz & Hymes [1972] 1986) therefore makes a crucial methodological addition to the discipline by enabling researchers to aim for depth rather than breadth in sociolinguistic investigations. My own research, for example, considers the workings of a number of linguistic features—from the phonological level to the level of discourse—by a relatively well-defined group of speakers at a single high school. As suggested above, this focus contrasts with traditional work, which examines the distribution of a few linguistic features within a large population. Because of this difference in scope, the primary methodology of such research—the sociolinguistic interview—is inappropriate for investigations of a single group; additionally, the structure of the interview may preclude the use of important linguistic forms (Wolfson 1976), and the interview genre itself may impose certain communicative assumptions that do not correspond to the interactional practices of interviewees (Briggs 1986).

The approach I take in this study uses an ethnographically based series of interviews in conjunction with other forms of data collection to avoid the limitations of studies based on sociolinguistic interviews alone. The study's focus on specificity rather than generality also sets aside problems of representativeness of samples and other concerns that plague variationist studies. On the other hand, it is precisely the earlier

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sociolinguistic surveys that make possible studies like this one by providing background information about the structure and use of specific linguistic varieties.

Being the "new kid"

A goal of researchers in educational settings is to be an unobtrusive, unauthoritative omnipresence in school life, a status that may be attained through a number of different strategies. Penelope Eckert (1989a), for example, achieved "nobodyness" by avoiding classrooms altogether, preferring to remain in the marginal regions of the school—its hallways, stairwells, and courtyards. Other researchers have elected to move solely in students' own worlds, sitting, like elementary schoolchildren, in child-size classroom desks (Thorne 1993) or joining middle-school kids at cafeteria tables at lunchtime (Eder, Evans, & Parker 1995). By contrast, Janet Schofield's (1982) research team focused on teachers as well as students and thus members did not attempt to distance themselves from adults to the same degree as in these other studies. In my own research, severe overcrowding at Bay City High made it impossible for me to assume a full-fledged participant role in classrooms, if for no other reason than because there was often nowhere for me to sit; I was often relegated to a worktable or, less often, I would roam around the classroom when students worked on activities individually or in groups. This situation kept me more an observer than a participant in most classrooms. However, I occasionally provided academic assistance to students struggling with homework assignments, although I thereby risked taking on a teacher role in the eyes of students.[26]

I militated against this possibility as much as I could by modeling my behavior not on the teachers but on other students who helped their peers with homework. At times this involved violations of my own pedagogical philosophy—telling a student the right answer instead of guiding her to it, for example—but I was in the school not to teach but to get to know students, which required that I foster their good will.[27] Opportunities to earn students' trust arose in other situations as well, as when I stumbled upon or was invited to

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witness illegal activities like a game of three-card monte or the sharing of a marijuana pipe. In some instances I was not the only one who felt I was being tested: one day early in my research Ms. Stein left the classroom for a prolonged period to investigate a disturbance in the hall. Afraid that if I continued to take notes I would appear to be spying for the teacher, I ostentatiously put down my pencil and notebook. The students, many apparently unaware of my presence, broke into animated conversation, which halted suddenly when someone shouted, "She's testing us! There's someone back there!" Several heads swiveled to look at me. I assured the students I had no authority and that it was all right to go ahead and talk, relieved that I had had the foresight to stop taking notes.

My assiduous efforts to appear innocuous, which included wearing a casual uniform of jeans, sneakers, and plain T-shirts, were aided by my height—at four feet eleven I made even freshmen look tall by comparison. However, my age and race worked against me; I was twenty-eight when I began the fieldwork, a good ten years older than the oldest seniors, and I am white. These factors earned me a certain degree of student deference that was not accorded to one another, and my age in particular prevented me from ever "passing" more than momentarily among the students themselves, although I have been occasionally mistaken for a student by some teachers and administrators. In any case, passing was never a goal of the research; besides being ethically unconscionable it would have limited my movements among different social groups.

Perhaps more than anything else, however, my fieldwork was influenced by my own experiences as a high-school student, first in a small all-white community in the rural Midwest and then at an urban Southwestern magnet school that was demographically and academically similar to Bay City High. The similarities brought back to me with unwelcome vividness my own unhappiness in high school. I was something of a rebel and an outsider growing up, and transferring in the middle of my freshman year to an intimidatingly large and diverse new school was initially overwhelming and isolating. My socially tenuous position as a researcher at Bay City High, with the accompanying

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necessity of constantly meeting new people and seeking out new situations, reminded me of my self-consciousness as "the new kid" in my own high school, a position that I eventually left behind as a high-school student but could not entirely abandon as an ethnographer.

Conflicting interests in fieldwork

Because of my own background and experiences—as a former high school student, as a teacher, and as a white woman—I found that my loyalties and sympathies in the field tended to be shifting and unstable. When observing classrooms, I identified readily with the teachers, whose work lives most closely resembled my own, and at first I had trouble ignoring what was going on at the front of the classroom in order to find out what was happening elsewhere. Yet I soon found my attention shifting to the "problem" students in the classroom: the angry students, the jokers, those who were silent and refused to participate. Finally I realized I was overlooking the "good" students, who tended to be so quiet and compliant that they had never appeared in my fieldnotes.

Outside the classroom, my attentions and loyalties were divided even further. My strong sense of outrage at the stereotyping of black students was tempered to some extent by the recognition that those stereotypes shaped my own behavior as well; the fears of white students and of the larger community—which were genuine, even if unjustified—fit in only too neatly with my personal collection of urban lore about race and danger.[28] My secret criticisms of teachers' lesson plans and disciplinary decisions, my annoyance at administrators' abruptness or evasiveness when I asked for information, were mitigated somewhat when I realized the sheer number of students that teachers were responsible for every day, and when I realized the magnitude of the pressure being applied to school officials by parents like Ursula Chambers. I could even find some sympathy for the overbearing Ursula, whose fervor to defend Bay City High School against perceived intruders even led her to try to enlist me in her cause as a stealth agent who might be able to

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gain access to carefully guarded school records because "you're a researcher, not a rabble-rousing parent."

Despite the conflicting demands made on me by the various adults associated with Bay City High School, my first responsibility was to the students. At times my commitment to them caused me to run afoul of a teacher whose good will I also needed: on my first day observing in one classroom I opened a locked classroom door for a late student and received a polite but firm reprimand from the teacher: "Didn't you see me lock that door a second ago? ... Please don't do that again." I was fortunate that the teacher was good-natured enough to allow me to remain in the classroom despite my violation, but I knew that if called upon to open another locked door for a student, I would in all likelihood do so.

My loyalty to the students stemmed not only from my reliance on them for my research but also from my sense of their unjust treatment at the hands of the press and the community. When the public concluded that integration at the high school had failed, it blamed the students for ruining its well-laid plans, for spoiling the future that Bay City had hoped for. But as I have argued, the students of Bay City High School did not create the racial ideologies that flow around them; the community outside the high school, aided by the media, deserves the largest share of the blame for any shattered dreams.

Conclusion

In a song that was popular during my fieldwork, Ben Harper suggests that racism begins at school: "When I was a baby I was not prejudiced / Hey how about you / This was something / That I learned in school" (*Fight for Your Mind*). But the evidence from Bay City High indicates that the school is not the source of the problem; rather, it is the site on which larger public debates about race are played out. These debates—about racial divisiveness, about competition for scarce resources, and most of all about violence—are, at bottom, debates about fear, which in turn has led many white parents to remove their

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children from the high school and to place them in private academies. Under the circumstances it is indeed remarkable that any students transgress the boundary that has been laid between African Americans and European Americans, and indeed, as we will see in Chapter 3, European American students who manage to build identities across the racist divide take their resources not from the local African American community of the school but from the wider culture of commodified hip hop. With the social context presented in this chapter as a background, the next chapter describes how white students who affiliate with black youth culture carry out this process of identity construction through the symbolic and strategic use of African American Vernacular English.

Notes

[1] All names for people and places are pseudonyms, and other identifying information has been changed. I refer to the teacher in this classroom as Ms. Stein because although she invited students to call her by her first name, many of the students I am concerned with preferred to call her by her title and last name. For my own part, I addressed her by her first name and usually referred to her by first name and last name when talking about her with students.

[2] The wording of Fade's story is reconstructed from fieldnotes taken at the time. I have quoted it here to give a sense of the scene. In all other instances, words that appear within quotation marks are exact quotations of speakers.

[3] Because my research focuses specifically on the relationship between African American and European American students, the interrelationships of other groups will not be considered in detail here. To some extent this restriction perpetuates a common oversimplification and distortion of U.S. race relations as exclusively black-white. However, as will be seen, in the context of Bay City High School black-white relations are central to the discourse about race, and hence my attention to this dichotomous construction is justified by the concerns of members of the high-school community. Nevertheless, to

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examine the experiences of other groups would illuminate and complicate the ideology of a black-white dichotomy in important ways; the discipline awaits such a study.

[4] Because students must select only one category from a restricted list of racial/ethnic designations upon enrolling in Bay City High School, official figures may not reflect students' own racial and ethnic identities. This problem is particularly acute for the diverse groups that fall under the category *Asian* and for the many students of mixed race who must be classified as belonging to a single race. The political and social issues raised by the situation of mixed-race individuals are discussed by Maria Root (1992), Paul Spickard (1989), and Naomi Zack (1993); see also Chapter 1. Racial/ethnic categories in Tables 2.1 and 2.2 are those used in Bay City High School's official documents (the abbreviations in Table 2.1 are given in full form in Table 2.2). The category *Pacific Islander* (as distinct from *Filipino*) has been omitted because no students at the high school were counted in this category.

[5] This sort of argument serves as one of the strategies of displacement that substitutes European American interests for those of African Americans. In this case, segregation on school grounds—and by implication in the larger community—is a result not of social and economic inequities but of a lifestyle choice. I argue against the "segregated by choice" position below (see footnote 9).

[6] Ursula's speech error—*white* rather than *right*—could be explained as an innocent anticipation of the following [w] in *word*, but given her use of the racially charged word *complexion*, it seems likely that a quasi-Freudian analysis would not be far off the mark. Her mistake reveals a racial subtext that also came out explicitly in anecdotes she recounted about black and Mexican families from out of town who reportedly took advantage of Bay City's school system.

[7] Ursula's concerns parallel those expressed by many white Americans in the national welfare debate. The discussion is often framed in terms of unfair taxation of the (mostly

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white) middle class in order to provide aid to undeserving poor black families. In this discourse, too, strategies of displacement are applied: the problem of inadequate education for many African American children is reinterpreted as a threat to deprive European American children of scarce and coveted resources.

[8] A Chinese American boy told me that he and his friends—a racially diverse group of middle-class boys—fear being hassled by black students and hence spend their lunch period in a small paved area hidden by surrounding classroom buildings. Likewise, a working-class European American boy told me that an older friend who had graduated from the high school promised he would "take care of" anyone who bothered him. Fear of violence figures far more centrally in boys' narratives about Bay City High than in girls', perhaps because, as Fade's story indicates, to be a victim of violence is a threat to boys' masculinity (which in Fade's story is equated with heterosexuality); see also Chapters 4 and 5. However, this fear seems to be largely unfounded. I asked both boys if anyone had in fact harassed them at the high school; the answer in both cases was "No." To highlight the danger facing European American and Asian American boys when African American youth are demonstrably at far greater risk of violence (both intraracial and interracial) is yet another instance of the discursive displacement of black concerns in favor of less justified but more highly publicized white (or at least nonblack) anxieties.

[9] This caricature served as a microcosmic analogue to the recent statewide debate over Proposition 187, which restricted "illegal" immigrants' access to many public services, including education.

[10] "The park" is a city park across the street from the high school. It is remarkable that the white enclave of the school is not even part of school property, suggesting a pattern of "white flight" away from school grounds. Conversely, not only is the black enclave of Bay City High squarely on campus, but it is also situated near the administrative building that houses the principal's office. The logic that underlies this spatial division seems to

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have less to do with student choice, at least insofar as African American students are concerned, and more to do with black students' greater risk of being bothered by the city police once they venture off school grounds. The spatial patterns of social groups at Bay City High are thus made more complex by the heterogeneity—racial and otherwise—of its students. In a more homogeneous setting (cf. for example Penelope Eckert's [1989a] study of a white suburban high school) the middle-class white students might be expected to congregate nearer the center of institutional power, the principal's office, and less scholastically successful students, many of whom are black, might be expected to leave the confines of the high school in favor of a less regulated zone.

[11] I have eliminated or altered some of the students' labels for geographic points on their maps that might reveal the school's identity. Social labels have not been changed.

[12] Because my purpose was not to develop an exhaustive inventory of social categories at Bay City High, and because category terms and definitions proliferate, I do not offer a complete list of such social groupings. However, in Chapter 5 I provide a sketch of the main superordinate categories of white youth identity.

[13] The extent to which these students are unaware of the social organization of other groups can be seen in John's interpretation of the Mexican American gang symbol XIV as the letters "X. I. V." rather than as 14; the symbol is usually read as *catorce*, the Spanish word for 'fourteen'. For the semiotics of this symbol and others among Mexican American gang members, see Norma Mendoza-Denton (1997).

[14] Transcription conventions are provided in the Appendix.

[15] The emblematic use of African American Vernacular English phonology—here exemplified by r-less *to' up* for *tore up*—is quite common among some white students at the high school. Its complex racial meanings are examined in Chapters 3 and 4.

[16] Many of these changes were recommended five years ago as part of a $4,000 study of security at the high school conducted by a private firm. Although some measures were first

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implemented earlier—most notably the fencing of the school, which initiated such student protest that the gates were soon reopened—the 1995-96 academic year marked the first time extensive security strategies were implemented, and the first time the student body accepted them so docilely. The policing of U.S. public schools has been explored by John Devine (1995).

[17] Part of these expressions of concern may have also stemmed from a generalized fear of urban youth among many adults, due in large part to media focus on teenagers as lawbreakers. As journalist Pia Hinkle writes in a *San Francisco Bay Guardian* special issue on youth, "If 'never trust anyone over 30' was the media stereotype of youth attitudes in the 1960s and 1970s, media coverage of young people today could be summed up as 'never trust anyone *under* 30' " (1995:14).

[18] I am happy to report that the book has remained unopened on my bookshelf, which is no reflection on the quality of the text but only on its relevance to research in a U.S. high school.

[19] The prevalence of researchers of various kinds at the high school has in fact led some scholars to shun Bay City High as "atypical," a reputation that it also holds among the community at large because of its diverse student body and strong academic offerings. Because I am not concerned with the representativeness of Bay City High's situation, but rather with the specificity of its social structure, I do not view the school's unique situation as a weakness of my study. The tendency for the high school to be overrun with researchers did, however, cause some practical problems in my fieldwork. In some classrooms I observed, researchers were so numerous we were almost literally sitting on top of each other, and I have a suspicion that I am featured in more than one observer's fieldnotes, in an unsettling reversal of the ethnographer's gaze.

[20] Perhaps surprisingly, given that I am a white woman, European American girls did not volunteer disproportionately, as I had expected. My interviewees varied in gender, age,

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social class, and race; the only groups that are underrepresented, for reasons I do not yet fully understand, are non-native speakers of English, especially Latinas and Latinos.

[21] I gave students the option of conducting the first interview in a group as well; several students preferred this arrangement. I recorded the interviews on a Sony WM-D6C cassette recorder, a professional-quality machine that had the advantage of roughly resembling in size and shape the personal cassette players many Bay City High School students wore. The study participants could therefore wear the recorder and a small lapel microphone (Sony ECM-T150) unobtrusively during recorded non-interview interactions. This arrangement not only resulted in tape-recorded data of sufficiently high quality to allow for phonological analysis of speech, but also overcame one of the greatest barriers that divides linguistic researchers from their consultants: in the past, the linguist was marked as an outsider by virtue of being perpetually laden with recording equipment (cf. Goodwin 1990). For group interviews and stationary interactions a flat microphone (Sony ECM-F01) recorded the group on one channel and the lapel microphone recorded a single individual on the other, which greatly facilitated the transcription of multiparty conversations.

[22] The interview questions and word list appear in the Appendix.

[23] This class is required of all sophomores and therefore offers a representative cross-section of the school as a whole, assuming that demographics do not vary widely from year to year.

[24] Because the terms *ethnography* and *participant-observation* are sometimes used rather loosely in certain disciplines, including education and cultural studies, it may be appropriate to explain my use of them. Participant-observation, as the central method of ethnography, involves longterm study of a community by immersing oneself in it and discovering its members' own understandings of their practices and beliefs (Emerson 1983; Lofland & Lofland 1995; Spradley 1980). Interviews may also be used as part of the method to the

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extent that they are open-ended and grounded in the concerns of the interviewee (Spradley 1979) and are not significantly disruptive of the workings of members' everyday lives (Milroy 1987a). It is not necessary—or possible, in most cases—to become a full participant in order to carry out ethnographic research. Additionally, the ethnographic method does not demand that the researcher's analysis reproduce the members' interpretations of their situation, and in any case such interpretations themselves are multiple and conflicting. Thus I do not pretend I became a "friend" of most students as a result of my research; my position in their lives was too liminal in most cases for me to claim such a position for myself. Nor do I maintain that I am "speaking for" or "giving voice" to the students, a problematic but increasingly common goal of much advocacy-oriented research (alternatives to this goal are offered by Cameron et al. 1992).

[25] A modification of this method that produced what is perhaps the quintessential example of efficiency in sociolinguistic data-gathering is William Labov's (1972c) famous rapid and anonymous interview technique, which allowed him to collect data from 264 unwitting subjects in six and a half hours. Similar covert elicitation methods may be used to investigate speech style (Anderson 1990) and speech-act production (Turnbull 1992; Weiss & Sachs 1991) and interpretation (Ervin-Tripp, Strage, Lampert, & Bell 1987).

[26] While in some sense this tutoring work was a way of "giving back" to students who otherwise would not have benefited in any tangible way from my presence, my relief on being asked to assume the recognizable role of tutor in the school, albeit only temporarily, showed me that such moments were perhaps more rewarding for me than for the students. This uncomfortable truth was brought home to me when a student I had interviewed casually mentioned he would like my help with his college application essays. I brought up the topic again when I ran into him several weeks later, and after several failed attempts to make an appointment to meet, I finally reached him by phone, only to be told he had sent off his applications that day. He followed this news with a very sincere apology, a

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response that made clear that what I had thought of as my favor to him was instead, from his perspective, his favor to me.

[27] The necessity of making such compromises in the course of fieldwork is a familiar problem in the sociological and anthropological literature. The tension between one's identity as a fieldworker and other aspects of the self is inescapable, given the liminality of the fieldworker's position.

[28] Black students also stereotyped whites, although this practice did not affect media representations of the school, as white students' stereotypes of blacks did.

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Chapter 3

Idiolect as dialect: Style and the problem of fluency

> [Nic] Mattingly is a cool 5'8" with water blue eyes who wears his blond hair slicked back with *mousse*, shaved closely on the sides. He plans on getting a fade, a popular haircut among African American males that starts with a short crew on the top and fades to near baldness on the sides and back.
>
> A freshman at [suburban] Concord High, Mattingly comes from a comfortable home and can walk down the street without fear of being shot, robbed or maimed.
>
> Yet black urban music calls out to him. ...
>
> Sometimes Mattingly finds himself speaking like the b-boys he hears on CDs. For him, the music, the language, the style links him to what's cool, what's in. It's not about acting black at all—he's just being himself. (Wagner 1996:28, 30)

Introduction: Identities on the boundary

In the previous chapter I suggested that ideologies of racial division make it difficult for individuals to move across the black/white racial boundary. I now focus on the linguistic strategies—phonological, morphological, and prosodic as well as lexical—of some of the speakers who carry words across this boundary. The present chapter offers a closer look at the language of these cultural brokers and its role within the racial economy of Bay City High School. Via linguistic and other choices, such speakers locate themselves at times with African Americans, at times with European Americans, and at still other times squarely on the racial border itself.

As already seen in Chapter 2, linguistic, racial, and spatial boundaries converge on the school grounds, and white speakers who cross into AAVE also enter African American

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Figure 3.1: Map of Bay City High School social space by Willie

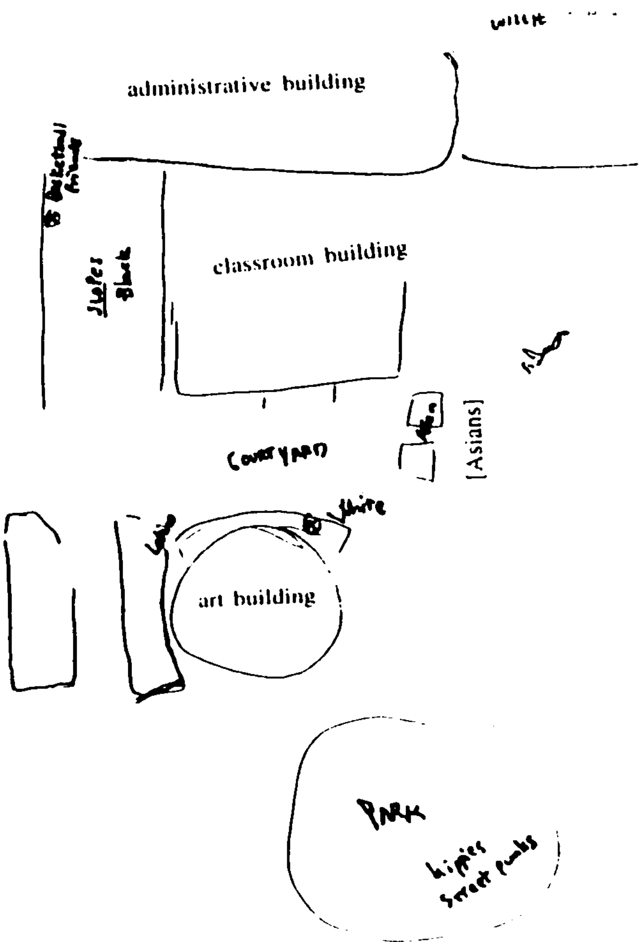
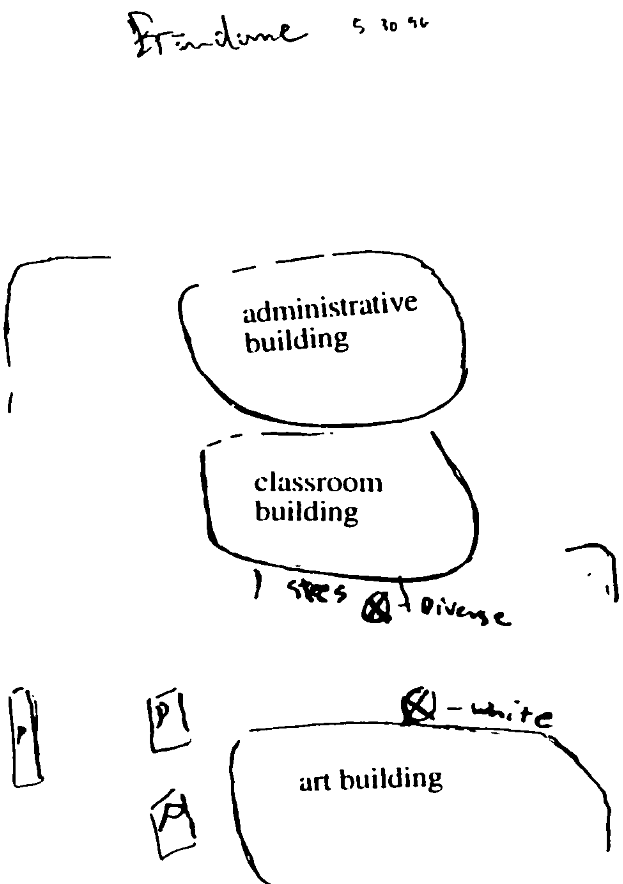


Figure 3.2: Map of Bay City High School social space by Brand One



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or racially mixed social space and social groups. The geographic reflex of cross-racial language use may be seen in Figure 3.1, drawn by Willie, a white boy who orients to hip-hop culture. Willie has marked his own location on the school grounds with circled Xs—one on the steps, which he labels as "white," and one on the slopes, where his basketball friends are, and which he labels "black." In Figure 3.2, Willie's best friend Brand One, who is also white, offers a similar though sketchier representation. He positions himself both with Willie in front of the arts building and across the courtyard on the classroom building steps, with a "diverse" group of students. Indeed, all of the boys discussed in this chapter take up multiple positions within the racially charged terrain of Bay City High. The heightened visibility that results from such geographic mobility makes these white students subject to the evaluations of their peers, both black and white.

