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Publication Date

2007

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Language, Power and Social Process 19

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Mouton de Gruyter
Berlin · New York

Words, Worlds, and Material Girls

Language, Gender, Globalization

edited by

Bonnie S. McElhinny

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Berlin · New York

Mouton de Gruyter (formerly Mouton, The Hague)
is a Division of Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, Berlin.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

McElhinny, Bonnie S., 1966–
Words, worlds, and material girls : language, gender, globalization / edited by Bonnie S. McElhinny.
p. cm. – (Language, power and social process ; 19)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-3-11-019574-3 (hardcover : alk. paper)
ISBN 978-3-11-019575-0 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Language and sex. 2. Globalization. 3. Multilingualism.
I. Title.
P120.S48M36 2007
306.44–dc22
2007041738

♾ Printed on acid-free paper which falls within the guidelines
of the ANSI to ensure permanence and durability.

ISBN 978-3-11-019574-3 hb
ISBN 978-3-11-019575-0 pb

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at http://dnb.d-nb.de.

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Cover design: Christopher Schneider.
Printed in Germany.

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Chapter 11
Shop talk: Branding, consumption, and gender in American middle-class youth interaction*

Mary Bucholtz

1. Introduction

The large-scale restructuring of capitalism in the United States and elsewhere in the past several decades has placed consumption indisputably at the center of economic subjecthood. In previous configurations of capitalism, workers' relation to economic production – via class positioning and mobility within the labor market – was the primary means by which they could forge identities linked to economic structures and processes. In the current post-Fordist economy, however, the labor market, along with the rest of the apparatus of capitalism, has become diffuse and flexible (Harvey 1989) and hence a less stable ground for identity projects. At the same time, consumption has emerged as the primary site of identity formation within economic systems through the intensive marketing of a multitude of niche lifestyles on a global scale (Lury 2004). The accompanying promotion of "enterprise culture" (Keat and Abercrombie 1991) – and more recently "the ownership society" – as neoliberalism's guiding metaphor for the organization of institutions, from government to the arts to education, also invites people to reimagine themselves as consumers first and foremost (Bartlett et al. 2004; cf. Collins 2001; Fairclough 1993).

One indication of this shift toward consumption under late capitalism is that despite their marginal position in the labor market, young people are heavily targeted by advertisers (Klein 2000; Milner 2004; Quart 2003; Schor 2004). Youth are a focus of corporate attention not only because they increasingly have access to disposable income but because they are seen as the initiators of new street-based styles that can be commodified and marketed to a mass public (including other young people). Although the commercialization of youth culture is widely recognized by researchers, commentators, and the public at large, the issue has been examined primarily from an adult

perspective; consequently, commentators typically take a sharply critical view of the relationship between youth and consumption. Murray Milner, a sociologist who applies Weber's theory of status relations to American high school social structure, argues that "the status systems of high school ... are an important contributing factor to the creation and maintenance of consumer capitalism" (Milner 2004: 8). He maintains that teenagers' consumption-based status is a problem that can be solved through a range of substantial changes in schooling practice, including school uniforms, lunchroom seating assignments (to avoid the formation of cliques), gender-segregated schools, and mandatory national service. Similarly, economist Juliet Schor considers advertisers' targeting of the youth market to be extremely harmful to children's development as social persons:

> Marketing is ... fundamentally altering the experience of childhood. Corporations have infiltrated the core activities and institutions of childhood, with virtually no resistance from government or parents. Advertising is widespread in schools. Electronic media are replacing conventional play. We have become a nation that places a lower priority on teaching its children how to thrive socially, intellectually, even spiritually, than it does on training them to consume. The long-term consequences of this development are ominous. (Schor 2004: 13)

Schor goes on to link the targeting of children as consumers to a range of highly sensationalized problems confronting contemporary American youth, from obesity to attention deficit disorder to bullying to psychological disorders.

There is no question that the drive to market to children and teenagers and the consequent emphasis on consumption among youth have a number of pernicious effects, but at the same time the strongly deterministic view taken by these and similar researchers fails to look closely at how young people engage with commodities in their everyday lives. Such a view may therefore overlook the fact that youth do not simply fall into a predetermined economic script written by corporate marketers but take up much more complex and ambivalent relationships toward consumption that are grounded in the first instance in locally relevant social concerns rather than global market forces.[1]

By contrast, the ethnographic and interactional approach taken in this study aims not to impose the analyst's perspective a priori but seeks instead to privilege the ways in which teenagers, as members of a culture, jointly

make and make sense of their social worlds, moment by moment. Ethnographic studies of youth and consumption, though still scarce, enrich theoretically and politically driven accounts both by taking youth seriously as social actors and by demonstrating the variable meanings of consumption among youth in different cultural contexts (e.g., Liechty 2003; Wulff 1995; see also references in Bucholtz 2002). Such an approach enables researchers to acknowledge that the grasp of the new global economy is far-reaching but not all-encompassing, and to recognize that local processes of meaning making – which, no matter how limited by the workings of power, are never entirely foreordained – are still the best defense against encroaching hegemonies.

2. Language, gender and consumption

Within ethnographic and other field-based studies of language and gender, relatively little attention has been paid to the full range of phenomena that fall under the rubric of political economy (McElhinny 2002, 2003; cf. Bucholtz 2006). Aside from extensive scholarly interest in interaction in professional workplaces and service encounters, such research focuses primarily on the interpellation of speaking subjects into economic systems via class structures and the organization of labor (e.g., Gal 1978; Milroy 1987; Nichols 1983) and the unequal distribution of economically valorized linguistic resources (e.g., Goldstein 1995). This emphasis on production in the study of political-economic processes has aided the scholarly understanding of linguistic practice as both symbolic and material, and of gender (and increasingly sexuality; see Hall 2005; McElhinny 2002) as a central factor in the relationship between linguistic and economic issues. While valuably foregrounding production and reproduction in this small body of scholarship, however, ethnographically oriented language and gender researchers have given even less attention to consumption.

Conversely scholars of discourse and cultural studies have examined the issue of consumer culture, but generally not from an ethnographic perspective. Such studies importantly highlight the sociopolitical issues that can be at stake in the consumerism that drives late capitalist societies, such as the imperative to consumption created through advertising discourse and the reproduction of gender ideologies through consumer media (Benwell 2003; Machin and Thornborrow 2003; Mills 1995; Talbot 1995; and contributions to Talbot and Morgan 1999), but they usually do not document how social

actors negotiate and give meaning to practices of consumption on the ground, in local ethnographic contexts. Meanwhile, some more recent language and gender research (Bucholtz 1999a, 1999b; Cameron 2000) documents the commodification of language itself in gendered contexts of production and consumption.

Language mediates young people's consumption practices in both the top-down, social-structural fashion that is the focus of cultural studies scholars and in the bottom-up fashion favored by ethnographers, which emphasizes local contexts and the agency of social actors. At the level of social structure, language encourages consumption through the vehicle of advertising, which links commodities to youth cultures by tying them to an ideology of coolness (Frank 1997), whereby almost every aspect of youth culture is bound to the procurement of a rapidly shifting set of trendy products targeting specific niche markets: music, clothing, personal