Cultural brokers like Willie and Brand One are sometimes dubbed *wannabes* by black students and *sellouts* by other whites, a situation that reflects both the near-universal disapproval of racial boundary crossing and the differences between black and white perspectives on the phenomenon. To many African American students, white hip-hoppers are making illegitimate claims to a black identity; to many European Americans, they are rejecting their "own" racial group. In other words, where African American students may see the white use of AAVE and other black practices as an intrusion on black cultural space, European American students may view it primarily as a withdrawal from white cultural space.[1]

Similar attitudes have been reported in other studies of language crossing, but the range of attitudes varies considerably depending on demographic, cultural, temporal, and other factors, as the British studies by Roger Hewitt and Ben Rampton illustrate. Hewitt reports, for example, that his black consultants viewed white use of creole as "a further white appropriation of one of the sources of [black] power" (1986:162), while Rampton, working in an area where blacks were a small minority, found greater tolerance for cross-racial language use. He suggests (1995:38) that the different black responses in the two

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studies may be due not only to the size of the black population in each location but also to the type of black music popular with each group. As in the present study, whites in the British research who used black language also listened to black music and adopted other black cultural practices. Rampton argues that because reggae, the dominant musical form among youth in Hewitt's study, is closely associated with black politics and culture, white users of creole were not readily admitted. In contrast, African American musical genres such as soul, funk, and rap were more popular among the black, white, and South Asian students studied by Rampton, and given the greater accommodation of multiracial participation within these genres, white users of black language were more easily accepted.

It is important to note, however, that the multiracial impulse of hip hop that Rampton found in England is not universal. Indeed, in the Bay City High context, although consumption of rap music spans all racial groups, rap production is racially specific: white hip-hop fans rarely listen to white professional rappers, and only black students at the school perform their own raps both among their friends and more publicly.

But even fandom can create problems for white hip-hoppers who do not merely listen to rap music but adopt hip-hop clothing styles and features of AAVE, because such practices are understood by many onlookers as "black." Conversely, white reggae fans at Bay City High who sport dreadlocks and Rastafarian colors on their clothing are not viewed as perpetrators of cultural theft because few black students at the school listen to reggae or view it as a symbolic resource for cultural identity. (A similar deracialization of jazz audiences has occurred at the school, as well as elsewhere in the Bay Area and around the nation; for the history of this shift see McMichael 1996.)

The racialization of rap is part of the larger ideology of racial division at Bay City High, and as a result, white rap fans at the school, like white reggae fans in Hewitt's study, experience pressure from black students to remain at a distance from what are viewed as black language and culture. At the same time, they experience similar pressure from white students who do not participate in hip hop. In most cases this pressure is mild,

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taking the form of jokes and indirect criticism, but as in Hewitt's study, white participants in black culture at Bay City High face more severe pressure from other whites than from blacks. Unlike Hewitt, Rampton does not discuss the attitudes of white non-Creole users; however, he studied only fleeting instances of crossing into Creole rather than everyday use of Creole features as Hewitt did.[2] The latter may elicit greater resentment among whites than the former because it represents a greater commitment to black culture.

For the white speakers themselves, however, the adoption of linguistic and cultural forms from hip hop is an individual choice that is devoid of racial meaning. This orientation is evident not only at Bay City High School but in more suburban Bay Area cities as well, as the epigraph above indicates. Thus white users of AAVE, other white students, and black students each offer contradictory interpretations of cross-racial AAVE (CRAAVE) use as symbolic action. Where black and white students alike use it as an illegitimate movement across racial boundaries, the speakers themselves view their style as an expression of their individuality. None of these perspectives can be privileged, for each offers a piece of the ethnographic "truth" of the situation. In this chapter, I will examine each perspective in turn, considering first the ideology of individuality among white users of AAVE and its effects on speakers' language and personal style.

The status of the individual in sociolinguistics

The individual speaker has not traditionally been a central concern of sociolinguistics, and the preference for studying well-defined homogeneous groups rather than their individual and heterogeneous constituents continues in most recent work in the field. Dell Hymes's observation of the situation of individual-centered research nearly two decades ago still holds true: "These lines of work have continued and influence some studies of discourse today, but whereas they were begun as developments out of linguistics, largely by linguists, they have found themselves at the periphery of linguistics, if not quite outside it, from the standpoint of the conception dominating the discipline" (1979:34).

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In arguing for the importance of the individual in linguistics, however, Hymes frequently espouses a model of the individual as a microcosm of her culture or society. In this view, individual patterns of language use are seen as representative of larger social groups, and hence the model "provides a way to integrate differences among cultures with differences among individuals" (1979:40). Perhaps the most vocal proponent of the microcosm model of sociolinguistics is William Labov, who maintains, even in a collection of articles ostensibly about individual differences in language competence and use, that "individual linguistic practices are primarily a result of 'the socially determined pattern of linguistic variation' " (1979:329).[3] (In his more recent work, Labov has moved back to a more individual-oriented analysis that recognizes "the crucial role of the individual in the actuation of sound change" [W. Labov 1996].) Similarly, Allan Bell's (1984) work on intraspeaker variation relies on a strong version of the microcosm model: stylistic variation of a single speaker across contexts, Bell argues, reflects social-group variation, which is primary. Yet Bell's theory does have room for individual agency insofar as it distinguishes audience design (orientation of linguistic style to a copresent audience member) from referee design (orientation to representatives of a nonpresent but influential speech community).[4] Although audience design is largely driven by social factors in a quasi-deterministic fashion, referee design is an initiative use of language whose occurrence cannot be predicted. The concept of referee design thus allows for individual language use as a creative enterprise that is not a direct reflection of wider sociolinguistic patterning.[5]

Within nonvariationist approaches, too, sociolinguists often collapse individual linguistic effects into social effects. Thus John Gumperz and Deborah Tannen define "social differences in language" as "those features of an individual's speech behavior which are shared by significant numbers of others and play a role in the signaling of common identity" (1979:305). But the assumption that the expression of shared social identity is rooted in shared linguistic practice overlooks the possibility that speakers may display a shared social identity through different linguistic practices that are nonetheless evaluated as

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"talking the same." Here Nancy Dorian's (1994) concept of *personal-pattern variation* is helpful. In her investigation of language variation in a small Scottish fishing village, Dorian found that certain variables of East Sutherland Gaelic, an endangered language, were not affected by any of the social factors such as age, sex, geography, and style that sociolinguists appeal to in their analyses; indeed these linguistic variables did not seem to hold any social value at all. This phenomenon, which Dorian terms *personal-pattern variation*, reminds linguists that speakers need not use the same linguistic features in order to be heard as using the same variety. Despite its general theoretical utility, however. Dorian's framework is not directly applicable to my own study in that I consider not a tightly knit social group but a social category whose members are mostly acquainted with one another but are not close friends. Moreover, the speakers in my study, in contrast to those in Dorian's, select variants that are endowed with social meaning. Finally, although most of Dorian's speakers, like all of the speakers in my own study, are not fluent in their target variety, some of them are fluent and nevertheless exhibit personal-pattern variation. Yet variation among the Bay City High speakers seems to be due precisely to their lack of fluency, which leads them to select a few socially significant variants to display their affiliation. Thus the variation in my own data should not be classified as personal-pattern variation, but as something more akin to the individual variation identified by Robert Le Page and Andrée Tabouret-Keller (1985). Crucially, however, the variation in the present study, like that in both Dorian's and Le Page and Tabouret-Keller's research, cannot be accounted for within the microcosm model. Instead, the individual variation in these instances must be understood as incommensurate with variation across social groups.

Le Page and Tabouret-Keller's study of language variation in creole contexts links the social and the individual without slighting either by positing "linguistic behavior as a series of *acts of identity* in which people reveal both their personal identity and their search for social roles" (1985:14; original emphasis). The authors make clear that these symbolic linguistic acts are not the unconstrained choices of an autonomous individual but are limited

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by the social world surrounding the speaker. The acts of identity model has become very influential in the investigation of language use in situations that do not fit the traditional sociolinguistic paradigm. Barbara Johnstone (1996a), for example, follows Le Page and Tabouret-Keller in arguing that within the "multicultural communication" perspective exemplified by her research, "language is seen as the result of choices from among resources provided by multiple models, choices which can be strategic (rhetorical) or expressive of self. Cultures and languages meet, then, within individuals, who group themselves and are grouped by others, for various and changing purposes, into various social groups" (1996a:11). In fact, Johnstone's recent work (e.g., Johnstone 1995, 1996a, 1996b, 1997; Johnstone & Bean 1997) represents the discipline's most sustained effort to bring the individual into the center of the sociolinguistic enterprise. Her theory of multicultural communication originates in part in her study, in collaboration with Judith Mattson Bean, of ten women who are public figures in the state of Texas. As she remarks, "the sources of identity expressed in talk and other action are idiosyncratic and particular. Although all of the women whom we have studied draw on gender expectations and stereotypes as they construct public voices, each does so differently, all draw equally or more on other linguistic and cultural resources, and all attribute the largest part of their identity to very particular facts about their own lives and families" (1995:186). This outcome leads Johnstone and Bean to conclude, "[w]e see all language use as essentially syncretic, . . . a result of situated choices among and combinations of the possibilities provided by the varieties fully or in part available to speakers" (1997:19).

Johnstone's reliance on the case-study method is a natural result of her concern with individual linguistic choices. Other researchers have also drawn upon this method in an effort to get a closer view of language use in context. The shift from social determinism to individual agency in sociolinguistics is especially important in investigations of cross-racial language use, because the conscious choices of speakers must figure into any adequate account of this phenomenon. In particular, given European Americans' widely

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attested nonfluency in AAVE, at least according to the linguistic definition, speakers must use the resources of their individual idiolects to assert their affiliation with the African American speech community. In other words, such speakers index dialect through idiolect. For this reason, the bulk of research on outgroup—and especially European American—uses of AAVE is almost entirely based on case studies (e.g., Cutler 1996; Hatala 1976; Jacobs-Huey 1996; Lo 1996; Sankoff 1996). What I present in this chapter, then, is not a unified picture of European Americans' use of AAVE but a description of individual uses and interpretations of AAVE crossing. To emphasize individuals is not, however, to lose sight of the social world within which they speak and act; as Edward Sapir has pointed out, both elements are crucial to an adequate description of language in social life. Sapir expresses skepticism about "whether a completely impersonal anthropological description and analysis of custom in terms which tacitly assume the unimportance of individual needs and preferences is, in the long run, truly possible for a social discipline" (1949:570). And Hymes notes that "successful study of individual differences must include the social meaning of such differences, and hence a method of work, ethnography, cultivated in sociology and anthropology" (1979:36). Mindful of these admonitions from the two most eminent linguistic anthropologists of this century, I turn now to the different ways that individuals take up AAVE and racialized cultural practices in the display of a shared social identity.

Semiotics and clothing style

Individual members of the same social category draw from a common stock of symbolic resources, both linguistic and nonlinguistic, that allow them to project distinctive versions of the same social identity. Because not all speakers use the same resources, individuals are able to differentiate themselves from others in the same category by developing a personal style that incorporates language, physical self-presentation, and other displayable aspects of

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the self. As a central component of style, clothing may be fruitfully examined alongside language for what it can reveal about individuals' social and personal identities.[6]

The media play a substantial role in forging teenagers' identities. This is not to say that the media dictate or determine youth identities, but that words and images in the media serve as resources for teenagers to select and arrange. Perhaps the clearest examples of this phenomenon are the pervasive media collages that Bay City High students frequently produce for school assignments. Students are asked to represent "themselves"—their beliefs, opinions, and values—using photos and captions from popular magazines; many collage elements are taken from advertisements. The production of individuality through the mass media in this way may seem paradoxical, yet it is evident in every aspect of students' lives.

Clothing, too, like the media, is a mass-produced resource used in the service of individual expression. In particular, the fashion associated with hip hop offers a rich symbolic system for both social and personal aspects of identity and especially for the interplay of racial identity with other dimensions of the self. As Marcyliena Morgan (1996) has pointed out, hip-hop style, particularly for boys, permits the blurring of racial categories—caps, baggy clothing, and close-cropped hair obscure most physical details. It thus provides an effective means for European American teenagers to mark their affiliation with the music and culture of African Americans. But if the hip-hop uniform expresses a shared social identity, at the same time hip-hoppers are not homogeneous: individual styles of dress are created through the selection and combination of particular designers and brands. Table 3.1 lists some of the clothing preferences of the five of the boys I studied most closely.[7] All the boys make use of the same general style popularized by rap artists and their fans in recent years, an oversized and layered but clean-cut prep-school look that substitutes the expensive fashions of European American designers for the more countercultural style of hip hop in the 1980s (see Kakutani 1997). Each boy sports the hip-hop style of cap, chunky athletic shoes, shirt layered over a white T-shirt, sagging jeans

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Table 3.1. Clothing styles of five European American boys affiliated with African American youth culture at Bay City High

	Al Capone	Billy	Brand One	Eddie	Jay
cap	Timberland, Nautica, Hilfiger baseball cap	Kangol golf-style cap, knit ski cap, army hat	none	Nike baseball cap	baseball cap with sports-team logo (New York and local)
jacket	Eddie Bauer	sports team logo (local), North Face, camouflage jacket	North Face, Adidas	Nike	Adidas (?)
shirt	Polo	Ben Davis	Polo	Nike	T-shirts with sports team logos
shoes	Nike hiking boots	hiking boots	Nike (numerous pairs and styles)	Nike	Adidas

revealing boxer shorts, and capacious jacket, but each shapes the style in his own way. Al's look, replete with fashion inspired by sailing and hiking, is rugged and outdoorsy. Jay's sports-team-oriented style is more athletic, and Brand One's shows the most attention to detail—even his deodorant is a designer brand, and unlike the other boys he likes to shop and views his style as something he has self-consciously developed. He describes it as "pretty-boy." Billy, by contrast, is quite eclectic, and Eddie's brand loyalty to Nike, surprisingly enough, separates him from the crowd.

Economic factors play an important role in these stylistic choices. The cost of designer fashions is prohibitive for many African American rap fans, and many African American boys at Bay City High wear the same brand-name item often rather than rotating their wardrobe frequently as the more well-off European American boys are able to do. Thus European Americans at the school, despite their greater marginality within the hip-hop world, may be more able than many African Americans to express their identity through adherence to hip-hop fashion. But even among European Americans, some of the boys in Table 3.1 above come from relatively well-to-do families while others are less financially

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secure. Al Capone and Brand One, for example, have much larger wardrobes than Billy or Eddie (who maintains his name-brand style by regularly wearing the same few items). In addition, there are other limits to these boys' participation in a "black" cultural style: some wedge cards or pens between their caps and the side of their heads, as many African American boys do, but none carry the sports towels and wooden hairbrushes popular with black boys (although many of the white boys have similarly short hairstyles). And unlike many black boys, they do not have pierced ears.[8]

Pathways through AAVE

As with clothing styles, each speaker draws on a different subset of African American English features, including morphosyntactic, phonological, prosodic, and lexical elements, and once again, the features each boy selects may be partly due to differential access. Following John Baugh, I classify such terms as Black English Street Talk (BEST) rather than AAVE (see Chapter 1 for this distinction). All speakers use many lexical items that first became familiar to them via African American youth and rap artists, such as the affiliative terms *blood, homie, partner* and terms of approbation like *raw, saucy, tight* (see also Chapter 2):

(1)

a. Al Capone: I mean Shawn'll like I'll get into an ar- a **phat** argument with him and (.) I mean I <u>know</u> that we're going to still be friends afterwards ...

b. Al: If I dropped my pen and somebody picked **that shit** up, I'd be all over him.

c. G.C. <a black boy>: Billy! <offers pen that Billy had lent him>

Billy: **It's all good**.

d. Billy: They're my **homies**, I **give them props**.

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e. Brand One: Tiffany!

<wiggles fingers for her to join him and Calvin, a black boy>

Calvin: She can put her arms behind her back.

<demonstrates, smiling>

<Tiffany, a black girl, folds both arms up behind her back>

Calvin: That's nasty!

Brand One: Damn, **girl**!

f. <Nick, a black boy, has just commented mockingly on Eddie's new haircut.>

Eddie <irritably>: That's how he cut my hair, **blood**.

g. <to Catalina, a black girl, who is leaving class ahead of him>

Eddie: Wait on me, **girl**!

h. Priscilla <a white teacher>: Where's your partner?

Jay: <mock tearful quality> {She left me for another man.}

Priscilla: Can you blame her?

Jay: **Scandalous**! [skænləs] <AAVE pronunciation>

Speakers also use phonological features of AAVE, such as vocalization or deletion of postvocalic liquids and consonant-cluster simplification. These features may create confusion for European American listeners, as in Example 2:

(2)

<Natalie, a white teacher's aide, has just read Billy his part in a class play>

Billy: It's all good. [ɪs a: gu:ʔ]

Natalie: It's awful?

Billy: It's all good. [ɪs a: gu:ʔ]

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However, some speakers also include additional features of AAVE that are idiolectically specific. For example, of all the boys in Table 3.2, Al has the highest rate of substitution of the stop [d] for the voiced interdental fricative /ð/, illustrated in (3).[9]

Table 3.2. Initial /ð/ realized as [d] for five speakers, by preceding phonetic environment*

Speaker	Stop	Fricative	Nasal	Liquid	Vowel	Pause	Total
Al	16/26 (62%)	2/8 (25%)	3/16 (19%)	4/16 (25%)	3/14 (21%)	8/20 (40%)	36/100 (36%)
Billy	4/22 (14%)	2/27 (7%)	0/14	0/5	0/13	0/19	6/100 (6%)
Brand One	1/22 (5%)	0/18	0/15	0/9	0/16	1/20 (5%)	2/100 (2%)
G.C.	8/15 (53%)	5/12 (42%)	0/25	3/7 (43%)	15/25 (60%)	1/16 (6%)	32/100 (32%)
Mark	0/31	0/9	0/25	0/9	0/10	0/16	0/100

*Ambiguous tokens are excluded. Data are taken from individual interviews containing at least 100 /ð/ tokens. Other variants include [ð], Ø, and assimilation to a preceding consonant.

(3)

Al: Well, hip hop culture is like (.) you know **the** [də] music (.) the [ðə] like dee-jaying whatever, breakdancing, and graffiti. Those [ðouz] are **the** [də] **the** [də] as- the [ðə] main aspects you know.

None of the other boys in Al's social category exploit this feature at all; for comparison, I have also included the rate of use for Mark, a mainstream white boy who speaks Western European American Vernacular English (WEAVE), and G.C., a mainstream black boy who speaks AAVE and who is acquainted with most of the others.[10]

Less quantifiable but still recognizable are differences in the use of other features of AAVE across speakers. Although small numbers of total tokens prevent quantitative analysis, as Bell (1992:337) notes even a single token of a marked variant can be analytically important. Some of these, like the phonological feature favored by Al, are

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easily observable markers or stereotypes of AAVE and are therefore readily exported into white teenagers' speech. They may also involve relatively superficial elements of the AAVE linguistic system, such as intonation and stress, rather than fundamental structural characteristics of the grammar. In Examples (4a) and (4b), Jay makes use of a distinctive low-mid intonational contour as an evaluative and affective discourse marker.

(4a)

```
<discussing his baseball league>

Jay:       League South.

           Leà:gue Sóu:th! [sau:f]
```

(4b)

```
Charlie:   Bay City Catholic Academy.

           But it's in <creaky> {Weston.}

           They kept their <creaky> {name.}

Jay:       I know. h

           ...

           Trying to- [trajnə] trying to- [trajnə] represent.

           No. [nɑ:]

           Pè:rpetrá:te.
```

The pattern described here is frequently found in calling routines among African Americans at Bay City High. It is heard, for example, in cheers at the school's pep rallies and sports events. This connection to athletics is not surprising, for Jay is an avid baseball player who may have acquired AAVE features from teammates and fans. Jay also employs AAVE patterns of stress, as in (5):

(5)

<Marian, a black girl, has just reported that her friend accidentally injured her.>

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Jay: Did you beát her àss?

Marian: No:! She's my frie:nd!

Standard English would place primary stress on the object and secondary stress on the verb: *Did you beàt her áss?*. Jay's AAVE use here may be triggered by his African American interlocutor; likewise, in other examples of his speech, Jay is more likely to employ AAVE prosody when topics or language pertain to African American culture.

Example (4b) is an especially rich illustration of the linguistic tension in European American students' claims to AAVE. Jay's incipient grammaticalization of *trying to* as [trajnə] (which is often spelled *tryna* in hip-hop publications and rap lyrics) indexes his identification with hip hop, as does his lowering of the vowel of *no*, a lexically specific phonological feature of the African American hip-hoppers at the school and elsewhere. However, his use of the vowel [ɑ] rather than the [ɔ] of AAVE is characteristic of WEAVE. Moreover, Jay's use of the BEST term *represent* is incorrect here; its meaning is 'to show pride in, to stand up for (one's hometown or social group)'. Jay quickly corrects himself and supplies the appropriate term *perpetrate* ('to defraud, to misrepresent oneself'). In marking his correction with the low-mid contour, he doubly displays his knowledge of black linguistic practices, and thereby semiotically eradicates his error. At the same time, his switch into a recognizably African American form signals his awareness of his own peripheral status in the African American speech community; the multiple and conflicting pressures exhibited here are explored at greater length in Chapter 4.

The preference for phonological and prosodic features is characteristic of cross-racial linguistic borrowing patterns, according to the evidence of earlier studies (e.g., Hatala 1976; Hewitt 1986; Wolfram 1973). Typically, syntactic features and socially meaningful forms that are below the level of consciousness of speech-community members (*indicators*, in W. Labov's 1972e terminology) are much less available for use and correspond to intensive contact with African Americans. Although none of the boys in this

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study experienced the cultural immersion of Carla in Eileen Hatala's research or of the Puerto Rican teenagers studied by Walt Wolfram, some of them do produce these less expected forms.

Thus, Willie uses existential *it* WEAVE uses *there* (Example 6):

(6a)

```
<discussing what gangsta rap he likes>
Willie:→   It's certain people,
           like (1.3)
           I like certain things,
           but all that stuff.
```

(6b)

```
Mary:      So is there a difference between East Coast and West Coast
           because some people were saying
Willie:→   [Yeah. It is.        ]
Mary:      [that there's like a ] huge difference.
```

Outside of linguistics, this feature is not widely recognized as part of AAVE, although it has long been known to be characteristic of the variety (e.g., Dillard 1972; W. Labov 1972a; Smitherman 1977). As the only one of these speakers to use existential *it*, Willie exhibits an especially subtle awareness of language. His linguistic assertion of cultural authority is not flamboyant—yet neither is it difficult to acquire, since it involves the substitution of only a single morpheme, albeit within a closed class.

By contrast Eddie selects much more recognizable features of AAVE which, as morphosyntactic-level phenomena, constitute a very strong claim to membership in the school's African American speech community. Much more than the other boys, Eddie's use of CRAAVE involves verbal features such as copula deletion and uninflected present-tense forms, as shown in examples (7a) through (7c).[11]

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(7a)

<Re: heavy drinking>

Eddie: It make you do like this. <jitters body>

It do!

(7b)

Neil (white boy): Why are you looking at me?

Eddie: Cause you lookin at me.

(7c)

<In sex-education class, explaining how pregnancy occurs>

Eddie: When he shoot his nut it go up in there.

The use of syntactic features of this kind suggests ongoing interaction between Eddie and fluent AAVE speakers, although Eddie himself is not fluent in AAVE, nor do his rates of zero copula and zero inflection appear to match those of the African American students with whom he associates. My data from Eddie are not sufficient to allow for a meaningful quantitative analysis, but his use of the AAVE variant of these variables seems to be close to 100%, which is much higher than the rates for even the most basilectal speaker among his friends. Other users of CRAAVE also employ some syntactic features, such as habitual *be* in (8) below and zero copula in (10), but not with the frequency of Eddie's usage.

(8)

<Kelly, a white girl, and Jay are looking at the schedule of presentations required for the class>

Jay: I don't want to do it.

Kelly: Why not?

Isn't your partner here?

Jay: Probably not.

She never be coming.

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In addition, Eddie draws on some of the grossest stereotypes of AAVE, as illustrated by his adherence to extreme /r/less phonology in words such as *sure* [ʃoʊ] and *floor* [floʊ], which was not characteristic of any of the African American speakers I studied, although some black speakers did use these forms for stylistic effect (i.e., monitoring black; see Chapter 4). The supercorrection of Eddie's linguistic style corresponds with his physical self-presentation.[12] Eddie is the only one of the boys to wear his cap sideways (rather than forward or backward) and the leg of his athletic pants pushed up to his knee, both African American male styles that do not otherwise cross black-white racial lines at the school. Additionally, Eddie not only follows the widespread urban youth practice of carrying a pager; he wears no less than three pagers and brings a cellular phone to class, which bespeaks an exaggerated adherence to these trends among black students. And while many students of all races bring Walkman tape players to school, Eddie brings an oversized portable tape player of the "ghetto blaster" type. The convergence of speech and the physical self is not as straightforward for every speaker as it is in Eddie's case, for each speaker takes up a slightly different position toward hip hop and blackness through choices of idiolect and fashion.

Free style: Stylistics and sociolinguistics

The production of personal style through language and other aspects of self-presentation described above is usually seen as far removed from sociolinguists' concept of the term *style*, whether this is defined as "attention paid to speech" (W. Labov 1972g) or as a reflex of social variation (Bell 1984). For sociolinguists, style resides not in speakers but in situations and is characterized by its instability; intraspeaker variation across contexts is the central phenomenon in sociolinguistic studies of style. Style thus is not a product of agentive acts but of factors that are largely unconscious, whether cognitive (à la Labov) or social (à la Bell).

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Yet linguistics does offer another approach to style that may yield a more complete perspective: the linguistic approach to literature known as stylistics. Within the stylistics framework, style is understood as the linguistic manifestation of individuality by an author who is relatively aware of the choices she makes and who intends these choices to have particular effects on her audience.[13] Although early work focused narrowly on literature, especially poetry (e.g., Sebeok 1960), more recently stylistic analysis has expanded to include investigation of noncanonical literary genres as well as nonliterary forms of speech and writing. A union of sociolinguistic and literary approaches to linguistic style may allow for inclusion of the best insights of both frameworks: the stylistic recognition that style is largely an act of individual expression may be coupled with the sociolinguistic recognition that style varies widely, expressing not a single self but an array of identities across social contexts. The central role of the audience in both the stylistic and the sociolinguistic approaches—especially as the latter has been formulated by Bell (1984)—also facilitates the merging of these two theoretical strands.

This richer definition of style allows us to account for apparent anomalies in the data from white users of AAVE. That is, the boys in my study exhibit relatively little style-shifting between more and less formal contexts. In Example (2) above, for instance, Billy does not adjust his pronunciation when a white adult displays confusion. Such resistance to shifting is entirely unlike what one finds among African American teenagers. A typical example of black students' style shifting appears in (9):

(9)

```
Easton:     How old was you when you started <your current job>?
<Guest speaker indicates that he doesn't understand>
Easton:     How old were you when you started <working>?
```

Like Billy, Eddie does not code-switch during class; this fact is part of Eddie's determined efforts to maintain his identity in the classroom. That other students noticed his efforts

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became evident on the last day of school, when the students participated in an activity in which they expressed appreciation for one another's contributions to the class. Neil, the white boy in (7b) who had an antagonistic relationship with Eddie throughout the year, said to him ironically, "Thank you for being so consistent." Walt Wolfram and Ralph Fasold (1974:92), citing William Labov (1964), have suggested that style-shifting does not occur until adolescence; younger speakers, they argue, have not yet acquired the social knowledge to adapt their language according to context. Such claims have been amply refuted, however (McClure 1981; Shatz & Gelman 1973; Zentella 1997). Furthermore, in the present situation there is no reason why European American students would be significantly less attuned to contextual appropriateness than their African American peers. To be sure, African Americans, because of race-based power inequities, have to be more accommodating to European Americans than the reverse, and thus it may be that for white students, but not black ones, the classroom does not constitute a formal environment.

Alternatively (or additionally), AAVE may be doing different linguistic work in each context: that is, the same linguistic feature may index a number of frames. Susan Ervin-Tripp (1995) reports a similar functional differentiation in her study of the speech of second-language learners. This one-to-many relationship between form and function is not limited to language but is typical of other semiotic systems as well, especially those associated with identity. Thus Erving Goffman observes that in the matter of one's "personal front" (1959:23-24)—expressive aspects of self-presentation such as clothing, physical characteristics and behavior, and speech—the individual "possesses a limited range of sign-equipment" (1959:29) and hence must use the same signs in a variety of situations. In fact, such functional extension may be especially common among those who lack access to a complete sign system, among them second-language users and second-dialect users. The position of such speakers is akin to that experienced by rap artists who perform "free style" rhymes (that is, improvisational composition). Such performers rely

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on a set of formulaic phrases and structures that can be applied to a wide range of topics (Morgan 1996).

Nevertheless, white students do in fact engage in some minimal style-shifting, although this appears to occur at least as much for the benefit of overhearing black students as for teachers. In Example (10), Al Capone shifts from CRAAVE to Standard English following Calvin's turn:

(10)

<The teachers, Carolyn and Norma (both white) have just handed out a photocopied rap song with anti-drug lyrics.>

Calvin: Why'd you change *talking shit* to *talking dirt*?
It don't make any sense.

Al: {It don't-
It doesn't make any sense.} <quietly>

Jay: Al can rap it!

Al: hhhh

Billy: I can do the beat box while he rap it! <makes rhythmic noises with his mouth into his cupped hands>

Al's self-correction seems designed to avoid appearing to imitate Calvin's speech too closely, rather than from a sense that such forms are not "appropriate" in a classroom context. This analysis is supported by the fact that Al's turn is spoken quietly and cannot be heard by the teacher, although it can be heard by Calvin, who is seated nearby, and perhaps by a few other students of both races. Such avoidance of AAVE forms before an African American audience is also typical of the white speakers in Hewitt's study (e.g., 1986:51), who feared sanctions from unsympathetic black speakers if they used Creole with them. Thus questions of audience and agency become central to the explanation of Al's shift in this example. In this same exchange, however, Billy does not adjust his speech to his

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audience in the way that Al does; his turn, spoken loudly to the entire class, is akin to Eddie's CRAAVE performances in the classroom. Indeed, both Eddie and Billy are class clowns, and this fact may help explain their highly consistent language use across situations. Such interactions suggest that linguistic choices—including what variety to use and when to use it—are highly individualized for the speakers discussed in this chapter.

As the above examples illustrate, the joining of stylistics and sociolinguistics also admits a more central focus on variation not only within speakers but across speakers within the same social category. The high degree of interspeaker variability seen here appears to be typical of language crossing and other cases of nonfluency. Hewitt found a dramatic degree of interspeaker variability in his study of white teenagers' use of Creole in London (1986:127), which is similar to the widely variable patterns Le Page and Tabouret-Keller describe in their report of nonfluent Creole use by black London teenagers who are the children of Jamaican immigrants:

> "London Jamaican" is more a set of norms to be aimed at than an internally coherent and consistent system. Speakers behave as if there were a language called "Jamaican," but often all they do (perhaps all they *know how* to do) is to make gestures in the direction of certain tokens associated with Jamaican Creole which have a stereotypical value. In other words, the "idealized" London Jamaican is a language close to the "deepest" form of Jamaican Creole, and is identified as such by all those features above the level of awareness which distinguish Jamaican Creole from Standard English. . . . In practice, most speakers cannot achieve the ideal. The result is a variety of speech which is (a) highly variable from speaker to speaker, (b) highly variable internally, (c) tends to 'revert' to London English—i.e. speakers often seem to find difficulty maintaining London Jamaican over long stretches. (1975:180; original emphasis)

Thus, London Jamaican and other varieties formed at social boundaries (in this case, between first- and second-generation speakers of Creole) involve speaker intentions, social

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constraints, and personal and social identities—indeed, whereas sociolinguistics usually examines how language creates identity, in the cases of London Jamaican and CRAAVE identity is the impetus that creates language.[14]

Given the distinctiveness of individual speakers' linguistic patterns, then, it becomes difficult to offer a Labovian analysis of structured variation within the speech community. These speakers, all members of the same social category, have different relationships to AAVE, although their different uses result in the same symbolic display of identity. It is necessary to investigate further the traditional sociolinguistic concepts of speech community and fluency in order to discover the place of such speakers within sociolinguistic theory.

The concept of the speech community

Given the centrality of the speech community in sociolinguistics, the inability of sociolinguists to agree on an adequate definition of the concept is rather surprising. Even Leonard Bloomfield, who devoted a chapter of his foundational work *Language* to the topic, offers two variant definitions:

> A group of people who use the same system of speech-signals is a *speech-community*. ([1933] 1984:29; original emphasis)
>
> A speech community is a group of people who interact by means of speech. ([1933] 1984:42)

Bloomfield's failure to specify in the second definition that members must share the same linguistic system suggests how deeply this expectation is embedded in his work. However, such definitional variability in more recent work reflects a growing recognition of the inadequacy of prior definitions. John Gumperz, for example, after proposing two different definitions of the term early in his career later suggested that pinning down the speech community at all may be futile (1982:26). Gumperz's skepticism is largely a reaction to the definition of *speech community* proposed by William Labov and widely adopted by

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sociolinguists. For Labov, a speech community "is not defined by any marked agreement in the use of language elements, so much as by participation in a set of shared norms; these norms may be observed in overt types of evaluative behavior, and by the uniformity of abstract patterns of variation which are invariant in respect to particular levels of usage" (1972h:120–121). In other words, speakers may use language differently on the surface (for example, rates of consonant deletion will vary by age, sex, and social class) but their shared orientation to linguistic norms will be manifested in their similar overall linguistic patterns (for example, speakers of all backgrounds will exhibit less consonant deletion in more formal speech contexts). This model of the speech community has been critiqued on a number of grounds both within quantitative sociolinguistics and in adjacent fields like creole studies and linguistic anthropology. The predominance of creolists among the critics is due to the fact that both Labov himself (1980) and other scholars have been unable to apply the model successfully in creole situations. Suzanne Romaine (1982) and Donald Winford (1988), for example, argue that the requirement that all community members share a single grammar does not always hold up, but they agree that the criteria of shared linguistic and sociolinguistic norms should be retained. Although each theorist adjusts the model somewhat differently, their revisions leave Labov's definition largely intact.

More significant is the shift away from language norms altogether in the ethnography of communication framework. Gumperz ([1968] 1972) retains this component, but Dell Hymes (1974) moves the analytic emphasis to shared sociolinguistic and especially interactional norms. As a consequence, nonfluent speakers such as those studied by Dorian (1982) are admitted as speech community members for the first time.

Other scholars have found fault with the criterion of a shared sociolinguistic norm. These researchers have challenged Labov's definition for its assumption of a consensus-based stratified social structure, in which all speakers evaluate language in the same way regardless of their own social status (Guy 1988; J. Milroy 1992; Rickford 1986). Such scholars argue that different social classes, which are divided ideologically as well as

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economically, do not share sociolinguistic norms, even though they share knowledge of the sociolinguistic consequences of class division. Thus, as John Rickford points out (1986:218), vernacular language use should be seen as a choice, not a necessary corollary of class position.

Table 3.3. Competing sociolinguistic models of the speech community[15]

	Shared language use	Shared grammar	Shared pattern of variation	Shared socio-linguistic norms	Shared interaction	Shared inter-actional norms	Speaker self-identi-fication
Bloomfield ([1933] 1984:29)	+						
Bloomfield ([1933] 1984:42)					+		
W. Labov (1972h)	-	+	+	+			
Guy (1988)	-	+	+	-			
J. Milroy (1992)	-		+	-			
Rickford (1986)	-			-			
Winford (1988)	-	-	+	+			
Romaine (1982)	-	-	-	+			
Gumperz (1962)					+		
Gumperz ([1968] 1972)	+	+		+	+		
Hymes (1974)				+	+	+	
Dorian (1982)				-	+	+	
Hudson (1980)							+

+ = explicitly included in model; - = explicitly excluded; blank = not discussed.

Likewise, in his more recent work Gumperz (1982) has abandoned not only linguistic norms but sociolinguistic norms as well, embracing a model that, like Rickford's,

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emphasizes identity and agency. Gumperz's new framework relies less on the concept of the speech community, with its attendant assumptions of commonality, than on the notion of *linguistic boundaries*, which highlight sociolinguistic division and linguistic interaction between members of different social groups. Other alternative models similarly replace the speech community with a more theoretically informed conception of the social world: thus Mary Louise Pratt (1987) proposes that sociolinguists replace the utopian "linguistics of community" model with a theory of a "linguistics of contact" that recognizes "the relationality of social differentiation" (1987:59):

> Such is the momentum of the linguistics of community that when internal social division and hierarchy *are* studied, the linguist's choice is often to imagine separate speech communities with their own boundaries, sovereignty, fraternity and authenticity. To pick a well-known example, this is the angle from which William Labov (1972[a]) represents American Black English. Indeed there is a real sense in which Labov's concept of Black English Vernacular (BEV) *created* a speech community along the utopian lines I have been referring to. (1987:56; original emphasis)

Pratt's dissatisfaction with such essentialist models is shared by many other linguists. Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet's (1992) theory of the "community of practice" within language and gender studies deposes language from its privileged position entirely, a move that forces linguists to look at the entire complex of practices—including but not especially language—in which speakers engage (see also Chapter 5). The ethnographic method central to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet's approach is compatible with the relationality of Pratt's framework. Together, the two models make the questions debated above and others like them not only possible but answerable. Within a linguistics of contact, Dorian's semispeakers are no longer shunted to the "working margins" of the speech community, to echo the title of her essay, but become central to discussions of identity, endangered languages, and encroaching English hegemony. As skilled participants

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in the practices of their community, such speakers must be recognized by analysts as full-fledged members despite their nonfluency.

The role of such "marginal" or nonfluent speakers necessarily varies depending on the communities in which they participate. In some instances (as with the boys in this study) they may be cultural brokers, transmitting linguistic forms from one group to another. More crucial for the present discussion, however, is the identity such speakers manufacture for themselves using language. Membership in the speech community does not hinge on an objectively measurable fluency; instead, it is based on ethnographically specific notions of identity that may involve language—and fluency or nonfluency—in a variety of ways. For example, Bonnie Urciuoli (1991, 1996) found that in the African American and Puerto Rican New York neighborhood she studied, membership was determined on the basis not of fluency but of friendship and other network ties. Here power and practice are both at issue.

Fluency (and/or grammatical competence) in such models is viewed very differently than in traditional linguistic (e.g., Fillmore 1979) or sociolinguistic theory. Contact- and practice-based approaches to linguistics emphasize ethnographic methods that take into account local definitions of fluency. Hewitt (1986:110, 153) notes that notions of fluency in Creole among London teenagers vary by race, by neighborhood, and by friendship group. Among black youth, Hewitt observes, emblematic use of a few phonological or lexical items counts as Creole use, while among white youth, only those who live in areas with small black populations are counted as "speaking Creole" when they engage in such restricted use of the variety. Likewise, Hymes (1974) argues that nonfluency may be central to a language's use in a particular community. He takes as an example the Menomini Indian White-Thunder, described by Leonard Bloomfield as lacking fluency in either Menomini or English. Hymes points out that the very limitations of White-Thunder's Menomini (and that of others of his generation) are "integral to the language as it exists for those in question" (1974:72). The role of competence in a given speech community, he

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suggests, is an empirical and ethnographic issue. For similar reasons, Le Page and Tabouret-Keller ultimately reject the competence model that underlies traditional notions of the speech community, remarking, "A community, its rules, and its language only exist insofar as its members perceive them to exist; this is the nature of linguistic competence, and no satisfactory model is yet available for its description" (1985:205). Richard Hudson (1980) embraces an early version of this framework in his survey of theories of the speech community; he advocates speaker self-identification as the sole criterion of speech-community membership. Table 3.3 summarizes these different theoretical perspectives.

Such debates inevitably intensify in the analysis of CRAAVE. Yet the problem of cross-racial language use and contested identity that is hinted at in the epigraph that opens this chapter has been addressed only rarely by linguists. In 1976 Eileen Hatala, a master's student at the University of Pennsylvania, submitted to her advisor an essay based on her fieldwork at a middle school in Camden, New Jersey, whose student population was 98% black. The essay focused on a thirteen-year-old white girl, Carla, who attended the school. Much to Hatala's surprise, Carla was accepted and well liked by her African American peers. Hatala argued that a primary source and outcome of Carla's social success was her facility with certain features of AAVE. In fact, when Hatala played tapes of Carla's speech for black and white judges, all the African Americans and the majority of European Americans identified her as black (this discrepancy between the judges is an unexpected outcome that I will return to below). Taking these findings in conjunction with a quantitative analysis of sociolinguistic interview data, Hatala concluded that despite some differences between Carla's speech and the sociolinguistic description of AAVE, Carla was indeed accepted by other AAVE speakers as a speech-community member.

Four years later, Hatala's advisor, William Labov, drew upon her data but came to the opposite conclusion. Speech-community membership, he argued, must be determined by linguists, not community members. In Labov's view, the Carla study merely reinforces this point:

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> This case underlines the great gap between the social construction "speaks Black English" and the linguistic definition . . . . Note that the symbolic BEV is available to some measure to both blacks and whites, and serves to bridge the gap between the two diverse speech communities of Philadelphia. Nevertheless, I believe that the two communities remain distinct, and *the central object for sociolinguistic analysis is a grammar that is linguistically defined*: the vernacular that underlies the various superposed varieties acquired later in life. (W. Labov 1980:379; emphasis added)

Thus, on the basis of the linguistic description of her speech, Labov declared that Carla was linguistically divided from the African Americans around her.

Other scholars have since issued rejoinders to Labov. Ron Butters (1984) has pointed out potential problems with his claims on linguistic grounds, arguing that Carla's speech practices are entirely appropriate for a thirteen-year-old girl:

> It has been one of Labov's many great strengths as a scholar that he has consistently searched for the answers to questions of linguistic behavior in the cleverness and intelligence and knowledge of his informants, and not in their weaknesses. It is entirely in this spirit, then that I suggest that Carla's restraint with copula deletion and [subject-verb] agreement placement are evidence not of her lack of knowledge of BEV, but rather of her extremely subtle mastery of its finer points. . . . (Butters 1984:34-35)

This perspective, however, retains its commitment to the linguistic definition of the speech community. Lanita Jacobs-Huey (1996), in a replication of the Carla study, breaks with this assumption and demonstrates that sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists must attend to the discourse context as well as to metalinguistic expressions of ideology in assigning meaning to concepts like *speech community*, *fluency*, and even *African American English* itself. Noting that "Labov's attempt to delimit the boundaries of the [African American speech community] discounted the social situatedness of discourse and overstated the import of grammar and phonology" (1996:4), she emphasizes "the

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importance of qualitative emic-based approaches to research on the African American speech community" (1996:viii). Jacobs-Huey argues that an adequate sociolinguistic description of the speech community must take into account the views of community members. Other scholars have also called for further investigation of African American English as a social as well as linguistic phenomenon. Arthur Spears observes, "The social [definition] is quite straightforward but is not precise. According to the social definition, Black English is the form of English that Black speakers label as such" (1988:100). And Rickford, discussing the cross-racial use of Gullah on the Sea Islands of South Carolina, notes that the explanatory power of "socially generated expectations that this is how blacks *should* talk, and this is how whites *should* talk, is quite compelling." Rickford continues,

> On the Sea Islands, blacks and whites, for all their lack of intimate interaction, are aware that each group follows different norms, and *should*. Talking Gullah is part of black identity, not white.... Approximation to or adoption of the other group's linguistic norms may be negatively viewed as *crossing-over* and regarded with suspicion or hostility.... (1985:116; original emphasis)

Although Spears states that only community members—African Americans—can define the social borders of AAVE, Rickford leaves open the possibility that borders can be defined by those outside them as well as those within them. I build on the insights of these researchers by suggesting that in addition to considering members' own perspectives, linguists must take into account definitions held by the outgroup as well. In the present instance, we must turn to the metalinguistic evidence of European American teenagers who do not use CRAAVE, for European American teenagers at Bay City High School who use features of AAVE in their daily speech are defined as aspiring members of the African American speech community not primarily by African American members themselves, but by other white teenagers who do not orient to black culture. As we will see, this classification simultaneously highlights and problematizes the phenomenon of crossing.

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The linguistic "one-drop rule"

The admission of outgroup members' perspectives on linguistic and social boundaries further problematizes the speech community. What emerges is, in effect, a radical conflict model. In the original conflict model, ingroup and outgroup members agree on the location of the borders that divide them; their differences lie in the realm of their practices and interests, which diverge based on class, culture, or other factors. But the logic of borders dictates that their location is often a matter of some dispute.[16] In the radical model, ingroup and outgroup members do not necessarily agree on speech-community boundaries, and members on either side of the disputed border may share practices whose meanings are not agreed upon. Membership on one side or the other is itself inherently contestable. Hence the speech community can have no uniform ethnographic definition; Dell Hymes's injunction that "ethnographic objectivity is intersubjective objectivity, but in the first instance, the intersubjective objectivity is that of the participants in the culture" (1974:11) cannot be fulfilled.

Hewitt takes note of this boundary flux in his own study when he reports that "creole-derived items which have been taken up into the local vernacular of one group of white adolescents and which are *not* [racially/ethnically] marked (and are not regarded as being so marked by the black peers of such white adolescents) may, in another nearby locality and another group of interactants, plainly function as 'emic' [i.e., racially/ ethnically marked]" (1986:128; original emphasis). Here those who are definitively counted as group members disagree on whether to include marginal participants: in other instances, the tables may turn and marginal participants may insist on their own membership over that of others whose legitimacy might otherwise go unquestioned. Thus during her research Jacobs-Huey (1994), an African American scholar, found herself accused of not belonging to the African American speech community—her accuser was a European American man who confidently asserted his own African American cultural credentials. Contra Hudson,

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such situations highlight the difficulties of accepting Le Page and Tabouret-Keller's criterion of speech-community membership as based on self-identification.

Less visible in most studies, however, are the attitudes of other whites to whites' use of black language. Hatala, for example, used both European American and African American judges to assess whether her white consultant Carla could "pass" linguistically as black, but she did not explore the attitudes of either group beyond their judgments regarding Carla's racial background. In contrast, Jacobs-Huey (1996), in replicating Hatala's method, explicitly sought the reactions of African Americans to her revelation that her consultant (the same man who had accused her of cultural inauthenticity) was white. But in her replication Jacobs-Huey omitted European Americans as judges. Yet the fact that Hatala's white judges, more often than the black judges, identified Carla's race as white suggests that European Americans' attitudes toward CRAAVE use and the role of outgroup members in defining the meaning of such symbolic practices are well worth exploring. It also allows greater recognition of social constraints than is usually admitted in linguistic studies of the individual; research on individual language use is often charged with failure to take such constraints into account (e.g., Wood forthcoming).

In examining this question, it may be helpful to turn to Charles Peirce's semiotic theory, which is implicitly based on the dialectic between speakers and their audiences. In Peirce's trichotomy of icon, index, and symbol, what I have been calling *symbolic practices* would be more accurately termed *indexical practices*. Where icons directly resemble the objects they denote and symbols are associated with their referents entirely through convention,[17] indexes become linked to meanings via juxtaposition (Peirce 1955; see also commentary in Hanks 1996). This process is achieved in part through the interpretation of the indexical sign by others. In making use of indexical types, speakers draw on the semiotic knowledge of their listeners, although the actual tokens they employ may evoke this knowledge in new contexts. Thus white speakers use AAVE indexically insofar as certain linguistic features evoke an association with African Americans, but this

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use is innovative insofar as it inserts European Americans into the sign relation. In either case, indexical language use relies on the audience for its semiotic meaning, for the audience must recognize the juxtaposition and its semiotic significance.

However, the association between index and meaning is rarely direct. Elinor Ochs (1992:340) argues in a discussion of gender indexing that "few features of language directly and exclusively index gender"; instead, the association between gender and certain linguistic features comes about indirectly, through the prior association of language with particular interactional, social, and pragmatic meanings that in turn are linked to gender. Similarly, the linguistic indexing of other social categories does not take a direct route. Many features similar or identical to those of AAVE are found in other varieties of English as well. The indexical bond between these features and African Americans comes about through recognition of their recurrent juxtaposition: in William Labov's (1972e) terminology, the features become markers or even stereotypes of African American language use. Yet the same features also occur within other speech communities and, crucially for the present discussion, their use among African Americans co-occurs with numerous other contextual factors; European American audiences witness their use within these contexts. Thus for white observers, AAVE use is associated with rap music, sports, and urban youth culture—the contexts in which these features are most accessible to white teenagers.

Not surprisingly, these arenas of cultural practice are remote from the concerns of mainstream white youth at the school. In identifying with hip hop, European American teenagers also identify themselves against available white identities such as "hippies" and "street punks" (see Figure 3.1 above) and this in turn shapes their social worlds. Thus the park, as a white subcultural space, does not figure in Brand One's map at all, and in Willie's map it is a distant place, far from his everyday concerns but part of his conscious social world. The polarization of black and white students that Willie represents in his map is in fact more dramatic than the figure implies; recall that the park, which is across the

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street from the school, is widely and implicitly understood to be a white space as the white social categories "hippies" and "street punks" on Willie's map indicate.[18] The implication is that in choosing to display an "African American" style, white cultural crossers also display their rejection of mainstream "European American" styles.

Recognizing the social forces at work here can help in accounting for the characteristics of CRAAVE at Bay City High. All of the speakers discussed above have access to some of the features of AAVE, but none is fluent in the entire linguistic system. Traditional sociolinguistics would account for this partial language acquisition on theoretical grounds: one's vernacular—the variety that is learned first and perfectly—cannot be displaced by a variety learned later in life. However, the ethnographic evidence offers a different explanation. Speakers' linguistic styles may be understood as choices that are the outcome of a local linguistic ideology held by mainstream European American teenagers, which I call the *linguistic "one-drop rule."* In U.S. legal history, the "one-drop rule" decreed that an individual with any known African American ancestry was to be classified legally as black: "Between 1850 and 1915, white America moved from overlooking 'some blackness in a person' to classifying persons with 'one iota of color' as black" (Zack 1993:175n.2); a similar but less stringent policy was in effect from the early days of slavery. By extension, the "linguistic one-drop rule" maintains that any use of recognizably AAVE features in European Americans' *ordinary* speech style counts as affiliation with African American culture.[19] Because even slight deviations from the WEAVE norm are heard as "black" by other whites, European American teenagers need make only subtle changes in their speech to separate themselves symbolically from their mainstream counterparts.

An illustration of this situation is found in the relationship between Jay and Charlie. Charlie is also European American and has been Jay's friend since kindergarten. But he told me that Jay "can get kind of annoying." Charlie explains the reason for this in Example (11):

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(11)

Charlie: Sometimes he tries to act pretty ghetto.
Like-
Talking like--
He played on this <laughs> <baseball> team.
Which is like (.)
it's it's all black kids,
a:n:d and then he started like talking like them,
and I don't know we always we always clown him about
it because it sounds pretty funny.

While Charlie's longterm friendship with Jay mitigates how "annoying" he perceives Jay's linguistic practices to be, other European American students who do not affiliate with African American culture, and who are further removed from those who do, openly express their scorn and even hostility (see Chapter 4). It is important to recognize that speakers like Jay are looked upon with amusement or annoyance by many other white teenagers precisely because they are white but orient to black culture—such mainstream white teenagers tend to espouse a "separate but equal" ideology that does not find fault with African American culture but sees it as an inappropriate part of white teenagers' identities. This ideology of racial division leads white students who do not align with African American culture to closely monitor speech-community boundaries as a way of monitoring racial boundaries. Thus, white students' definitions of speech-community membership at Bay City High are simultaneously constructions of white racial identity.

The linguistic one-drop rule may also account for the discrepancy, in Hatala's study, between the judgments of African American and European American judges of Carla's speech. One might expect that fluent members of the African American speech community would be more likely to detect inconsistencies in Carla's use of AAVE that might signal her racial background, but instead it was the nonfluent outgroup members

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who recognized this possibility. This finding is predictable, however, when we consider that it is whites far more than blacks who vociferously object to linguistic and cultural crossing, which they often view as an incursion of racial borders. Thus European Americans' hyperawareness of CRAAVE is part of their surveillance of these borders. Likewise, where Carla was accepted, both linguistically and socially, by African Americans because of her full participation in African American social groups, the boys in this study are mocked by both whites and blacks (but mostly the former) because of their failure to immerse themselves entirely in either white or black mainstream social groups. Susan Ervin-Tripp has suggested that "one way to differentiate similarity arising from cohesion from difference arising from identity marking is the presence of negative sanctions" (1973:356); the negative sanctions placed on European American users of CRAAVE indicate that even within the demographically homogeneous social category of European American middle-class speakers, the social divisions expressed through identity marking are powerful forces in students' lives.

Conclusion

The widespread influence of black on white speech at Bay City High indicates that it is an oversimplification to emphasize the separation between the black and white speech communities. Indeed, to think of the relationship in only this way may reify theoretically constructed linguistic boundaries and reinforce the same racial divisions that sociolinguists decry. When linguists take a strictly linguistic definition of speech-community membership they fail to recognize the extent to which such groupings are socially rather than linguistically constituted through processes of opposition and alignment.

When European American youth adopt African American linguistic features and clothing styles, they display their affiliation with African American culture and perform their separation from other European American teenagers who do not share this cultural identity. However, those groups of white youth also share a racial identity that they may

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invoke in order to express their opposition to black youth at the high school. Thus white hip-hoppers have access to two oppositional identities, one defined culturally and the other racially. This situation contrasts with the research of Penelope Eckert (1989a) and of Norma Mendoza-Denton (1997) on social-group differentiation in high schools, for in both studies students polarized along a single social axis.

In some contexts, then, white users of CRAAVE demonstrate their orientation toward hip hop, but in others their whiteness becomes more salient. As I show in the next chapter, for these speakers—and for mainstream youth as well—in such contexts AAVE paradoxically becomes a resource for the construction of white identity.

Notes

[1] Several Standard English-speaking African American students identified the term *sellout* as denoting a black individual who does not participate in black culture (along with other, racially specific terms, such as *oreo*); they reported that the term was sometimes applied to them. No black speakers identified *sellout* as a term for a white individual who does not participate in white culture. This shift in the reference of *sellout* according to social group supports the claim that the term is used to criticize group members who stray rather than as a racialized term like *wigger*.

[2] Rampton does briefly consider the attitudes of teachers toward cross-racial Creole use (1995:129-130), but he does not examine the role their racial identities might play in their responses.

[3] Labov's rejection of individual agency in this article contrasts with his earlier recognition of individual variation and its association with one's chosen social identity (e.g., W. Labov 1972d).

[4] Clearly these two patterns may overlap in that referee design is not immune to audience pressures; in other words, it is a rhetorical (audience-oriented) practice.

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[5] For an example of individual-centered research within Bell's framework, see John Rickford and Faye McNair-Knox (1994).

[6] By *social identity* and *personal identity*, I mean the individual's self-concept as part of a group, and her self-concept as a unique human being, respectively. These agentive definitions contrast with Erving Goffman's (1963) treatment of both personal and social identity as externally ascribed. The ascription of categories by onlookers is indeed relevant to the analysis of identity, as I will discuss below, but it should not be thought of as the exclusive source of identity.

[7] My focus on boys in this chapter should not be taken as an indication that European American girls do not participate in hip-hop culture. The absence of girls in this study is instead the result of my methodology. Although I identified and sought out several white girls who use AAVE features in their everyday speech, I was unable to persuade them to participate in the study. By contrast, European American boys volunteered eagerly. My impression is that this asymmetry is the result of several factors: (1) the boys were drawn to my recording equipment, which connected to their interest in music production, a predominantly male aspect of hip-hop culture that the girls did not share; (2) the girls tended to be athletes, especially basketball players, and as a five-foot-tall non-athlete I was unable to create rapport with them concerning this central aspect of their lives; (3) my own style during my fieldwork—short hair, no makeup, nondescript clothing—clashed with theirs and made me a social liability in a way that I was not for the boys. This last issue may also be linked to Penelope Eckert's observation that in the Michigan high school she studied—and presumably most other U.S. high schools—"girls' status still depends to a great extent on physical appearance and contacts. Girls, therefore, are constrained to exert considerable effort in the symbolic sphere and to pay particular attention to their place in the social system" (1988:205). A comprehensive study of European American girls' use of AAVE has yet to be done.

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[8] Adoption of a hip-hop style is not the only way white students can participate in black culture. Many white students who hang out in the park also interact with black students. As mentioned above, often this affiliation is part of a bohemian cultural style associated with jazz or reggae. The black students involved are generally a numerical minority and usually are not in the mainstream of the school's African American community. Additionally, some mainstream white students do listen to rap but the groups they prefer are rarely those favored by African American students and white CRAAVE users. Moreover, mainstream white students do not adopt hip-hop clothing styles until they become deracialized; see Chapter 2.

[9] Eddie's rate for this feature probably equaled or surpassed Al's, but because I was unable to interview Eddie individually, I do not have adequate data to confirm this impression.

[10] Al's stop substitution should not be viewed as a feature of a nonstandard white variety; not only is its use rare among other nonstandard white speakers, as shown in Table 3.2, but the stopping of /ð/ is not accompanied in Al's speech by the stopping of /θ/, which is characteristic of the white but not the black vernacular described by Walt Wolfram and Ralph Fasold (1974:135). Thus the feature is best understood as a borrowing from AAVE rather than an independent development of WEAVE.

[11] I am aware of the problems with sensationalistic examples such as those given for Eddie's speech, but constraints of data collection necessitate their use. I do not mean to suggest that Eddie (or any of the other boys) are particularly confrontational or preoccupied with alcohol and sex. The nature of the examples is partly due to Eddie's role as the "class clown," with the result that most of his contributions to interaction are best understood as performances.

[12] The overproduction of linguistic forms has been termed *hypercorrection* by William Labov (1972f), but this collapses the misapplication of a linguistic rule—the classic sense of this term—and the overapplication of a variable rule. I follow Donald Winford (1978) in

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using the term *supercorrection* for the latter phenomenon. Baugh (1992) calls the overproduction of nonstandard linguistic forms *hypocorrection*, but this term obscures the similarity between phenomena that are essentially the same.

[13] A similar approach is offered by work on style within the field of rhetoric, where style is seen as the production and performance of a carefully crafted self for an audience.

[14] This reversal is not limited to cross-racial contexts; it is seen, for example, in a rather different form in the ideological creation of separate "languages" among various factions in the former Yugoslavia.

[15] The models presented here are necessarily simplified; concepts such as *norms* have different meanings for different scholars. The table obscures some important differences between these definitions. Nonetheless, the utility of locating general theoretical patterns may justify the lack of nuance.

[16] The work of Fredrik Barth (1969, [1964] 1986), which has gone a great distance toward changing sociolinguists' and linguistic anthropologists' static models of ethnic identity, fails to give this point adequate attention. Although Barth argues that "the critical feature" of ethnic identity is "self-ascription and ascription by others" (1969:13), he often collapses these two parameters, assuming them to be identical.

[17] But see Saussure: "it is characteristic of symbols that they are never entirely arbitrary" (1986:68 [101]). For Peirce, icons and symbols are different kinds of signs.

[18] Willie's use of the term *street punks* rather than simply *punks* for this social group also indicates its markedness for him vis-à-vis the definition of *punk* in BEST as 'weakling, homosexual'. Even fashion choices like facial hair take on oppositional and racialized meanings: almost all of the white boys discussed above wear or have worn a moustache without a beard or goatee, a style that is taboo among mainstream white boys, possibly because of its association with a gay male aesthetic, but is very common among heterosexual black boys.

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[19] The qualifier *ordinary* is meant to exclude rhetorically marked contexts such as those described in Chapter 4.

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Chapter 4

Marking black:

The construction of white identities through linguistic stylization

Introduction

In Chapter 3, I focused on the production of linguistic style by analyzing how black-affiliated European American teenagers at Bay City High incorporate features of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) into their ordinary speech variety in order to project their identification with hip hop and other African American cultural forms. In this chapter I examine instances of *linguistic stylization*—the invocation of African American language in special discourse contexts as part of the construction of white racial identity.

The center of the discussion is a culturally recognized African American speech event, known as *marking*, that some European American students at Bay City High have borrowed from the black speech repertoire and employ as a commentary on AAVE and its users. Thus, where chapter 3 demonstrated the ways that European American students regularly police and transgress the borders between the black and white speech communities, the present chapter offers evidence that even when white speakers cross into AAVE they may use the linguistic resources they find there to highlight racial difference and division.

In the process, the data presented here exemplifies the Janus-like relationship between mimesis and alterity posited by Michael Taussig (1993). As Taussig notes, the act of mimesis simultaneously constructs both self and other, and thus imitation is also an assertion of alterity, or difference. At Bay City High, European American teenagers' linguistic mimesis of African Americans is carried out in the service of a project of racial alterity.

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"An argument between languages": Represented speech and social identity

The discourse phenomenon under consideration in this chapter includes within it what is often termed *reported speech*, the relaying of a speaker's utterance in a new interactional context through the structural device of quotation. Deborah Tannen (1989) has pointed out that what is usually called reported speech is more aptly termed *constructed dialogue*, inasmuch as it is not a verbatim account of another speaker's utterance but rather a creatively adapted or invented text with little direct relation to any previous interaction. As Tannen notes, *reported speech* carries too strong a suggestion that the utterances marked off by quotative features were actually produced.[1] Her emphasis on the construction of quoted speech shifts attention from truth to representation. The term *constructed dialogue*, however, despite its utility in calling attention to the creativity underlying all apparently quoted speech, is restricted to the realm of direct discourse—speech that is overtly bracketed by quotative markers. But not all quoted speech is of this kind: indirect discourse, for example, may invoke a quoted speaker without any explicit syntactic signaling. In this chapter, I consider both direct and indirect discourse forms as well as analogous discursive practices in literature and popular entertainment, and hence I use the term *represented speech*, which more fully encompasses the range of linguistic practices under discussion.

Represented speech, from this perspective, comprises all linguistic acts that index the voice of another.[2] In addition to direct and indirect discourse, which construct the speech of a particular individual in a particular past moment, represented speech includes linguistically stylized forms (discussed below) that construct the speech of a generalized other. These latter forms are not tied to a particular moment of speaking, utterance, or speaker; instead, they linguistically construct the targeted speaker as a general type. Thus where direct and indirect discourse provide opportunities for speakers to construct and comment on the personal identities of individual speakers, stylized discourse allows

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speakers to project the social identities of groups of speakers: in short, to create stereotypes.

Perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of represented speech appears in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981; see also Bakhtin 1986; Vološinov 1973). Central to Bakhtin's analysis is the concept of *double-voiced discourse*—the integration of two linguistic systems into a single utterance, thereby producing "an argument between languages" (1981:76), or, rather, between the worldviews associated with each language, variety, or style. Although Bakhtin's ideas have a great deal of currency within sociolinguistics, strict adherence to his theory of dialogism in discourse may create analytical problems for sociolinguists. In order successfully to apply Bakhtin's work to ordinary speech, it is necessary to rethink some of his central assumptions, for he was primarily concerned not with speech but with the language of the novel. Bakhtin sought to demonstrate that novelistic discourse was fundamentally different from poetic language. Because of his concern with artistic discourse, everyday speech enters Bakhtin's theory only occasionally, and when it does it usually serves as a point of contrast, not of convergence, with novelistic language. Indeed, Bakhtin makes clear that he is skeptical of the possibility that ordinary speech can achieve the purposeful dialogic quality that he locates in artistic prose. Represented speech in conversation, he suggests, is too focused on the "transmission of information" about specific individuals to achieve the pre-eminently social and linguistic effects of double-voiced discourse in the novel (1981:340).

Despite Bakhtin's disavowals of his theory's utility for understanding spoken language, many linguists have found inspiration in his work, and in their analyses they have implicitly disproved many of his claims about speech. Most notably, Tannen (1989) has demonstrated, using Bakhtin's own work, that ordinary speech does in fact resemble artistic discourse in numerous ways. In particular, she shows that constructed dialogue is consciously shaped not merely to transmit information but to represent the world. This

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representation takes place at the level of the individual, as Bakhtin maintains, but it is also necessarily social and linguistic—a representation both of the quoted other and of the language of the other as well. In the words of Erving Goffman, "often what talkers undertake to do is not to provide information to a recipient but to present dramas to an audience. Indeed it seems that we spend most of our time not engaged in giving information but in giving shows" (1974:508). If, following Goffman, we take performance—the representation of reality—rather than the reporting of reality as the foundation of ordinary interaction (see also Potter 1996), then the basic framework that Bakhtin has developed for discourse in the novel applies equally well to representations of speech in spoken discourse. It is important to bear in mind, however, that this is not how Bakhtin viewed his own work.

To understand how represented speech works, it may be helpful to compare it to a similar practice that Deborah Schiffrin (1992, 1993) has variously identified as *speaking for another* and *taking the role of another*. Speaking for another involves reporting something about another person that she could have said herself, such as "She's not eating the main course because she's a vegetarian," said in reference to a co-present third party. Both speaking for another and represented speech thus blur the linguistic boundaries between self and other, but speaking for another blurs the social boundaries as well. What is at issue in Schiffrin's description of speaking for another is the content of the utterance, for its form is not particularly striking: talk is produced without marked structural features and although the content of the utterance is ascribed to another, it is produced in the speaker's own voice.[3] Represented speech, on the other hand, is always centrally concerned with linguistic form, which indexically associates it with the speaker (or kind of speaker) to whom it is attributed, creating the "hybrid" or "heteroglossic" effect that Bakhtin describes. And where speaking for another constructs a relation of involvement between the speaker and the one spoken for (whether positively, as intimacy, or negatively, as interference or "busy-bodyness"), represented speech highlights the separation between

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self and other precisely by linguistically unifying both "voices" within double-voiced discourse and thereby contrasting the represented voice with the speaker's own. This separation may also have both positive and negative effects, such as emulation on the one hand and mockery on the other. But regardless of its function in a specific context, when it is an act of linguistic stylization represented speech is always also primarily an argument between languages—a performance of linguistic and social otherness.

Style and stylization in language

Another characteristic of represented speech is its degree of linguistic stylization. By *stylization* I mean the purposeful divergence from one's "ordinary" language toward non-ordinary language in order to achieve particular rhetorical or aesthetic effects. Linguistic stylization differs from linguistic style in that the latter is the "ordinary" variety a speaker selects in a given setting, while the former is always non-ordinary for a particular speaker in a particular setting. Such a definition necessarily invokes the notion of normative linguistic practice, a highly problematic sociolinguistic concept that, as discussed in earlier chapters, has been the target of heavy criticism. However, the normative linguistic practice I have in mind here is not assessed across groups or across speech situations, as much previous scholarship has done, but is determined on the basis of the speech of a single speaker within a single discourse context. Moreover, where traditional sociolinguistics takes a quantitative approach, measuring divergence from a quantifiable norm, the present analysis is qualitative and discourse-based, which allows not only for the identification of shifts away from the linguistic norm but also for the interpretation of their meaning in the interactional setting. Finally, stylistic divergence is here evaluated against a speaker's surrounding discourse in the immediate context rather than against a more general corpus of the speaker's speech in the "same" situation at different times (e.g., with the same friends at lunchtime over several days). Because the criteria for locating linguistic stylization are

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rooted in the immediate discourse, there is less likelihood of misidentifying a shift away from ordinary language or of relying on an overgeneralized norm.[4]

In the case of represented speech, stylization manifests itself in the speaker's deliberate failure to provide an "accurate" or "realistic" representation of the targeted speech.[5] I place the words *accurate* and *realistic* in quotation marks to indicate that what is at issue is not so much any objectively determined accuracy or reality but a discursively defined, intersubjectively accepted range of representations.[6] In fact, what counts as "accurate" may have little relation to the way in which the targeted speaker actually uttered the stretch of talk being represented; rather, it is expected that speakers will, in ordinary discourse contexts, lend their own voices to those whom they quote, so that the represented speech is not formally different from the surrounding talk. In such situations, the speaker does not differentiate self and other, and this discursive unity is iconically suggested through the speaker's use of "single-voiced discourse." Conversely, by refusing to use her own voice to quote another the speaker signals her distance from the other: such a refusal is, in short, a linguistic construction of alterity. This failure signals to listeners that the form of the represented utterance is semiotically meaningful and must be attended to in order completely to interpret the utterance.

The mismatch between stylized represented speech and one's ordinary voice may occur at the level of the lexicon, syntax, or phonology. Most often, however, it is realized suprasegmentally, that is, at the level of intonation. This feature is paramount in the speech event of marking, an African American practice of representing speech. This practice, as I will argue, has influenced the way that European American students position themselves in relation to AAVE and to African Americans.

Marking: An African American speech event

Perhaps the most familiar form of represented speech is quotation in conversational narrative, which within many African American communities is a culturally recognized

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practice, known as *marking*. Despite its ubiquity, however, marking remains little studied by sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists, in contrast with other African American discourse forms such as signifying.[7] In her groundbreaking research on the linguistic practices of an African American community in West Oakland, Claudia Mitchell-Kernan (1971) became the first sociolinguist to describe marking as an African American speech event. Marking, as she defines it, is "a style of quotation which is characterized by the reception of the quoted individual's remarks accompanied by a mimicry of the paralinguistic features" (1971:70). She notes that the purpose of marking is to provide indirect information to the addressee: in this case, information about the quoted speaker's intentions and background. It is therefore functionally similar to many other African American speech practices such as signifying and reading (Morgan forthcoming a). Whereas this quoted speech style can be a faithful imitation of a speaker, Mitchell-Kernan found that it often includes parodic and invented elements that are used to characterize the effect of a speaker's utterance regardless of its actual form. As Marcyliena Morgan (forthcoming b) notes, "This is done in such a way that the marking is attributable to a 'type' of person who is different from the speaker and/or intended hearers."

At the sociolinguistic level, then, the representation of another's speech through marking and similar practices of quotation differentiates the speaker from the quoted other. At the rhetorical level, marking legitimates the narrator's claims to authority through the invocation of a speaker's "exact words." This authority also diminishes the speaker's responsibility for her words, for in both cases she is, to use Goffman's (1974, 1981) terminology, merely the *animator* (or transmitter) of the utterance, not its *principal* (or source). The speaker thus projects her version of social and linguistic reality by appealing to the seemingly irrefutable evidence of prior interactional history. However, this construction of "reality" is not achieved solely through the narrator's efforts: the audience must collaborate in the process by drawing inferences about the quoted other based on details of the speaker's performance.

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It should be clear from this description, and from the examples below, that marking is not unique to the African American speech community. Likewise, many other discursive practices that scholars have identified as culturally African American, such as instigating, or inciting confrontation by reporting rumors (Goodwin 1990), and reading, or direct on-record criticism of another (Morgan forthcoming a), have general functional equivalents in other communities and cultures. What distinguishes these practices is not their structure or function, then, but their culturally recognized status among many African Americans. Although numerous cultures engage in similar ways of speaking, they do not necessarily have a metalinguistic term for these forms.[8]

The evidence from Bay City High indicates that marking is still a widespread linguistic practice among African American speakers in the Bay Area. In the conversation excerpted in examples (1a) and (1b), Tiffany, an African American student, explains to me and her friend Kendra, who is also African American, why she no longer eats lunch with the clique of friends to which she used to belong: the reason, she reports, is that they are jealous of her longterm relationship with her boyfriend.

(1a)

```
1   Tiffany:   At first I didn't want to think that it was
               jealousy because I was thinking,
2              "No those are my friends they won't act like
               that."
3              But (.)
4              My mother and my sister:s,
5              they told me about the signs to {watch out
               for} <high pitch> and,
6              then just one day they told me,
7   →          {"Well you don't spend any time with us
               anymore:"} <nasal quality>
```

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The nasal quality of the reported speech in line 7 is evidence that Tiffany is marking her friends (*they* in line 6 refers to her friends rather than to her family), as compared to her ordinary voice quality when quoting herself in line 2. As Tannen (1989) points out, we are not to assume that those whose speech is reported in fact used the voice quality attributed to them nor that groups of speakers who are quoted actually spoke in unison, which Tiffany's telling may imply. Rather, marking constructs a version of past events in order to evoke their crucial features. Here the distinctive paralinguistics Tiffany employs in the reported speech indirectly signals that the audience is to interpret her friends' collective behavior in a negative light.

The central role of paralinguistic features in represented speech here—or what John Lucy (1993) terms *metapragmatic presentationals*—has been noted by a number of scholars, who have found that it serves a variety of discursive functions: for Lucy, they are framing devices; Niko Besnier (1992) observes that they are used to structure narrative themes; and Kathleen Ferrara (1994) notes that they can create interactional alignment. Intonation in quoted speech, including in marking, thus gives shape both to words and to the world they construct. This use of markings is also evident elsewhere in Tiffany's narrative, when she goes on to describe how even her best friend turned against her, spreading rumors about Tiffany and her boyfriend. Several other instances of marking occur as this episode unfolds:

(1b)

1 I mean she's telling her mom these stories,

2 I mean her mom told my so called best friend that (.)

3 → {Oh,

4 I'm a bad influence on them so we shouldn't hang around each other} <sing song, low pitch>

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```
5       When actually that is like (.) so ridiculous to me
        because my (.) ex best friend (.) is a little on the
        wi:ld si:de.
6       Her mother di- you know was not aware of this at all.
7       And we were like total opposites,
8       you know,
9       So for her to say that to me:,
10      And also the way she did it.
11      She came up to me and we were in a big old group of
        people and she said,
12 →    {"I sort of have bad news.
13      My mom said (.) you're a bad influence on me so we can't
        spend ti:me together."} <rapid, high pitch>
```

In lines 3 and 12, Tiffany animates two new voices, using prosodic features such as pitch and speech rate to project a negative impression of the speakers. In this way she efficiently sketches less-than-flattering portrayals of the characters in her narrative without going on record as having done so. Through quotation she speaks with heightened authority and reduces her responsibility for the words she uses and the way she uses them.

Uses of marking like those in Example (1) are extremely frequent in black students' daily interactions at Bay City High as part of a widespread African American cultural value favoring indirectness in communication (Morgan 1991). But thirty years after Mitchell-Kernan carried out her fieldwork, marking as a culturally recognized practice has gained ground among some European American youth in the Bay Area. This is not to assert that similar quotative practices did not previously exist in European American speech. What is new in the situation at Bay City High, however, is the association of this practice with African American language and culture among some white students. The speech event has become transformed in being transferred to a new group of speakers: its association with African American culture has caused the practice to become racialized, so that marking,

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though not always labeled explicitly as an African American practice, is often linked to African American linguistic forms and cultural settings. In addition, the borrowed form of the practice extends beyond quotation and embraces two different phenomena: the jocular use of linguistic stereotypes of AAVE, especially among white students who are not affiliated with black culture; and the use of Cross-Racial AAVE (CRAAVE) as one's ordinary speech style, as is typical of European American speakers who affiliate themselves with African American youth culture via hip hop. Both, then, are ways of taking on a "black" voice, of what I call *marking black.* Thus cross-racial marking is a local example of what Ben Rampton (1995) calls *crossing*—the outgroup use of particular linguistic forms in a variety of contexts—which in turn is part of the larger practice of represented speech. Unlike crossing, however, which has diverse effects, the two different forms of marking employed by European American teenagers at Bay City High fulfill a common purpose for their users: to construct speakers, whether they reject or embrace African American culture, as racially white.

European American representations and appropriations of AAVE

Other forms of represented speech also shed light on the jocular or parodic use of CRAAVE. The practice is akin to Mitchell-Kernan's (1971:76-77) concept of *monitoring black* among African American speakers although, as an in-group practice, the function of monitoring black is quite different. The exaggerated use of vernacular features is common to both speech events, but monitoring black is employed to indicate one's stance toward a statement, whereas marking black indicates a stance toward African Americans as a group. Marking black must also be distinguished from two other discourse phenomena, one of which is also specific to African American communities and the other of which is more general. Morgan (forthcoming a) has termed the first of these *reading dialect*, and describes it as a variant of the speech event of *reading*, or overtly criticizing an addressee. In reading dialect, the speaker juxtaposes Standard English and AAVE for rhetorical emphasis. Unlike

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marking black, reading dialect always involves explicit, directed criticism of an addressee or co-present participant, and where reading dialect relies on the contrast between AAVE and Standard English in the immediate discourse for its effect, and thus can be carried out only by bidialectal speakers, marking black for parodic purposes succeeds precisely because it is performed by speakers who lack fluency in AAVE; indeed, their performance underscores this fact and is designed to do so.

The criterion of bidialectalism also separates marking black from a phenomenon that is usually not part of represented speech: codeswitching, or the alternation between two or more languages or varieties in a single interaction.[9] It has by now been conclusively established that, rather than signaling lack of fluency in either linguistic system (Weinreich [1953] 1970), codeswitching indicates a high level of fluency that allows speakers to exploit both systems for discursive or rhetorical effects (e.g., Gumperz 1982). It is therefore inaccurate to apply the term *codeswitching* to alternation between linguistic systems if the speaker is not fluent in both of them.

In fact, marking black, in its parodic aspect, has less in common with such familiar sociolinguistic phenomena and more in common with practices so widely held to be marginal that they have rarely merited scholarly attention by linguists at all. These are the representations of African American speech in European American literature, popular entertainment, and media. Yet such seemingly marginal, unsystematic uses of African American English by European American speakers and writers are similar to the parodic use of CRAAVE in more informal contexts: both function to emphasize racial difference.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of this act of constructing alterity through mimesis is the minstrel show, the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century stage shows in which white performers donned blackface (with the help of burnt cork) to act out racial stereotypes of African Americans. Eric Lott (1993) has suggested that such performances contained an element of racial desire, but the baldfaced racism of the shows has prompted many scholars to reject this analysis. In any case, the production of racial

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difference in such performances is inescapable; as Michael Rogin (1996) points out in his discussion of blackface among Jewish immigrants in Hollywood, the very act of "blacking up" emphasizes the performer's non-blackness. By extension the stereotyped African American speech, or "blackvoice," that pervaded minstrel shows, from dialogue to song lyrics, likewise highlighted the fact that the performers (and their audience) were not African American and were not *like* African Americans.

Marking black uses language to create a similar racial distance between white speakers and their black targets. But whereas blackvoice in minstrel shows was omnipresent and its imitative purpose was explicit, marking black does not occur in specific contexts and it does not usually co-occur with the performance of other racial stereotypes, as blackface does with blackvoice. Moreover, marking black does not necessarily involve overt mimicry of African Americans; speakers rely on their audience's social knowledge to recognize the racial target of the imitation. Thus marking black, unlike blackvoice, is characterized by its deniability, and the speaker's responsibility for any implications about African Americans is correspondingly diminished.

Also similar to marking black with regard to the key feature of responsibility is the representation of AAVE in literature by European American authors. Language is used in literature not merely to represent the speech of a group but to create individuals. AAVE thus comes to be associated even more than in minstrelsy with particular personalities. It thus also enables the author's abdication of responsibility, for links between AAVE use and particular character traits may be claimed to be descriptive only of an invented individual, not of any actual individual or group. In many ways, then, European Americans' representations of AAVE in literature are also appropriations that put the language to uses far removed from the lives of its actual speakers. Shelley Fisher Fishkin (1993) argues, for example, that the inspiration for Huckleberry Finn's vernacular voice came not from a white child, as Mark Twain himself claimed, but from a black one. If Fishkin is correct, Twain performed a double act of crossing: first in appropriating an African American voice

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and then in assigning that voice to a European American narrator. Similar acts of racial masquerade continued in twentieth-century literature, as Michael North (1994) has shown. North demonstrates that AAVE was a vital resource for whites in the modernist movement, even as black modernists were rejecting the dialect's utility for their own work. But where Fishkin finds in Twain's linguistic appropriation an instance of cultural mingling, an "emblem of a society that is now, and always has been, ... multiracial and multicultural..." (1993:144), North sees European Americans' use of African American linguistic forms as "more dangerous than indifference" (1994:11).[10]

The representation of AAVE in the media is especially susceptible to diminished author responsibility, for the writer can claim to be providing an accurate quotation of the speaker.[11] Walter Brasch (1981) traces the presence of African American language in American mass media. He shows the ways that AAVE has been described and represented, and he suggests that the form such representations took in various historical periods correlates with particular genres that dominated the media in each era. Although Brasch's focus is on the accuracy rather than the rhetorical force of these representations, it is clear from his examples that the apparent neutrality of description has long been a factor in the dissemination of racially stereotyped linguistic forms.

In all of these situations what is at issue—despite the focus of the slight sociolinguistic treatment of the topic (e.g., Abrahams 1975)—is less the accuracy of the representation than the social work that it performs. Specifically, the fact that the speaker or writer is not fully answerable for any racial implications of her or his use of represented speech is one way that racism is made invisible and institutional. As overt racism is increasingly (but not completely) forced underground, covert practices such as represented African American speech in popular culture, literature, and the media perpetuate racial stereotypes and ideologies while permitting plausible deniability to those who represent such speech. The studies described above therefore provide a starting point for the

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investigation of European American representations and appropriations of AAVE in more informal contexts, especially in ordinary conversational interaction and narrative.

Marking and alterity

Although the above-described mocking uses of AAVE have not been much studied by linguists, the stereotyped use of a dialect or language other than one's own for humorous effect has been discussed by a number of scholars (e.g., Hill 1993; Preston 1992; Woolard 1988). Such linguistic practices allow speakers symbolically to distance themselves from the targeted dialect and its users. Some examples of this form of marking are given in (2). The speaker, who fittingly enough selected the pseudonym "Mark," is a European American boy who has little affiliation with African American culture, as his map of the high school makes clear (Figure 4.1). In this exchange he is discussing the current teenage lexicon at Bay City High:

(2a)

```
1        Mark: Instigate.
2              All right.
3              I use that (.) only when I'm mocking,
4              only when I'm mocking (.) like (.) ghettos: (.) speak
               I guess.
5        →     Like "why you tryin to instigate this,"
6              or something like that.
7              It's mainly used in like fighting and like-
8        Mary: So you would just do that (.) as a joke?
9        Mark: Yeah.
10             Represent,
11             same thing.
12           → "We gotta represent (.) for-"
```

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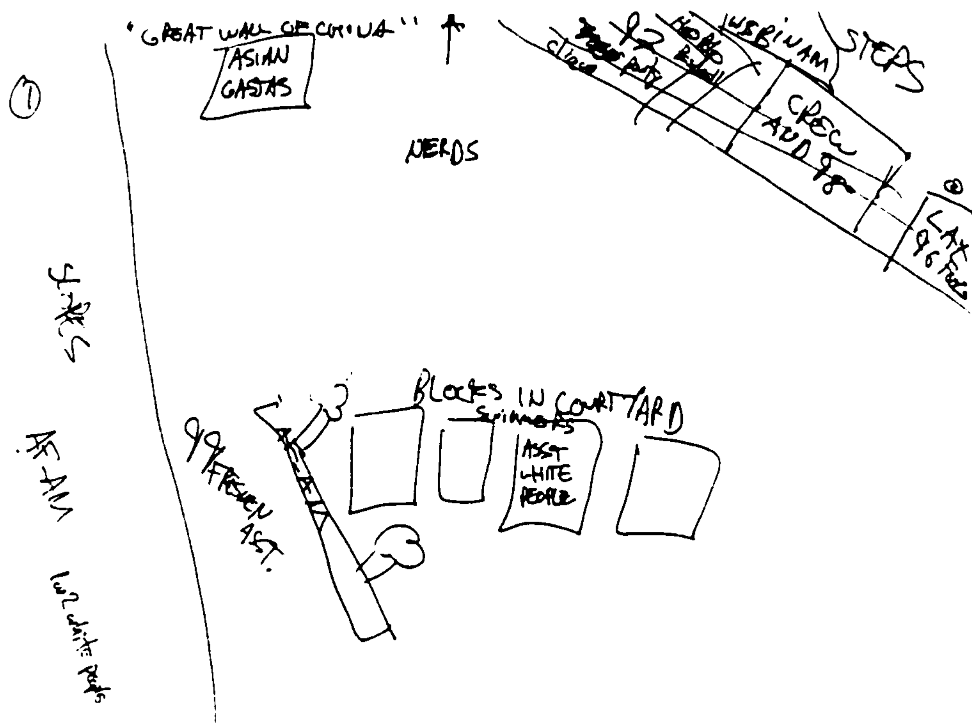

Figure 4.1: Map of Bay City High School social space by Mark

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13 like like\

14 if I'm at something with a bunch of white people I'd be like,

15 → "Represent\

16 your/ <[you]> side"

17 just to like mess around.

18 But these are both (.) words I'd use (.) in jest.

(2b)

1 Tight.

2 I use this.

3 I u:se it.

4 But it's a remnant of making fun of (.) things.

...

5 I just started using it.

6 It's more of a (.) African American word. (.)

7 Phenomenon.

(2c)

1 → "Yeah,

2 you a ho!"

3 I'll say that like

4 → "Yeah,

5 she's a ho,"

6 and I'll be making fun but then I'll also be saying it.

7 I'll also be describing the girl.

(2d)

1 → "What's up blood?"

2 I don't use that unless I'm really getting into it.

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As Mark notes in lines 3 and 4 of Example (2a), his use of AAVE is "mocking"; indeed, the term *marking* apparently derives from the homophony of the two words in AAVE phonology (Mitchell-Kernan 1971:137). In these examples Mark readily uses phonological and syntactic features of AAVE—especially copula deletion (line 5 in Example 2a; line 2 in 2c) and /r/lessness (line 16 in 2a; line 2 in 2c)—to enhance his performed illustration of each lexical item under discussion. His reported language use here corresponds closely with his actual speech, samples of which I also collected.

Mark makes very clear that some words of AAVE (or more precisely, BEST [Black English Street Talk; see Chapter 1) origin are marked—in every sense of the word—as black, while others have entered his speech with only faint traces of their prior history. For the purposes of this discussion it is irrelevant whether Mark's association of these words with African American speech is accurate; it is his linguistic ideology, not the reality of lexical history, that drives his linguistic practice. Thus the address term *blood* in line 1 of Example (2d) is marked, but *tight*, a synonym for *cool*, in Example (2b) is not. Only when words have become racially unmarked do they cease to be resources for mockery. The strong irony associated with marking in these contexts enables the practice to highlight racial divisions by highlighting linguistic divisions. As such, marking becomes a tool for the construction and assertion of white identity in opposition to black language and culture.

Marking and cultural emulation

Among another group of European American students at Bay City High, however, AAVE features are used not to separate speakers racially but to indicate cultural affiliation. Unlike other European Americans at the school, such students embrace an urban aesthetic whose focal point is hip hop, as discussed in Chapter 3.

In Bakhtin's terms, this use of CRAAVE is an *organic hybrid*: the blending of two linguistic systems in one's ordinary speech. Bakhtin suggests that much of the heteroglossia of daily speech is not intentional at all but the unconscious result of historical

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practices of language contact. But as discussed in Chapter 3, CRAAVE is a conscious part of the production of an alternative white youth style; its "naturalness" is ideological, not inevitable.[12] Such everyday use of AAVE may also be called *marking*, especially by those who do not engage in the practice, but its form and function are in most respects quite different from the mocking use of AAVE discussed by the white student Mark above. In both cases speakers draw on particular features of the dialect rather than making use of its entire linguistic system, a pattern at least partly attributable to the fact that they are not fluent in AAVE, as I have shown. However, white students who identify culturally with fluent AAVE speakers are more sensitive to details of the variety that go beyond the usual linguistic stereotypes. And where in the first instance marking emphasizes racial difference, here it is linked to an urban youth identity that is opposed to the mainstream white youth culture of the school. The choice of which elements to incorporate into one's speech is quite idiosyncratic. In Example (3), the speaker, Nico Caen, uses AAVE-influenced phonology, primarily in his vowels and intonational contours, in describing a rap song. The arrows mark instances of copula deletion (lines 1, 24) and /r/lessness (line 38) in his speech.[13]

(3a)

```
1 → Nico:It's like basically he just talking about
          fools that (.) that he thought were cool with him
          you know and then fuckin: just ditched him you know
          and he was just like <tongue click>
2         "Those are my so called friends I got my other
          friends right here you know"
3         Right.
4         Real friends and then you got associates
5         Like me I got associates/
6         and I got friends.
```

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7 You know what I'm saying.

8 I got more associates than I do friends.

9 For the simple reason that friends/

10 I know friends got my back.

11 You know.

12 I know friends will be you know (.) be cool

13 Tory: [What up/]

14 Nico: [you know].

15 They're not gonna go stab me in the back.

16 What's up Marnie.

17 But like (.) uh (.)

18 like what's my associates are just people I'm act-

19 you know I'm I'm I'm around them a lot.

20 I'm not-

21 You know what I'm saying.

22 But Billy, Billy is my friend you know

23 He's my he's my <u>best</u> friend .h really because-

24 → me and him always always together you know/

25 And just it's I mean it's like

26 What's up Greg.

27 It's like (.) I mean you can't have you can't have (.) more more friends than associates.

28 That doesn't work.

29 You know what I'm saying.

30 Because eventually somebody's gonna come back and just <strangled noise> you know take that thing and stab you in the back with it you know what I'm saying.

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31 And that's not cool,

32 you know.

33 Like, I been through shit with Billy before,

34 and you know/

35 That's how I know he's my friend/

36 because we been through all kind of sh-

37 through all kind of stuff together you know.

38 → I been through other stuff with my other partners <[pɑʔnəz]> too,

...

Nico's incorporation of AAVE features in this extended passage, unlike Mark's above, is his ordinary speech style; it is not intended to parody African American speakers but to emulate them. In quoted speech, Nico's marking is far more similar to Tiffany's, with explicit framing of the dialogue and distinctive voice quality for the quoted speaker. If he makes any racial evaluation at all, it is against white speakers:

(3b)

1 And people ask me,

2 they say,

3 → {"Is that all you listen to dude <[du:ʔ]>/

4 East Coast rap/"} <deep, "goofy" voice>

5 I said "Yeah"

6 "Why/"

7 "Because.

8 I mean they're saying something.

9 They're not just yapping at the mouth."

10 You know what I'm saying.

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The speaker being marked in this excerpt is not obviously black, as the address term *dude* in line 3 indicates. Geneva Smitherman (1994:102) has noted that in African American slang (i.e., BEST) the term is "used to refer to males but not as a form of address." In fact, the use of *dude* as an address term may instead signal a white speaker, for especially in California, the word is a linguistic stereotype of white youth. Although the word is spoken with a glottalized final stop, this appears to reflect Nico's own phonology rather than being a conscious mockery of such a pronunciation.

It may appear, then, that whereas students like Mark cross into AAVE to insist on their whiteness, students like Nico use it, in effect, to erase their racial status in order to legitimate their claims to black culture. However, this analysis would be incorrect. Although some European American students borrow heavily from African American language and culture, they may also simultaneously emphasize their own whiteness or highlight racial difference.

Marking black to mark whiteness

Such maneuvers are apparent in white students' stories of racial conflict, in which they differentiate themselves from blacks linguistically by increasing the use of AAVE features when reporting the speech of African Americans.

The excerpts in (4) are taken from a longer narrative told by Brand One, a European American boy who affiliates with African American culture:

(4a)

```
1    Brand One:  this this black dude was like six (.)
                 maybe like fi:ve ten he was big,
2                he was a lot bigger than me,
3                he was in my backpack and I felt him
                 and I turned around and I was looking
                 at him and I was like,
```

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4 "What are you doing?"

5 And he was like,

6 → {"No:thing, pu:nk."} <slow rate, low pitch>

7 And I was like <tongue click>

8 "Ma:n,

9 get out of my backpack du:de."

10 And then he walked up beside me right/

11 and there was like a wall {right there kinda you know/} <high pitch>

12 and he pushed me and he's all like,

13 → {"What you doin punk ass whi:te\ bi:tch/"} <slow rate, low pitch>

14 And I was like,

15 "Just get out of my backpack,

16 don't trip."

17 And he's like,

18 → {"What'd you say bitch,

19 I wasn't in your <[jə]> backpack."}

<AAVE-like phonology, low pitch>

20 And I was like,

21 "Whatever,

22 whatever,"

23 because I couldn't really fight him.

24 You know/

25 He was a lot bigger than me.

26 And he was like,

27 → {"Whatever <[wərɛvə]> bi:tch,

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28 whatever <[wərɛvə]> bi:tch,"} <AAVE-like phonology>

Two other African American boys with whom Brand One is friendly, and whom he describes as "gangsters," fortuitously appear on the scene:

(4b)

58 I came out,

59 I give them a pound,

60 I'm all y-

61 and I was looking at them this way,

62 at them,

63 talking to them,

64 and I was like,

65 → "Is there like a du:de <[duʔ]> back there <[ðɛə]> mugging me or still looking at me/"

66 you know/

67 And they were like,

68 "Naw he's walking away."

69 They're all like

70 → "Why <[wa:]>"

71 I was like,

72 "Because he tried to break me,

73 he tried to go in my backpack."

74 And then Steven's like

75 → {"You punk motherfucking\ <[mʌðəfʌkɪn]> bi:tch/

76 going in my nigger's <[nɪgəz]> backpack,

77 I'm gonna get you,"} <AAVE-like phonology, low pitch>

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78 you know/

In the first excerpt Brand One draws attention to the AAVE phonology of the boy who reportedly threatens him (lines 13, 18). The embedded levels of quotation can become quite complex; in lines 27 and 28 Brand One marks the black speaker's marking of Brand One's speech, and these multiple layers of quotation are relayed through Brand One's normal—that is, marking or AAVE-influenced—speech style.[14]

In the second excerpt, however, Brand One makes claims to AAVE, emphasizing his alliance with the "gangsters" in reporting his own speech (line 65). This assertion of legitimacy is made more powerful by Steven's reported identification of him as "my nigger" (line 76), an explicit challenge to racial boundaries.[15] Yet Steven is also linguistically aligned with the boy who reportedly threatened Brand One: Steven's threat to him (line 75) echoes the other boy's threat to Brand One (line 13).[16]

This linguistic emphasis on race is also found among European American students who distance themselves from African American culture. The examples in (5) come from Mr. Frisky, who describes himself as "the whiteyest of the white boys" and who has little contact with African American students. Here he critiques other white boys like Brand One and Nico Caen:

(5a)

1 Mr. Frisky: Those guys are <u>real</u>ly irritating.

2 I mean,

3 white guys (.) who walk along with the whole (.) you know African American style of pulling up one (.) pant leg/

4 you know/

5 I d- I I never understood that.

6 I never understood that.

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7 But it it it seems to be (.) something that actually looks good on African American people/

8 and when white guys try to do it you're just sitting there going,

9 "Great.

10 → {We wanna see even more paleness on your <[you]> ass.}

11 Just walk on."

...

In (5a) Mr. Frisky ventriloquizes a generic "you" (line 8) who is linguistically indexed as black. However, in the next excerpt Mr. Frisky mockingly marks other white speakers who use such patterns:

(5b)

21 They just look\

22 really goofy,

23 and really dumb looking\

24 and then they try and be all fresh and be like,

25 → "{Aw dude <[ɑ: d̪u:ʔ]>/

26 Yeah you talkin that shit now
<[yæ ju t̪ɔkɪn əʔ ʃiʔ naw]>

27 Watch me and my homies roll up on yo' ass."
<[wɑtʃ mi n̪ maj howmiz rol ʌp ɑn yow æs]>

28 with my mama borrowed car" and shit.
<[wɪd ma mɑməɽ bɑrowʔd kɑr æn ʃɪʔ]> <AAVE-like phonology, low pitch>

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29 So, you know,

30 "Be back in a little while,

31 Mommy <[mami]>

32 You know

33 "Gotta go beat some ass/" <calling intonation>

Again, the marking in (5b) has several embeddings: Mr. Frisky's quotative marking attempts (albeit not very successfully) to parody the speech of those for whom language crossing is the norm. And as in Brand One's narrative above, Mr. Frisky's constructed dialogue indicates a racial ideology in which blackness and whiteness are essentially different. Even when Mr. Frisky allies himself with an imaginary black speaker, it is only in order to insist on racial difference.

Conclusion

Political and cultural shifts in the Bay Area during the past twenty-five years have made possible the transmission of the speech event of marking from its origins in the African American community to European American youth in urban areas. However, transmission across racial boundaries does not necessary to break down those boundaries. It is tempting to suggest that white students' marking points to an affiliation with black culture that may eventually undo racial divisions. But in the absence of longterm multiracial friendships like those Rampton found in his study, it is more accurate to say that these white teenagers have merely added a new linguistic practice to their repertoire, a new resource for the construction of identities that are, in the end, avowedly white. The next chapter considers the motivations for the various stances toward AAVE that European American teenagers take up, and how gender fits into the local linguistic production of white youth identities.

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Notes

[1] Syntactic quotative features are verbs that introduce direct speech, such as the conversational markers *say*, *go*, *be all*, and *be like* (see Ferrara & Bell 1995 for discussion and literature review).

[2] Represented speech is therefore distinct from linguistic crossing, which Ben Rampton (1995) views as occurring exclusively between social categories (such as races or ethnicities) and not between individual voices. Represented speech includes crossing within its compass but is a more general phenomenon.

[3] Goffman (1974:532-537) describes a type of speaking for another—or "say-for," as he terms it—in which the speaker also adopts a distinctive voice quality to signal that she is speaking on behalf of someone else. As Goffman notes, this altered voice quality is particularly used when a speaker is giving voice to the perceived thoughts and desires of those who cannot speak for themselves (e.g., children, animals).

[4] In this regard I adhere to the methods of conversation analysis, but unlike strict practitioners of this method, I have recourse to categories of identity in my analysis. The extent to which phenomenological doctrine permeates the practice of conversation analysis can be seen in the work of Jim Schenkein (1978), who is so reluctant to assign identities, even when they are the center of analytic attention, that he places scare quotes around them. Although one has to respect this theoretical consistency, it produces odd collocations like "a conversation between two 'sisters' " (1978:70). Indeed, to be completely consistent Schenkein would have to put scare quotes around personal names as well, but he does not: in the next paragraph the conversation in question is described as "this exchange between Ellen and Patty," implying an essential identity, marked by first names, that cannot be arrived at by the methodology of conversation analysis. But conversation analysis does not avoid imposing identities altogether; in fact, the field takes interactional roles as the primary

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identities of participants in conversation. This theoretical stance assumes that the categories assigned by researchers are coterminous with speakers' categories. Interactional roles, however, are also analytic constructs.

[5] Not all represented speech involves linguistic stylization, for one speaker may quote another with no special formal devices, and not all linguistic stylization involves represented speech, since many aesthetic effects (such as the word play of young children) do not invoke a speaking other. But in its rhetorical guise linguistic stylization does often rely heavily on represented speech for its effects.

[6] Of course, the notion of intersubjectivity is itself problematic; see Chapter 3. This concept is most useful in the study of phenomena at the level of ideology or stereotype, as here.

[7] For work on signifying, see, for example, Roger Abrahams (1963), Michèle Foster (1995), Thomas Kochman (1981), William Labov (1972i), Claudia Mitchell-Kernan (1971). Marcyliena Morgan (forthcoming a) suggests that signifying has gained more scholarly attention than other African American speech events because it is associated with African American boys, who are often considered the prototypical members of African American culture. Indeed, it is striking that the work on conversational signifying—which is less ritualized than the form of signifying event known as *the dozens* and which has greater gender parity—has been carried out by (African American) women; research on the dozens has been conducted largely by (European American) men.

[8] However, functional equivalence in the broad outlines of this practice does not override the considerable specific differences across cultures. Thus researchers have found that reported speech—or other reported behavior—ascribed to an absent party can sometimes lead to conflict among African American girls women (Goodwin 1990; Morgan forthcoming a).

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[9] *Codeswitching* is sometimes reserved for conversational alternation between separate languages, with *style-shifting* indicating alternation between dialects within a single setting. This distinction implies, however, that dialect switching is akin to register-based shifting, and hence is a matter of style or level of formality, rather than resembling codeswitching in the simultaneous exploitation of multiple systems. The equating of dialect with style further suggests that the vernacular is most appropriately used in formal contexts. While research has shown that for bidialectal speakers dialect choice and formality level correlate in numerous situations, the relationship should not be stipulated axiomatically but demonstrated empirically. See also Chapter 3.

[10] Sylvia Wallace Holton (1984) views this appropriation more sympathetically, arguing that it legitimates the use of AAVE as a literary variety.

[11] I explore the problem of accuracy in transcripts of African American speakers in the media and other institutional settings in Bucholtz (1996b).

[12] Although Bakhtin acknowledges that language mixing is the force behind linguistic change, he claims that it is organic, unconscious, and "obscure" in its workings (1981:359). Bakhtin seems to have in mind here contact phenomena such as codeswitching which is usually unconscious (Gumperz 1982). Nevertheless, in a larger sense his assumptions have been disproven by a number of sociolinguists, foremost among them William Labov, who revolutionized linguistics by demonstrating the observability of linguistic change (1972e). Other sociolinguists have shown that conscious awareness can indeed play a role in the shaping of change (Hinton 1987) and that this process is linked to identity. In the present study it is unclear whether actual change or age-grading is at work, but the conditions for change are present, for the potential leaders of any change are those currently using CRAAVE in their daily lives.

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[13] The /r/less pronunciation of *partner*, popularized by hip hop, is obligatory even for white students who do not affiliate with African American culture; however, such students use the term only in joking contexts.

[14] Brand One's use of the address term *dude* in his report of his own speech (line 9) may also signal an attempt to differentiate himself racially from the other boy.

[15] It is sometimes claimed that the term *nigger*, in its /r/less pronunciation, is now devoid of racial content among some African American speakers and has taken on the status of a generic. Regardless of the accuracy of this assertion, however, it is significant that in his racially charged narrative Brand One applies the term to himself—in quoted speech.

[16] The reported use of the gendered and sexualized insults *bitch* and *punk* (which in BEST is equivalent to *faggot*) suggests that the racial identities Brand One constructs and projects in his narrative are closely bound up with issues of masculinity and heterosexuality. However, a simplistic mapping of blackness to masculinity and whiteness to effeminacy does not adequately capture the complexity of the problem, which I treat at greater length in Chapter 5.

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Chapter 5

B-boys and nerd girls:

Gendered dimensions of white oppositional identities

Introduction

In Chapter 3 I described the linguistic practices of European American teenagers who identify with African American youth culture, and in Chapter 4 I explored how mainstream European American students use African American Vernacular English (AAVE) to mark their symbolic distance from black culture. The present chapter continues the discussion of black-identified white teenagers; it also introduces a group of European American students who are even further removed from the cultural authority of African American youth than are mainstream youth and who are therefore viewed as one of the "whitest" social categories at Bay City High School. This group—the nerds—stands in opposition not only to mainstream blackness, as mainstream white youth do, and to mainstream whiteness, as white hip-hoppers do, but also to all other forms of alternative white youth identity. Accounting for this phenomenon requires investigation of the gendered aspects of youth identities at Bay City High. I begin by discussing the relationship of gender and coolness, an issue that has been addressed in sociolinguistics most directly with respect to the concept of covert prestige.

Beyond covert prestige

Early studies of language attitudes found that speakers of stigmatized languages or varieties may have negative (Carranza & Ryan 1975; V. Edwards 1979; Ryan & Carranza 1975; Tucker & Lambert 1969) or conflicting (J. Edwards 1977; Giles 1971; Giles 1973; Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, & Fillenbaum 1960) evaluations of their own language. Such research has most often been viewed as illuminating the tensions that minority-group members experience as they choose between their own variety and a more prestigious code

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(see, e.g., Ryan & Giles 1982). Attitudes of the dominant group have been considered primarily as indicators of the pressures faced by minorities; thus, dominant-group members' negative attitudes toward stigmatized varieties have garnered far more attention than their positive attitudes. Yet many studies have found that, like minority-group members, dominant-group members may rate the minority variety higher than the dominant variety on particular dimensions, especially solidarity dimensions that reflect speaker integrity or attractiveness as opposed to status dimensions that focus on competence (e.g., J. Edwards 1977; Powesland & Giles 1975).

These studies can shed light on Cross-Racial AAVE (CRAAVE) only indirectly, since there is no necessary link between language attitudes and linguistic practices. Indeed, considerable discrepancies between the two are not uncommon. The utility of the attitude research, however, lies in its demonstration that members of dominant groups may orient positively toward stigmatized codes.[1] A further useful insight of this work is its suggestion that positive dominant-group attitudes occur in an environment of potential social and political change: one model of language attitudes proposes that such a pattern is possible only if members of the dominant group "have become aware of alternatives to the [power] status quo" (Ryan, Giles, & Sebastian 1982:11). In the present study, European American students experience the racial power balance at Bay City High as reversed in relation to the wider society; the cultural authority of African Americans predominates, and many whites perceive themselves as vulnerable to the supposed violence of African American students (see Chapter 2). European American students who participate in African American youth culture find ways to value AAVE culturally even as they view it, in some cases, as a symbol of racial threat (see Chapter 4).

The combination of cultural appeal and racial fear that AAVE inspires among white hip-hoppers could be accounted for in gendered terms: we might argue that AAVE is associated with black masculinity and that the variety therefore indexes both positive and negative aspects of this gender matrix. In fact, early sociolinguistic research on attitudes

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toward nonstandard varieties invokes masculinity as an explanation for the nonstandard's putatively greater appeal for men than for women. This positive valuation of a nonstandard variety has been termed *covert prestige* by Peter Trudgill (1972), who found that women in his Norwich study tended to over-report their use of standard variants, and men tended to over-report their use of nonstandard variants. He suggested that a possible explanation lay in speakers' associations of the nonstandard with masculinity and toughness. Trudgill was careful to limit his claims to the Norwich data, pointing out the specificities of the social context that may have produced this symbolic gender association. However, interpretations and applications of this and other early studies of covert prestige often overlook the context of the original analyses, and as a result, a widely held assumption exists in sociolinguistics that nonstandard varieties are symbolically linked to masculinity across social contexts.

Because of this overextension, sociolinguists often expect men and boys to use nonstandard English or at least to report such use more often than women and girls in order to project a gender-appropriate identity. This assumption has been critiqued by numerous linguists, including Penelope Eckert (1989b), Letticia Galindo (1992), and Marcyliena Morgan (forthcoming a). Such scholars have shown that female speakers too draw on nonstandard linguistic resources in the construction of their gender identities.[2] In the present chapter I build on this critique by examining two very different categories of European American students at Bay City High, hip-hoppers and nerd girls. (Teenagers who participate in hip-hop culture are also called *b-boys*, i.e., 'brother-boys,' and *b-girls*; hence the title of this chapter.) I argue that European American boys who identify with hip-hop culture use CRAAVE as a symbol not primarily of masculinity but of coolness. To support this analysis, I turn to the evidence of nerd girls' linguistic attitudes and practices. Such girls, I suggest, reject AAVE because of its association with coolness, which is in turn linked to normative gender expectations. For members of both social categories, then, the link between gender and AAVE is indirect. Yet the gendered aspects of coolness have consequences for the reception of AAVE among European American youth. And for both

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b-boys and nerd girls, positioning oneself with respect to AAVE is an act fraught with not only gendered but also racialized implications.

Boyz 2 men?: Varieties of masculinity

Since the early 1970s, a vast literature on the relationship of language and gender has developed. Only a small portion of this research, however, has given direct attention to the production of masculinity as a cultural category and a gender identity, for the overwhelming focus of language and gender studies has been female language users. To be sure, neither does this body of scholarship devote much space to analyzing the production of femininity, for in early work both gender categories were usually taken for granted as pre-existing cultural products rather than as ongoing processes that are generated anew with every interaction. Thus the central problem in the early research was to uncover and account for differences between women's and men's linguistic practices (e.g., Fishman 1983; Kramarae 1982; Maltz & Borker 1982; West & Zimmerman 1983).[3] Such accounts often showed how femininity and masculinity were implicated in the production of linguistic inequality or difference, but researchers rarely took the next step and reversed the causal connection between linguistic practice and gender norms; femininity and masculinity (understood as fixed and monolithic ideological structures) were thought to produce particular linguistic outcomes, but language itself was not usually seen as contributing to the construction of the gender dichotomy.

More recently, language and gender scholars have begun to recognize that language both constructs and is constructed by cultural categories such as gender. A social-constructionist model has replaced the earlier comparative framework. The new research orientation emphasizes the specificity of gender identities in particular settings (e.g., Bergvall, Bing, & Freed 1996; Hall & Bucholtz 1995; West & Zimmerman 1991). However, such work has tended to retain the traditional focus on women's and girls' speech; very few recent U.S. studies have included the linguistic practices of men and

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boys. The exceptions to this rule are valuable not only for reintegrating male speakers into a paradigm that has overlooked them for too long but also for theorizing masculinity as a heterogeneous and diffuse category rather than as a unitary expression of an imposed gender identity.[4] Much of this work takes its inspiration from R. W. Connell's (1987, 1995) work on "hegemonic masculinity" as the brand of gender ideology that, by virtue of its association with institutional power (exp socioeconomic power), dominates over other masculinities and over all femininities at a given historical moment. Bonnie McElhinny's (1995) work on the language of police officers, for example, reveals the tensions between a working-class, paternal, and physical brand of masculinity and one that is middle-class, professional, and intellectual. Scott Kiesling (1996) finds a similar diversity of masculinities among the fraternity members whose speech he studied. Indeed, a central goal of the only collection of papers on the subject (Johnson & Meinhof 1996) is to break down the view of masculinity as monolithic and to replace it with a perspective that is more cognizant of fragmented, conflicting, and divergent manifestations of the category (see also Edley & Wetherell 1995).

The substitution of *masculinities* for *masculinity* in research on men's and boys' language undermines efforts to link the use of CRAAVE to gender identity. If AAVE symbolizes masculinity for European American boys, then it presumably symbolizes the same kind of masculinity for all who use it; otherwise the very meaning of symbolism becomes incoherent. But in fact the users of CRAAVE take up a variety of gender positions, some compatible with the working-class masculinity described by McElhinny and others not.[5] As shown in Chapter 3, for example, all the boys in my study developed their own individual physical and linguistic style; such wide-ranging choices in self-presentation call into question the expectation that a unitary masculine identity is operating. Additional evidence against such a position comes from other social practices that speakers engage in, as well as from their backgrounds and other details of their lives. Some of the boys, far from projecting themselves as tough, talk about their inability to protect

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themselves in a fight, and indeed many of them are physically slight, preferring soccer over traditional masculine sports like football and basketball. Although they all claim a heterosexual identity, some have steady girlfriends, some present themselves as "players" or ladies' men, and others are "player haters" who can't get a girlfriend. Nor is their language use due to macrolevel factors such as social class: some speakers are upper-middle-class, while others come from lower-middle-class or working-class homes. In short, the stereotype of black masculinity that would be expected to operate here—one of hyperphysicality as expressed through violence and heterosexual activity—is manifested only in attenuated and partial ways, if at all.

In their interactional practices, too, such boys are as likely to violate as to conform to traditional masculine styles. Example (1), extracted from Example (4a) in Chapter 4, illustrates this situation.

(1)

```
     and he pushed me and he's all like,
  →  {"What you doin punk ass whi:te\ bi:tch/"} <slow rate,
     low pitch>
```

Here Brand One presents himself as the victim of an African American boy; he reports that the boy called him a *punk* and a *bitch*, terms that cast strong doubt on Brand One's masculinity. Ultimately Brand One escapes the situation, but it is his wiliness and well-connectedness, not his physical strength, that save the day. Another example of Brand One's nontraditional orientation to masculinity is shown in (2). Here Willie and Brand One, who are best friends, engage in a highly emotional discussion of their relationship. This exchange comes in the middle of the discussion.

(2)

```
<Discussing a previous conflict in which Willie left for a party without
Brand One.>
```

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1 Brand One: Well I mean we didn't talk about it so I'll tell you:
2 it was like (.)
3 my feeling was you should have just been like
4 "All right then I'll stay. (.)
5 And I won't go to the party
6 I'll just kick it with you."
7 Because we been talking [about it all day.]
8 Willie: [But why would I] do that
dude [like I would- .h h h]
9 Brand One: [Because I was] about to do that that time
when we were all at Kyle's house
10 and you went out to dinner and I was like (.) you know
11 "I'll keep calling you"
12 and then everyone was about to leave and I was like
13 "Well can we wait like five minutes for Willie?
14 [He just paged me."]
15 Willie: [But that was like the day] I came back from vacation.
16 Brand One: Naw, that was a different day. (.)
17 That was- oh that night when Nate picked you up at
18 your house.
19 And everyone was leaving and I was like,
20 "Oh, let's wait up for Willie."
21 Willie: O[h].
22 Brand One: [And] then they were like
23 "All right let's leave" and I was like
24 "Can you just wait [two minutes."]

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25 Willie: [No but it was] different though
because there wasn't room in the car,
26 like there- there was a way for [you to-]
27 Brand One: [I know] but nuh uh
because I was ready to stay.
28 I was like
29 "Well, I'm not about to go if Willie c-
30 if you guys aren't going to wait for Willie.
31 Or give him a ride, whatever.
32 It's the same thing,
33 you're not going out that night./ (.)
34 So I was about- they're-
35 everyone was outside and I was in Kyle's house. (.)
36 And I- I yelled to Nate to wait to go pick you up. (.)
37 At your house.
38 Willie: W[ell-]
39 Brand One: [So] that's all I was saying is I thought you
40 should have (2.5) stayed and not-
41 I mean personally to me even if it had been someone
42 else I wasn't cool with I wouldn't have (.) like just
let them go home by themselves on a Saturday,
43 really.
44 (3.0)

...

The discussion turns to the topic of how they have grown apart lately; it lasts for about seven minutes total. At the end Willie remarks, "This is like therapy!" And indeed, this

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conversation, full of hurt feelings and misunderstandings, might have come right from the pages of popular psychology books like John Gray's (1992) *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*—if the speakers had been female and male. This is not to say that the speakers are not displaying masculine identities, merely that the masculine identities they do present do not fit comfortably with the hypermasculine stereotype that European American culture projects onto African American men. The fact that Willie and Brand One use AAVE-influenced phonology throughout this intimate exchange therefore strongly argues against the simple equating of CRAAVE use with the display of toughness.[6]

White hip-hoppers and oppositional youth identity

It may be tempting to try to salvage a gender-based analysis of the present data: if the boys aren't tough, then maybe they use AAVE as a way of compensating for their gender shortcomings; or perhaps Brand One and Willie are so comfortable with the masculine authority afforded by their AAVE use that they can risk using an interactional style that might otherwise call their gender identity into question; and so on. The fact that all of these explanations are equally possible, however, suggests that invoking masculinity has very little explanatory value.

But if these speakers do not employ CRAAVE primarily as a resource for creating their gender identities, what function does the variety serve for them? As I have argued in chapters 3 and 4, AAVE is used by white students at Bay City High mainly to construct their racialized youth identities. The boys we are considering here use CRAAVE to separate themselves symbolically from other white students at the school who are demographically identical to them. Whereas mainstream white students, who do not use AAVE as part of their ordinary speech style, project youth identities that can be found in any homogeneous white suburban high school, black-affiliated white students adopt an urban orientation that draws overtly from African American cultural practices. As shown in previous chapters, white students on either side of this divide are very scornful of each other. Example (3),

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which is reproduced from Example (5b) of Chapter 4 (without interlinear phonetic transcription), Mr. Frisky, a mainstream European American student who does not affiliate with African American culture, expresses his contempt for whites who do adopt this cultural style:

(3)

```
1  Mr. Frisky:    They just look/
2                 really goofy,
3                 and really dumb-looking\
4                 and then they try and be all fresh and be like,
5                 "Aw dude,/
6                 Yeah you talkin that shit now
7                 Watch me and my homies roll up on yo' ass
8                 with my mama borrowed car" and shit.
9                 So, you know,
10                "Be back in a little while,
11                Mommy,"
12                you know,
13                "Gotta go beat some ass/"
```

As this passage indicates, Mr. Frisky shares the commonly held assumption that nonstandard language use is linked to masculinity—or at least to a failed attempt to portray oneself as masculine. Whereas he invokes traditional masculinity with quoted threats (lines 7-8, "*Watch me and my homies roll up on yo' ass with my mama borrowed car*") and boasts (line 13, "*Gotta go beat some ass*"), he also implies that this masculine stance is fraudulent, as suggested by his references to a mother figure whose son is still tied to her apron strings (line 8, "*my mama borrowed car*"; lines 11-12, "*Be back in a little while, Mommy*"). Yet Mr. Frisky's analysis does not recognize that the dichotomous identities under construction are not masculine as opposed to feminine but urban as opposed to

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Figure 5.1: Map of Bay City High School social space by Mr. Frisky

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suburban, black-oriented as opposed to white-oriented, sophisticated as opposed to sheltered. Mr. Frisky's own participation in these mutually constructed oppositions between different types of white teenagers is apparent in his own map of the high school (Figure 5.1): he locates himself in the predominantly white park area, which takes up a full page of its own; the students who remain on the school grounds, where black-affiliated white teenagers hang out, are dismissed with an emphatic, "You all suck!" Despite the diverse identity practices of the CRAAVE speakers considered in this study, Mr. Frisky's map demonstrates that they all succeed in positioning themselves in opposition to him and other non-black-affiliated teenagers.

Like the European American teenagers who identify with hip hop, nerds also construct for themselves an identity that stands in opposition to the high school's white mainstream. But here the resemblance ends. Where white hip-hoppers shape their identities around an alternative (that is, black) version of coolness, nerds reject coolness as a resource for identity construction. Alternately ignored and mocked by members of other white youth social categories, nerds nevertheless play an important role in the racial drama of Bay City High, for in rejecting coolness—and the normative gender expectations associated with it—they also reject blackness. I now turn to an extended consideration of nerd identity and its relationship to coolness, race, and gender.

The social category of the nerd

In the popular imagination of American culture resides the archetype of the nerd: socially inept, physically unattractive, and mentally overdeveloped, with a special affinity for science and technology.[7] Despite the media's recent hailing of a trend toward "geek chic," exemplified by the popularity of the Internet and the financial success of computer software magnate Bill Gates, there is a certain ambivalence about this turn of events. Nerds are, it seems, feared as well as despised, for their intellectual capacity is seen as a potential threat to the social order. The popular "Revenge of the Nerds" movies offer a humorous view of

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this cultural anxiety, while media descriptions of Unabomber suspect Theodore Kaczynski suggest, with apparent earnestness, that his Ph.D. in mathematics somehow accounts for his alleged predilection for building and mailing package bombs (e.g., Paulos 1996). Even *Discover* magazine, which is dedicated to the dissemination of scientific knowledge to lay audiences and whose readership presumably contains a sizable number of nerds, takes a decidedly negative view of them in its lighthearted look at nerd evolution and socialization, urging readers at the end of the article in the best self-help vein, "If you've gotten to the point that you look in the mirror and see less Mel Gibson than Hoot Gibson, less General Eisenhower than David Eisenhower, less Harrison Ford than Edsel Ford, you may want to rethink your style" (Kluger 1993:48).

As the foregoing examples suggest, nerd status is overwhelmingly associated with males, designating those who are socially stigmatized for failing to measure up to conventional standards of American masculinity. To be thus categorized, according to this cultural ideology, is a social disaster, both resulting from and perpetuating the social incompetence of those labeled "nerds." The scant scholarly research that has been conducted on nerds does little to dispel these assumptions. Male nerds have received the bulk of scholarly attention, with scholars employing the medicalized discourse of disease and recovery to describe the movement into and out of nerd identity. Psychologist Randall Osborne, for example, suggests that nerds feel out of place and suffer from low self-esteem; "anything that makes you question your own abilities can lead to a nerdlike loss of confidence and stature," he states (quoted in Kluger 1993). Likewise, David Kinney, drawing on his ethnographic research in a Midwestern high school, argues that students who are labeled nerds in middle school must undergo a process of recovery in high school either by participating in extracurricular activities, especially sports, or by developing numerous social relationships. He writes of one boy who successfully cured himself of nerdiness: "Now in high school, this former lonely dork has a steady girlfriend and many more friends than he had in middle school" (1993:31). Kinney's description makes evident

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the nexus of cultural ideologies that are threatened by the social practices of nerds, chief among them the necessity of participating in the heterosexual matrix in prescribed ways and the importance of popularity, as measured by number of friends rather than strength of emotional bonds. Although Kinney suggests that acquiescence to hegemonic expectations may be problematic, he ultimately sees this process as "recovery," not capitulation.[8] Moreover, Kinney's focus on how individuals separate themselves from the nerd label obscures the perhaps more interesting issue of how and why many teenagers choose not to distance themselves from what at first glance appears to be the social liability of nerdiness.

Nerds and oppositional youth identity

Many studies of social groups in schools have shown that students tend to divide into socially polarized clusters on the basis of gender (Eder, Evans, & Parker 1995; Thorne 1993), race (Schofield 1989; Weis 1990); social-class affiliation (Eckert 1989a); orientation toward school (Fordham 1996; Willis 1977); or other factors. Recent research has also pointed out the importance of differentiation within a group viewed by outsiders as homogeneous; Norma Mendoza-Denton's (1994, 1996, 1997) work on Latina girls' gang affiliations is one of the most sustained demonstrations of intragroup symbolic distinctions. In all these studies, it has been observed that binary social identities are not only distinctive from each other but consciously oppositional. Thus, members of polarized social categories do not merely "do their own thing," but purposefully create and carry out their defining practices while monitoring the practices of their social opposites.

For nerds at Bay City High School, the task of creating an oppositional identity is made infinitely more complex by the fact that they must differentiate themselves not from a single dominant social group but from a number of groups that claim cultural authority at different moments and in different contexts. As discussed in Chapter 2, the school's dominant cultural style is largely shaped by black vernacular culture, especially hip hop. In addition, black students hold places of social prominence in the institutional structure of the

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arts building

science building

old classroom building

classroom building

administrative building

Figure 5.2: Map of Bay City High School social space by Bob

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school, as star athletes, cheerleaders, homecoming queens and kings, and so on. Many white students separate themselves from these arenas, participating in other extracurricular activities, focusing on college-track academics, and developing their own socially distinctive groups that largely replicate the groups found in homogeneous white high schools: punks, granolas, skaters, jocks, partyers, stoners, and nerds. Spatially, some nerds locate themselves in the park, which is racially defined as white. At the same time, however, nerds are socially and spatially marginalized by other white groups. Figure 5.2 provides an illustration of nerd hang-out patterns. A comparison of hang-out patterns of the main white social categories at Bay City High is given in Figure 5.3.

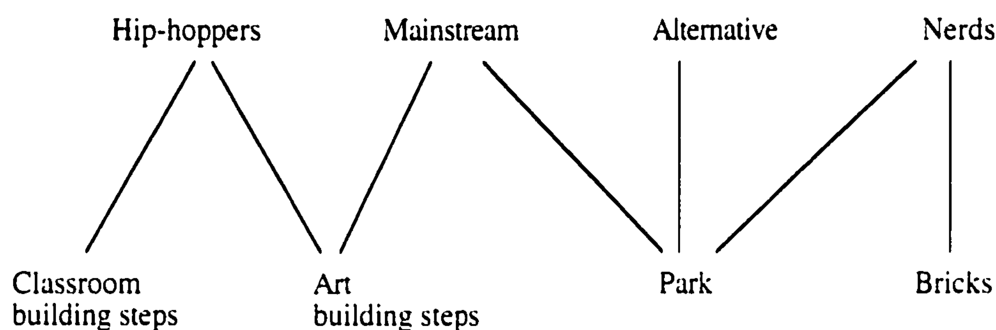

Figure 5.3. Spatial arrangements of white students at Bay City High School

A word on terminology: *mainstream* comprises, among other categories, jocks, partyers, and popular people; *alternative* refers to skaters, stoners, granolas, punks, and so on. All of the above categories, which are made up primarily of members of the upper middle class, are racialized as white at Bay City High, although not all members of these groups are actually white.[9] Thus only white students have been identified or identified themselves to me as nerds despite the fact that I have observed students of color participating in nerd practices and social groups. Nerd identity should therefore be understood as a site for the production of whiteness as a socially meaningful racial category. I discuss this point further below, with specific attention to the meaning of AAVE among nerds.

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Nerds must distinguish themselves from two general groups of students: those, primarily but not exclusively of color, who orient to black cultural forms, and those, primarily white and middle-class, who do not align themselves with black culture. Because these groups differ from, and resemble, each other along a vast array of socially meaningful variables, it might be expected that nerds would be at a loss for a coherent oppositional identity. In fact, however, such students define their identities as multiply oppositional by focusing on a single parameter: coolness. Whereas all other groups in the school can be thought of as cool—that is, as knowledgeable of and participating in current trends in youth culture—in one way or another, nerds are by definition not cool.[10] As Penelope Eckert puts it in her study of high-school social categories, "If a Jock is the opposite of a Burnout, a nerd is the opposite of both" (1989a:48). This identity, contrary to the claims of Kinney and Osborne, is not necessarily only ascribed by outsiders but may be a conscious choice of students who are not interested in pursuing coolness.

Evidence for this claim can be found in students' own accounts of their social identities. In Example (4) Fred describes how she deliberately moved from a cool group of friends to a nerdy group:

(4)

1 Fred: Last year I was good friends with Kate but I never saw her on weekdays for some reason.

2 I was sitting with this other group of people at lunch who were cool but they liked to talk about everyone who passed and make negative comments about everyone who passed and I just kind of sat there. ...

3 At the end of the semester I said, "What am I doing?

4 Why am I not hanging out with <Kate>?"

5 And so I moved in with <her group of friends>. ...

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6 We're always the nerds.

7 We like it.

8 We're glad to be the nerds and the squares.

9 We don't drink,

10 we don't do any drugs,

11 we just get naturally high,

12 we do insane funny things.

13 And we're smart.

14 We get good grades.

As Fred indicates, unlike the cool or popular people, nerds generally do not drink or use drugs (lines 9-10). In addition, they usually do not participate in socially prestigious extracurricular activities, they have small groups of closeknit friends rather than wider social networks, and they rarely date or have ongoing romantic relationships. Although this pattern is not true of all teenagers who identify as nerds, such social concerns do not appear to preoccupy them to the same extent as many other teenagers.

Nerds, coolness, and gender

The fact that the European American boys who embrace AAVE at Bay City High School are not representatives of traditional masculinity calls into question the equation between masculinity and AAVE. The linguistic practices of nerds provide further evidence that the link between gender and AAVE is indirect at best. For the AAVE-masculinity connection to hold up, European American boys who use CRAAVE must manifest a traditionally masculine gender orientation, and conversely European American girls who do not use CRAAVE must manifest a traditionally feminine gender orientation. However, the girls at Bay City High who are most adamant in their rejection of AAVE and its associated coolness—the nerd girls—are also adamant in their rejection of traditional femininity.

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Whereas oppositional identities have often been viewed as constraining possibilities for those who assume them, the nerd identity cannot be understood as limiting in any straightforward way; indeed, unfettered by coolness, nerds are able to act with a degree of social freedom unavailable to many other students. Perhaps most significantly, in offering resistance to hegemonic social expectations, nerds simultaneously challenge dominant ideologies of gender and sexuality. Such students opt out of the heterosexual matrix of the high school, in which pressure to engage in sexual activity is paramount.[11] Thus it is not surprising that some lesbian and gay teenagers, who have little interest in heterosexual preoccupations, align themselves with nerd identities and practices. Heterosexual nerds are not necessarily less homophobic than their trendy counterparts, but because sexuality is not an organizing principle of nerds' daily lives as it is for cool students, lesbian and gay students may find that friendship with heterosexual nerds provides a relatively safe space in the homophobic environment of the high school.[12] Erich, for example, commented that he thinks his best friend Miles, whom he has known since early elementary school, is gay. "It doesn't bother me," he said with a shrug. And Natalie, one of the few out lesbians at Bay City High, is the president of the Star Trek club, a group with a largely nerd membership.

Refusal to participate in the heterosexual matrix is also linked to the flouting of conventional displays of femininity and masculinity. Nerds do not wear the baggy clothing styles popular among many students of color and they are just as averse to the highly gendered fashions favored by their cooler white classmates: for boys, baseball caps, shirts, and jackets with sports insignia; and for girls, tight baby-doll T-shirts, close-fitting bell-bottom jeans, and children's pastel barrettes shaped like animals or flowers. Nerd girls do not wear revealing clothing, and although sometimes they may wear items decorated with Sesame Street characters or other emblems of childhood, these do not exhibit the combination of infantilization and sexualization evoked by the clothing of the cool white girls. In fact, nerd girls often seem consciously to subvert conventions of feminine adornment of the body through their own style choices: their jewelry tends toward plastic

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Crackerjack rings and their use of makeup is generally limited to painting their fingernails in alternating colors of red, blue, green, and yellow, in dramatic contrast to the more traditionally feminine fingernail polish preferences of popular girls as young as the fifth grade (see Eckert forthcoming). And whereas dark colors and pastels are the two dominant styles among cool girls, nerd girls often delight in bright, even mismatched colors.

The tendency to resist conventional displays of heterosexuality carries over into language as well. A number of nerd girls have lower-pitched voices than those of their cooler counterparts, which are often almost babyish; and even in their choices of pseudonyms for this study, cool girls selected names like "Lumiere" (with requisite French pronunciation), "Zoe," or "Tiffany," while the nerd girl already quoted chose "Fred" and another requested to be called "Bob, Conqueror of the Universe." It might be argued from such choices that nerd girls' identities are linked to maleness, but what is striking about these names is that they violate gender ideologies not merely in being masculine but in being masculine in the wrong way: they are humorous rather than macho. As such, Fred's and Bob's pseudonyms appear to indicate not an affiliation with masculinity but a disaffiliation with conventional femininity.

Besides threatening the normative social arrangements of Bay City High, nerds also pose a problem for the institutional values of the high school, according to which academic achievement and extracurricular participation are explicitly prized. Nerds fulfill both these expectations but in ways unanticipated by the school. Their intellectual ability may be a source of pride when statewide standardized test scores are reported, but it may also be an embarrassment to teachers whose errors they regularly catch and correct. And the extracurricular activities they choose to participate in are not generally viewed as accruing greater glory to the school: chess club rather than cheerleading, badminton rather than basketball. The problematic nature of being smart is especially acute for girls. Although they regularly achieve prominence in advanced math and science courses at Bay City High and the school has taken steps to encourage girls to pursue their interest in these fields,

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male dominance is still the norm, and it is difficult for girls to balance the interactional requirements of hegemonic heterosexuality with the need to compete and achieve academically, a double bind that carries over into college, as Victoria Bergvall (1996) has shown in her study of female engineering students. By withdrawing from conventional femininity and its attendant obligations, nerd girls are able to display their intellectual ability without apology.[13]

The linguistic construction of nerd identity

The social practices that nerd girls engage in in order to construct their identities are accompanied by socially meaningful linguistic practices. Students draw on resources at every linguistic level, from phonetics to discourse, to display a distinctive nerd identity that is associated at once with intelligence, humor, and a resolute refusal to be cool.

At the phonetic level, nerd girls are distinguished by their lesser participation in a set of vowel shifts that are characteristic of younger Californians' speech. I focus here on the back vowels (uw) and (ow), which are fronting and unrounding.[14] Leanne Hinton, Birch Moonwomon, and their research team (Hinton et al. 1987) have shown that this process is associated with white middle-class California teenagers to such an extent that fronted variants have become linguistic stereotypes of California speech. Herbert Luthin (1987) has also demonstrated that young women lead the fronting of (uw) and (ow). Thus, although the girls in my study conform precisely to the profile of speakers leading the change, they may resist participating in it because of their desire to distance themselves from the trendiness of the cool people, who are sociologically, or at least demographically, identical to them. The data in Table 5.1 suggest the pattern of fronting of (uw) and (ow) for three white girls at Bay City High.

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Table 5.1. Scores of vowel fronting for three white girls at Bay City High School (50 tokens each ranked for three values of frontedness)

	Beth	Bob	Zoe
(uw)	28	24	69
(ow)	26	21	65

Beth and Bob, who are both nerd girls, have similar fronting indexes of only 28 and 24 for (uw), and 26 and 21 for (ow), whereas Zoe, who associates with girls that Bob identifies as "popular," has a fronting index of 69 for (uw) and 65 for (ow). It does not appear that this pattern could be explained by lack of contact with those who are leading the change, because these girls were raised in the same city, attended the same range of public schools, and continue to have a great deal of contact with each other in classrooms. Instead, the differences in use of this highly salient marker of mainstream youth identity point to differences in identity itself.

However, nerds do not merely reject these socially normative linguistic resources; they also create their own strategies for the production of a nerdy self. One linguistic phenomenon that makes nerd speech distinctive is its measured quality, which lends weight to speakers' words, and the resistance to phonological processes characteristic of colloquial speech such as consonant-cluster simplification and unstressed vowel reduction. I offer two examples, the first by a boy, Erich, and the second by a girl, Beth.

(5a)

```
1  Erich:   U:h Hong Kong is a franchise too.
2           Mr. Lee's Greater Hong Kong.
3           <sniff>
4  Mary:    Is it meant to be a funny book or is it [sort of a:  ]
5  Erich:                                           [Yeah. I:t's ]
```

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6 meant to be somewhat humor.

7 Mary: Yeah.

8 Erich: But (.) it's very good.

9 It's very fun.

10 Sumatran computer virus.

11 <nasal laugh> Yeah.

12 It's a compu-

13 it's that's a whole (.) long involved plot about these

14 things called [namʃub].

15 Which is kind of like a computer program that will

16 program your brai:n.

17 <sniff> And uh

18 Mary: Oka:y, hh

19 Erich: it's it's very complicated.

20 You have to really read the book to understand it.

(5b)

1 Beth: I can't quite deal with it yet but it's

2 (keeping [more and more])

3 Mary: [What is it.]

4 I've never heard of it.

5 Beth: It's (.) it's this weird book.

6 It takes plac:e in (.) [Den-]

7 Christine: [Iceland] or something.

8 Beth: Denmark.

9 Christine: Denmark?

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```
10 Beth:        Yeah.
11 Christine:   Oh.
12              Oh, she's from Iceland.
13 Beth:        Yeah.
14              She- she's from Greenland actually.
15 Christine:   Greenland.
```

Both Erich and Beth use a measured speech style, slowing their rate of speech between certain words: in line 20 of Erich's transcript (*you have to read the book to understand it*) and in line 1 of Beth's (*I can't quite deal with it*). This produces an effect of careful enunciation by inhibiting assimilation of final stops to adjacent initial stops. Erich also produces fully released final [t]s in *understand it* (line 20) and in *somewhat humor* (line 6). In addition, Eric's speech shows some influence of spelling pronunciation in line 2 (*Mr. Lee's Greater Hong Kong* [hɔŋ kɔŋg]). Likewise, Erich and Beth both resist reduction of unstressed vowels in line 12 of Erich's turn (*It's a* [ej] *compu-*) and in Beth's line 14 (*Greenland actually* [grinlænd ækʃuwəlij]). The nonreduction of *-land* echoes Christine's use of this pronunciation in *Iceland* in line 12 of (5b).

These teenagers' resistance to colloquial speech forms does not merely mark them as untrendy, as their resistance to vowel fronting does. Additionally, it plays the more important role of constructing them as intelligent. The association of this precisely enunciated speech style with intelligence may be due in part to its relationship to literacy. Indeed, as shown in Erich's speech, nerd students may occasionally employ reading pronunciations, such as [folk] for *folk*, and incorrect pronunciations of words they encounter in their extensive reading: for example, one nerd girl I interviewed chose the pseudonym *Loden*, which she pronounced [ladn̩].[15]

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At the lexical level, nerd girls again show both resistance to trendy language forms and frequent use of lexical items associated with intelligence. An illustration of the first pattern can be found in the response of Fred and her friends to my request to discuss current slang, which other students usually found the most enjoyable part of our interview. They expressed dismay at the task, made numerous joking apologies for their lack of knowledge, and insisted on providing literal, nonslang definitions for the slang terms I suggested to them, as shown in (6).

(6)

Bob: [blu:d].

B-L. O-O. D.

The word is [blʌd]. ...

That's the stuff which is inside of your veins.

That's the stuff that–

I don't know.

I haven't gotten to that chapter yet.

The second pattern, the use of lexical items that make the speaker sound smart, is exemplified by the tendency for nerd girls to choose formal-register variants over more colloquial forms. Some examples are listed in (7).

(7)

(a) Carrie: Is anybody here knowledgeable about (.) the seeds on top of bagels?

(b) <In response to my question about what she calls male high-school students.>

Beth: I tend to refer to the whole (.) Y chromosome (.) as a guy.

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(c) <In response to my question about whether she has African American friends.>

Christine: I know them.
I know (.) I know people.
It helps alleviate situations sometimes.

To suggest that nerds draw on features of formal speech, however, is not to imply that they are uncreative and inflexible in their language use. On the contrary, such girls (and boys) manifest an extraordinarily playful attitude toward language: they have a high degree of metalinguistic awareness, and they take pleasure in toying with linguistic forms for humorous effect. Thus, although Fred and her friends were unable to supply the definitions of many of the slang words popular among trendy teenagers at Bay City High, they did volunteer their own definition of a word they had invented (Example 8):

(8)

Fred: Oh and we make up wo:rds,
like- hhh
Okay,
every day Kate and Bob have to go retrieve their violins?
From their <arts building> lockers,
up on the second floor of <the arts building>?
So we said, "We need a new verb,
that means 'to retrieve one's violin.'"
So we go schnarfing every day after school.

Nerds also engage in punning and other joking practices that require attention to linguistic form, as shown in (9a) and (9b):

(9a)

<Talking about what *popular* means to them.>

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→ Bob: Isn't that a kind of tree?

Loden: No, that's a pop[lar].

Kate: [Po:p]lar.

Bob: Whatever. <Laughs>

...

Bob: I think they're popular.

Kate: Who?

Bob: Elizabeth Hudson and like Blair,

all them.

Loden: Yeah.

Kate: Oh yeah.

Mary: What are they like?

Bob: They're okay.

Fred: Are they steps people? <i.e., students who sit on the arts building steps at lunchtime>

Bob: *What?*

Fred: Do they- [xxx]

→ Bob: [I thought you were talking about step relatives.]

<laughter>

(9b)

<Discussing the club they formed.>

Mary: So it's you four plus: Carrie and Ada?

Bob: And sometimes Melinda.

Fred: hhh

Kate: hhh

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Loden: What?

→ Fred: That was like A E I O U (and sometimes Y.) <laughing and gasping for breath>

These examples should be sufficient to disabuse Kinney of his notion that nerds lack even the most basic sociolinguistic competence. Kinney suggests that two "recovered" nerd boys whom he interviewed had a high-involvement interactional style with each other because "finding friends and frequently talking are relatively new experiences for them" (1993:35). I would propose instead that the intensity of the talk Kinney observed is due to the speakers' acute sensitivity to language and their extensive conversational experience together, which is partly the result of their longterm close friendship, not their friendlessness. Likewise, the stereotypical representation of nerds as friendless and not very funny is not borne out by my observations. Nerd humor is not the same as mainstream teenagers' humor, but both are of crucial significance in forging bonds of friendship and shared identity in their respective communities.

Nerds and the community-of-practice model

Because nerd girls' linguistic practices are interpretable only through the detailed investigation of the social context in which they occur, we need a correspondingly rich definition of community. The community of practice is such a model. Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet's highly influential 1992 survey article challenged scholars of language and gender to rethink traditional notions of community, identity, and gender. Previous sociolinguistic research on women centered on the speech community, a grouping defined by shared linguistic norms. By contrast, the community of practice attends to individuals not simply as speakers but as participants in the complex workings of community. In this framework, speech is only one of the many social practices in which individuals engage. However, linguistic practices can often reveal important social information that is not available from examination of other community practices alone. For

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example, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1995) apply the theory of the community of practice to Eckert's Jocks and Burnouts study. Linguistic analysis revealed that the two groups have somewhat different vowel systems, with the most innovative vowels being those used by the "Burned-Out Burnout girls," that is, the most extreme members of this social category. This finding is counter to theories based on covert prestige, which assume that boys and men use more nonstandard and innovative language than girls and women. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet argue that the vowels these girls use are resources through which they construct their identities as tough and streetwise. They suggest that Burnout girls linguistically surpass Burnout boys because unlike the boys, who can display their toughness through physical confrontations, Burnout girls must index their identities semiotically; fighting is viewed as inappropriate for girls. Thus, Burnout girls and boys share an orientation toward toughness in their community of practice, but the practice of toughness is achieved in different ways by each gender. By viewing language as equivalent to other social practices like fighting, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet are able to explain the ethnographic meaning of the Burnout girls' vowel systems and how language can acquire the empowering authority of physical force itself.[16]

Nerds of course attain empowerment in very different ways than either Burnouts or Jocks. As already suggested, one of the primary ways nerds differ from these other, more trend-conscious groups, is through the high value they place on individuality. The community-of-practice model accommodates the individualism of the nerd social category without overlooking the strong community ties that unify the nerd girls discussed in this chapter. The community of practice also lets us look at nerd girls in the same way Eckert and McConnell-Ginet viewed the Burnout girls: as speakers *and* social actors, as individuals *and* members of communities, and as both resisting and responding to cultural ideologies of gender and race.

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The formation of a community of practice: The Random Reigns Supreme Club

In order to illustrate the utility of the community-of-practice framework, I will focus on a single social group within the nerd social category. One important distinction between the speech community and the community of practice is that the latter, but not the former, allows us to examine language use within social groups as well as social categories. Hence, the entire social category of nerds at Bay City High constitutes a single community of practice insofar as its members engage in shared practices, but this category is divided into particular social groups whose members associate primarily with one another, and these groups form their own communities of practice. Unlike speech communities, communities of practice can be embedded or overlapping; their boundaries are determined not externally, by linguists, but internally, through ethnographically specific social meanings of language use. Ethnographic methods such as fieldwork therefore become crucial to the investigation of communities of practice.

The social group of nerd girls that is the focus of this discussion is a small, cohesive friendship group that comprises four central members — Fred, Bob, Kate and Loden — and two peripheral members, Carrie and Ada (Ada does not appear in the data that follow).[17] All the girls are European American except Ada, who is Asian American. The same group also formed a club, which I will call the Random Reigns Supreme Club. (Though not its actual name, this name preserves the flavor of the original.)

Random Reigns Supreme is more properly described as an anti-club, which is in keeping with the counterhegemonic orientation of nerd identity. It was created by members in order to celebrate their own preferences, from Sesame Street to cows to Mr. Salty the pretzel man. Members emphasize the "randomness" of the club's structure: it is not organized around shared preferences; instead, any individual's preferences can be part of the club's de facto charter, and all six members are co-presidents. This structure contrasts with the corporate focus and hierarchical structure of most school clubs, which bring together people who are otherwise unconnected to perform a shared activity. The Random

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Reigns Supreme Club centers around members, not activities. It has no goals, no ongoing projects, no official meetings. Nevertheless, members proudly take their place among the corporate clubs in the pages of the school's yearbook. The girls' insistence on being photographed for the yearbook has a subversive quality: the photo publicly documents the existence of this otherwise little-recognized friendship group and demands its institutional legitimacy on par with French Club, the backpacking club, and other activity-based organizations.

Unlike a corporately organized club, which comes into being through charters, through participation in leagues, tournaments, and competitions, and through other official records and relationships, the Random Reigns Supreme Club is constituted through memory. It traces its history through routes of friendship. Thus narratives of the community's formation are an important unifying practice, as shown in Example (4) above. There Fred emphasizes that her friendship with Kate is a matter of choice, not necessity. Expressions of nerd affiliation and identity are not always this explicit; as the following examples show, the details of interaction are important resources in defining a shared nerd identity within the club's community of practice. Example (10) is an extended exchange in the Random Reigns Supreme community of practice.

(10)

```
1  Carrie:  Where where do those seeds come from?
2           <points to her bagel>
3  <laughter>
4  Bob:     [Poppies.       ]
5  Fred:    [Sesame plants.]
6  Carrie:  {But what do they look like?} <high pitch>
7  Fred:    I have no idea.  hh
8  Bob:     Sesame:.
```

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9 Carrie: [Is anybody- h]

10 Fred: Ask me (.) [tomorrow.]

11 I'll look it up for you. h

12 Carrie: h Is anybody here knowledgeable (.)

13 about the seeds on top of bagels?/

14 Fred: /Sesame.

15 Bob: They're sesame?

16 They're not sunfl- ?

17 No,

18 of course they're not sunflower.

19 Loden: Yeah,

20 [What kind of seeds are-]

21 Carrie: [Because sunflower are those whopping ones?]

22 Bob: [Yeah.

23 Yeah.

24 I know.]

25 <laughter>

26 Bob: They come from trees.

27 They have big trees and they just

28 [ra:in down seeds]

29 [<laughter>]

30 Carrie: [No they don't.]

31 Uh uh.

32 Why would little tiny seeds [come from-]

33 Fred: [(into baskets.)]

<smiling quality>

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34 Ye:p,

35 [({I've been there.})] <smiling quality>

36 Carrie: [No:.]

37 Loden: [No:.]

38 Bob: [[Little tiny leaves come from trees,]]

39 Fred: [[{And the whole culture's built around it,}]]

40 like in: some countries,

41 All they do is like the women come out and they have

42 ba(h)skets on th(h)eir h(h)ead and they st(h)and under a [tree,]

43 Carrie: [My-]

44 You sound like my crusty king,

45 I'm writing this (.) poem because I have to like incorporate

46 these words into a poem, and it's all about-

47 <interruption, lines omitted>

48 (Fred: So what about this king?)

49 Carrie: He's like (.) has this (.) castle,

50 (xxx: Is he xxx king?)

51 Carrie: No-

52 Yeah,

53 he is.

54 Loden: hh

55 Carrie: He has this-

56 {He has this castle, right?

57 except it's all crusty,}

58 <rustling of lunch bag, clanging of aluminum can>

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59 (Fred: Uh huh.)

60 Carrie: And so he lives on a boat [in the moat.]

61 Bob: [A crusty-]

62 <Fred crushes her aluminum can>

63 Kate: Who:a!

64 <quiet laughter>

65 Bob: Is it really [crusty?]

66 Carrie: [He's-]

67 And so like the- like because-

68 the people are trying to convince him that like he should stay in the castle and he's all,

69 {"No, it's crusty!"} <high pitch, tensed vocal cords>

70 [<laughter>]

71 Carrie: [{"I'm in the moat!"}] <high pitch, quiet>

72 right,

73 Bob: What's wrong with [crusty castles?]

74 Carrie: [And so-]

75 Well,

76 Would [you want to live]=

77 Kate: [Crusty (castles).]

78 Carrie: =in a castle full of crust?

79 {[ɨ:əɨ:]} <noise of disgust and disapproval>

80 Kate: [How gross.]

81 Bob: [I mi:ght.]

82 Carrie: Huh?

83 Bob: What kind of crust?

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84 Like,

85 bread crust?

86 Carrie: Like

87 Bob: Like [eye crust?]

88 [crusty crust.]

89 Like {boo:tsy} <high pitch, tensed vocal cords>

90 crust.

91 <laughter>

92 Bob: Oh.

93 Well,

94 Maybe if it's bootsy,

95 I don't know.

96 Fred: {Boot[sy!]} <falsetto, sing-song>

97 Kate: [<coughs>]

98 <laughter>

Both the content and the form of utterances in this exchange exemplify the concerns and values of the nerd community of practice. The orientation toward books (Fred, line 11: *I'll look it up for you*) is not typical of most students at Bay City High; Carrie's enthusiastic recounting of the poem she wrote for a class — and the eager participation of others in this topic — is likewise rare among members of "cool" social categories. At the same time, however, Carrie's selection of subject matter for her poem is playfully subversive of school values and emphatically counter to traditional "feminine" topics. Bob also enters into the spirit of Carrie's narrative, repeatedly insisting on her own immunity from "gross" subjects like crustiness (lines 73, 81).

As the discourse suggests, knowledge is highly valued in this community of practice. Thus, Bob quickly interrupts and corrects herself when she misidentifies the seeds on Carrie's bagel (lines 17-18) and when Carrie explains why Bob is mistaken the

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latter overlaps with her, offering three quick acknowledgments that are designed to cut off Carrie's turn (22-24).

Given this exchange, Bob's initiation of a new conversational direction makes sense. Bob jokingly provides an authoritative answer to Carrie's question (lines 26-28), and thereby skillfully shifts attention from her lack of knowledge to Carrie's. Fred eagerly joins in with a parody of scientific discourse, amplifying on the theme while supplying invented anthropological details that riff off of the discourse of a typical high-school classroom. Such teasing episodes are frequent in this friendship group. But more importantly, this exchange is a collaborative performance of nerd identity: all the participants collide in sustaining the frame of an intellectual debate even as laughter keys the talk as play. Nerd identities are here jointly constructed and displayed.

Other performances of nerdiness are manifested in the details of speech style. Formal vocabulary projects a speaker's persona as smart and highly educated. Carrie, for example, selects this register in her question *Is anybody here (.) knowledgeable about the seeds on top of bagels?* (lines 12-13). Clearly, however, the girls are not stylistically limited to the formal register, unlike cool students who use a more colloquial register regardless of speech situation (see Chapter 3). It is equally obvious that the phrasing of Carrie's question has an ironic undertone: after two questions in colloquial register (lines 1, 6) she shifts into a more formal style. Her unwillingness to overlap her turn with Fred's (lines 9-10) further suggests that the question is a performance of nerdiness, not just a manifestation of it. That is, Carrie is simultaneously displaying and commenting on nerd practice, showing her awareness of nerdy linguistic forms and announcing her willingness to enter a nerdy interactional space.

The multivalence of Carrie's speech is significant given her peripheral status in the Random Reigns Supreme Club. As a non-core member, she moves between friendship groups — in fact, the interaction in this example occurred when Carrie approached the core group in the middle of lunch period; afterward she moved on to another group. Carrie's

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social flexibility has made her a cultural and linguistic broker for the Random Reigns Supreme Club, which becomes aware of current youth slang largely through contact with her. Many slang terms that circulate widely in the "cool" groups are labeled by Random Reigns Supreme members as "Carrie words"; Carrie's language patterns thus reflect her liminal position within the group. Most importantly with regard to the present chapter, Carrie's use of slang originating in Black English Street Talk (BEST) is not accepted by other group members. Note, for example, the reaction to Carrie's use of the BEST slang term *bootsy* (a negative evaluative modifier). Bob and Fred echo it in different ways, to general laughter (lines 94, 96). Carrie's performance of nerdiness places her within the community of practice, but her use of slang of African American origin moves her outside of it, as the other members are quick to let her know.

Additional evidence that nerds define themselves in opposition to both coolness and blackness comes from Example (6) above. There Bob first utters the word *blood* (a BEST affiliative term) with stereotyped AAVE phonology and exaggerated intonation: [blʊ:d]. Bob's marking (see Chapter 4) of AAVE speakers in this example expresses the distance between her identity and that of African American youth. Her return to her normal pronunciation in the second utterance of this word ([blʌd]) coincides with her attempt to provide a nonslang definition for the term. With this switch, coolness and blackness are linked to each other and separated from the world of nerds.

Besides expressing their distance from African Americans symbolically and implicitly with their language use, nerds may also explicitly state this ideology of identity. Thus Christine in Example (7c) above provides an overt statement that African American students are at best useful to know, but only as protection against other African Americans (as Brand One also suggests in the narrative in Chapter 4 from which Example (1) is taken). Such sentiments underlie the linguistic practices and attitudes that separate nerds from African American youth language and culture. Nerd girls' social freedom in rejecting

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normative femininity is constrained by their acceptance of normative, stereotyped views of African Americans.

Conclusion

I have argued that nonstandard language use is not necessarily linked to masculinity and that only through attention to local, ethnographic details can we understand the social meaning of language use. But an ethnographic approach also raises difficulties for the concept of covert prestige itself. Although commentators claim that covert prestige is widespread, perhaps universal, in societies with a class system, the notion that one's everyday speech style is only covertly valued displaces speakers' ordinary interactional context in favor of the dominant perspective. Covert values do manifest themselves in linguistic studies, but for most speakers most of the time the conflict between local and dominant linguistic ideologies is not a central issue. In my own data, white speakers use features of AAVE as a badge of honor. There is no sense in which the prestige they associate with the variety is covert or underground.

By contrast, white nerd girls' disdain of normative femininity results in their refusal to be cool, and their self-imposed distance from AAVE is a consequence of this anti-cool identity. At the same time, however, nerds' remoteness from African American youth language and culture enforces both their own racial identity as white and their oppositional stance toward blackness. Explanations based on covert prestige cannot account for the mismatch between gender and language for these two categories of speakers. Instead, local linguistic practices and attitudes must be the starting point for research on the interrelationship of language, gender, and race.

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Notes

[1] The claim that such an orientation is limited to solidarity as opposed to status dimensions is problematic from an ethnographic standpoint, however, since local definitions of competence and success (the elements of status) differ from wider cultural definitions.

[2] Other researchers, including Susan Gal (1978) and Patricia Nichols (1978), also force a revision of Labov's assumptions by explaining gender differences in language use not via sex roles but on the basis of women's and men's different socioeconomic positioning and social networks.

[3] This brief list includes both so-called difference and dominance approaches to language and gender, since both approaches use a similar methodology involving comparison of women's and men's speech and both invoke cultural explanations for linguistic phenomena rather than the reverse.

[4] The variable and contextual nature of masculinity was recognized early on by a few researchers, but it did not gain wider attention within language and gender studies until very recently. Thus Robin Lakoff (1975:13) observes that upper-class British men may make use of "women's" linguistic forms without endangering their masculinity among their peers; she explores this idea at greater length elsewhere, taking the speech patterns of George Bush as an example (Lakoff 1990:27ff.).

[5] In fact, McElhinny shows that the male African American police officers in her study tend to orient to a middle-class masculinity that is aligned against the white working-class masculinity of the pre-integration police force. This finding supports my argument that gender, race, and class are not linked to one another in inevitable ways.

[6] I view this interaction as a display of a particular type of (middle-class) masculinity rather than as evidencing failed masculinity, although it does not correspond to most descriptions of middle-class white male speech (e.g., Cameron 1996; Kiesling 1996; Sattel 1983). Part of the difficulty in analyzing these data is that discussions of teenage boys' speech are very

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rare in the language and gender literature, and I am therefore unable to assess the generality of such interactions. Deborah Tannen's work (1990:55-58, 266-270) is one of the few exceptions, and in fact the interaction she discusses is quite similar to the one presented here. She reports, however, that men who saw the videotaped conversation judged the exchange unusual.

[7] This social category has a variety of labels, including *nerd*, *geek*, *dork*, and *dweeb*, among others. *Nerd* was the most commonly used and recognized term at Bay City High, and is the one I have adopted in this discussion.

[8] The language of recovery may also emerge from the popular and scholarly dread of the supposed deviance of the nerd body, which is often viewed as sexually unattractive and physically awkward. Thus Kinney hails the onset of puberty as the endpoint of nerdiness for some of the students he interviewed. The determinism of pointing to bodily difference to account for the ostracism of groups that pose a threat to the social order is well documented in Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla (1995).

[9] The claim that these social categories are linked to whiteness is supported by the fact that students of color who participate in them run the risk of being labeled *sellouts* or *wannabes* by other students of color or of being accused of "failing to represent" their race. In addition, white students tend to be able to distinguish these categories in minute detail while lacking even the most cursory knowledge of social differentiation among African American, Latino, and Asian American students.

[10] In this analysis I take a much broader definition of *cool* than do some recent commentators, who tend to focus on the use of the term as applied to males and describe it as a state of detachment and unemotionality (e.g., Danesi 1994; Majors & Billson 1991).

[11] I have borrowed the term *heterosexual matrix* from Judith Butler (1990). This notion encompasses the concept of the heterosexual marketplace vividly described by Eckert (forthcoming).

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[12] Homophobia at Bay City High is rampant, both in curricula and in social arenas, as it is in most U.S. high schools (Friend 1993). Some efforts have been made to counter this trend through political activism and education, with a small degree of success. To take an example of the level of homophobia that gay and lesbian students experience, during my fieldwork I witnessed a girl make a vicious physical attack on another student who was a lesbian, on the grounds that she had tried to flirt with her (I allude to this incident in Chapter 2). The lesbian student later left the school and chose to finish her degree through independent study.

[13] Although I did not conduct a systematic study of math and science classes at Bay City High, I impressionistically observed a general tendency for high-achieving non-nerd girls to manifest the linguistic patterns widely associated with women in mixed-sex groups (first noted in Lakoff 1975), especially hedging and using interrogative rather than declarative sentence structure when displaying their knowledge. I did not see nerd girls engage in similar practices.

[14] Because the focus of the dissertation is not the identities of these girls, this investigation should be understood as preliminary only. Additional data analysis is under way.

[15] In fact, there is an intimate connection between nerds and reading; nerds were the only students whom I interviewed who reported reading for fun, and I often noticed them carrying around mass-market paperbacks or library books, usually science fiction or fantasy novels.

[16] Likewise, white hip-hoppers and mainstream white youth share an orientation toward coolness in their community of practice: the nerds fall outside of this community because they do not share this orientation.

[17] See the girls' discussion of this group in Example (9b). I did not meet Melinda, the additional member of the group. My impression is that she was even more peripheral than Carrie and Ada.

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Conclusion

In the preceding chapters I have documented how white teenagers' use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) variously enforces and interrupts local discourses about race. Here I summarize the discussion and suggest some new directions for research on cross-racial AAVE.

This study illustrates the variety of stances that European American speakers may assume toward AAVE and the identities that they are able to construct using the variety as a symbolic resource. As I suggested in Chapter 1, the linguistic practices found at Bay City High School are not unique to this school, this region, or this historical moment, but are part of a widespread European American tendency toward cultural and linguistic appropriation of the Other, especially the black Other, in the construction of whiteness. Yet there are dimensions of these appropriative practices that are specific to Bay City High. Chapter 2 detailed the ethnographic situation at the school that made the black-white racial dichotomy the organizing ideology both for the institution as a whole and for the individual identities of students. The three different positions that white teenagers take toward AAVE were examined in the subsequent chapters. In Chapter 3 I analyzed how European American boys who orient to hip hop engage in acts of linguistic and cultural borrowing through which they incorporate elements of CRAAVE into their ordinary speech style. I also described the social consequences of these practices among mainstream white teenagers. This latter group came into focus in Chapter 4, in which I demonstrated the ways in which white teenagers, both hip hoppers and mainstream youth, may use AAVE rhetorically as a way of constructing a white racial identity. In Chapter 5 I introduced a third group, the nerds, who, as a result of their rejection of mainstream coolness, are the European American youth category most isolated from AAVE.

I have argued that European American users of CRAAVE at Bay City High challenge traditional notions of the speech community because of their ability to cross

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racialized linguistic boundaries. Barbara Johnstone's (1997) discussion of "cross-cultural," "intercultural," and "polycultural" frameworks is helpful here. In the cross-cultural paradigm that dominated early research on second language learning (the focus of Johnstone's discussion), language is linked to nationality. Sociolinguistics quickly moved beyond this model of language. By contrast, Johnstone's second framework, the intercultural model, has prevailed in sociolinguistic research and is the source of the perception of the speech community as tightly bounded. The intercultural framework recognizes linguistic diversity within the borders of a single nation but divides groups from one another based on ethnic identities, which are in turn tied to different languages and linguistic varieties. Only in the polycultural paradigm, which is increasingly gaining ground in sociolinguistics, is language disentangled from ascribed identities. As a result, speakers are viewed not as exhibiting linguistic behavior determined by their position in a preordained social structure but as engaging in consciously performed linguistic practices that shape their chosen identities. The polycultural framework allows us to explain why European American teenagers in the same social setting orient to AAVE in such different ways. At the same time, it is important not to disregard the other models, for the intercultural framework, in which ethnically distinct linguistic varieties are sharply separated, exists as an ideology for some white students (i.e., those in the mainstream) and as a reality for others (i.e., nerds).

Inevitably, this study has left a number of important questions unaddressed. Here I offer four issues that suggest especially fruitful directions for later research:

(1) *CRAAVE and language change.* To what extent is CRAAVE an age-graded phenomenon, and to what extent might it exert an influence in language change? Beyond well-documented lexical influence and some evidence of effects on white Southern speech, AAVE has not been shown to have a powerful impact on European Americans' language use. Might white users of CRAAVE act as cultural brokers who usher linguistic forms of AAVE origin into other European Americans' speech? Will the speakers examined in this

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study continue to use CRAAVE in adulthood, as was found in at least one case study (Jacobs-Huey 1996), or will they shift away from it as they grow older, as another case study found (Cutler 1996)? What conditions must obtain for CRAAVE use to continue?

(2) *Gender and CRAAVE.* Do European American girls use CRAAVE in the same way European American boys do, and for the same purposes? What role, if any, does CRAAVE play in constructing gender identity, and how does this identity differ from and intersect with mainstream white femininity?

(3) *CRAAVE and racial attitudes.* What is the relationship between an ethnographic study of this kind and wider ideologies about AAVE among European Americans? The nature of these ideologies were exhibited most recently in the uproar over the proposed use of "Ebonics" in the Oakland public schools. How does the widespread existence of CRAAVE in the United States (and beyond) force a reinterpretation of this debate? How does it affect theories of linguistic divergence between white and black vernaculars (NWAVE 1987)?

(4) *CRAAVE and other students of color.* If we move away from the black-white binary, what new information comes to light? What role does CRAAVE play in the linguistic practices of Asian Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans, as well as among multiracial speakers? To what extent does CRAAVE serve as a resource for these students and to what extent do they rely on racially and ethnically specific varieties such as Chicano English (Ornstein-Galicia 1988) or American Indian English (Leap 1993)?

John Fischer has described linguistic change as "the protracted pursuit of an elite by an envious 'mass' and consequent 'flight' of the elite" ([1958] 1964:486). It is easy to read this as a class-based distinction, but Fischer's point is more subtle. As he notes, "one would not assume that the elite is always a property or authority elite. In politically and economically undifferentiated societies, the most important criterion might be technical skill and productivity in consumer goods, admired personality traits, etc." ([1958] 1964:486). What Fischer overlooks is that even in highly stratified societies like our own, those who

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inhabit the roles of "elite" and "envious mass" are constantly shifting. Connie Eble points out that "in the reverse of the pattern of creating a standard lexicon, in which the less powerful borrow linguistically from the more powerful, slang has always borrowed heavily from the dialects of subcultures" (1996:80). Likewise, as I have shown in this dissertation, the more powerful may also borrow elements of syntax, morphology, and phonology. Yet this borrowing process is not wholesale, and speakers may opt out at any time, especially when racial identity takes priority over youth identity. The findings of the study suggest that in addition to examining the details of linguistic difference, sociolinguists must focus as well on the workings of linguistic ideologies—both in our research sites and in the broader society—that insist on racial difference in language use.

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Appendix A

Transcription conventions

All names in transcripts are pseudonyms; some identifying details have been changed. Each line represents a single intonation unit. In a variation of a method proposed by John Gumperz and Norine Berenz (1993), phonetic details are given interlinearly when they are relevant to the analysis; otherwise spelling is normalized.

.	end of intonation unit; falling intonation
,	end of intonation unit; fall-rise intonation
? or /	end of intonation unit; rising intonation
\	falling intonation internal to the intonation unit
--	self-interruption; break in the intonational unit
-	self-interruption; break in the word, sound abruptly cut off
:	length
underline	emphatic stress or increased amplitude
(.)	pause of 0.5 seconds or less
(n.n)	pause of greater than 0.5 seconds, measured by a stopwatch
h	exhalation (e.g., laughter, sigh); each token marks one pulse
.h	inhalation
( )	uncertain transcription
{ }	stretch of talk over which a transcriber comment applies
< >	transcriber comment; nonvocal noise
[normal]	overlap beginning and end
[IPA]	phonetic transcription
/	latching (no pause between speaker turns)
=	no pause between intonation units

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Appendix B

Research materials

Individual interview questions

1. Please make up a name that you would like to be called in this study.
2. What is your age and racial/ethnic background?
3. Where did you grow up? If you didn't grow up in [Bay City], when did you come here?
4. How long have you gone to this school?
5. Who do you hang out with at school?
6. What do you like about each person?
7. Do you see each other outside of school?
8. What do you like to do together?
9. Are most of your friends from school, from your neighborhood, or somewhere else?
10. What do you look for in a friend?
11. Who is your best friend?
12. Who do you think has the most friends at this school?
13. What is it about them that makes them popular?
14. Are there people at this school that you'd like to be friends with but aren't?
15. What do you like about them?
16. Are there people here that you don't like very much?
17. What don't you like about them?
18. What do you look for in a friend?
19. What would you never put up with in a friend?
20. Do you have anything else you'd like to say?

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Group interview questions

1. How do you know each other?
2. Are there other people that you hang out with that aren't here? How do you know them?
3. Do you all have the same group of friends, or do you have different groups of friends?
4. What do you usually do together?
5. What's the most fun you've ever had together?
6. What do you like about each other?
7. What do you admire most about each other?
8. What do you think you have in common?
9. Who else would you want in this group of friends?
10. Who in this school seems to have the most friends? Why?
11. Are there people that sometimes hang out with you but aren't really part of your group?
12. How would you describe yourselves as a group?

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Word list

40's	alterna-tive music	awesome	baggy	bell-bottoms	bitch	blood	boy
braids	bro	bud	butterfly	chill	church	clique	club
college	com-puters	cool	crew	dance	dog you	dread-locks	drink
dude	dweeb	fake	fine	folk	fools	G	gang-banger
get high	girl	girlfriend	give props	graffiti	guys	hang out	hella
hip hop crowd	hippie	ho	homie	hoochie	hook up	immature	instigate
it's all good	jewelry	jock	kick back	kick it	kids	man	movies
nerd	notch	pager	park people	partner	party	phat	ponytail
popular	preppy	punk	rad	rap	rasta	real	reggae
represent	respect	saucy	scrub	sellout	shop	skater	sports
stoner	sweet	sweetie	tag	tight	Trekkie	trippin'	truthful
tweakin'	video games	wannabe	watch your back	weak	weed	woman	wowzers

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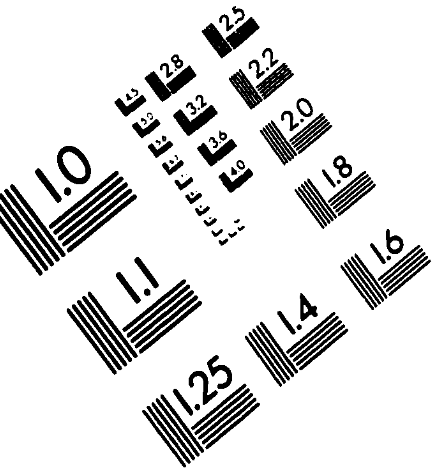
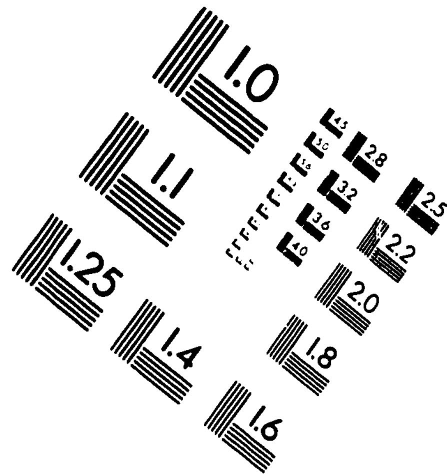
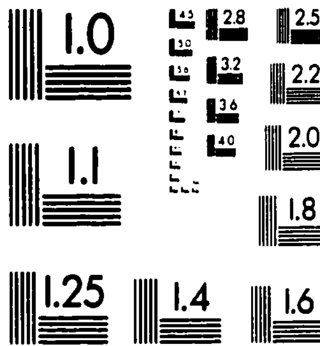
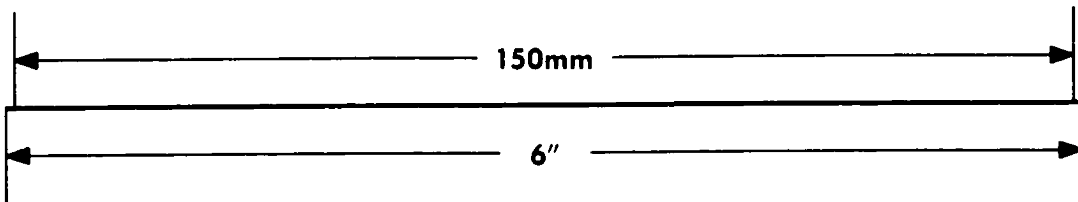
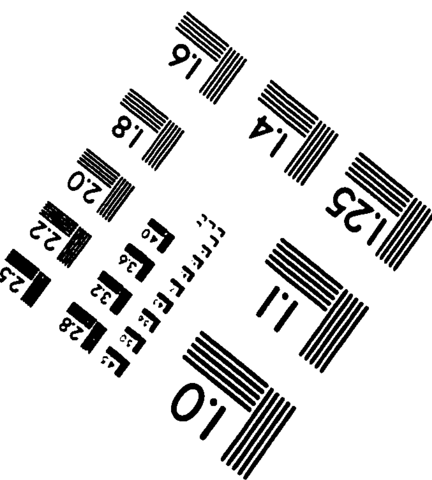
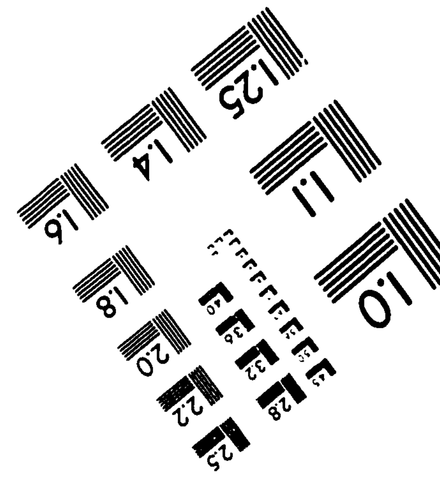
TEST TARGET (QA-3)

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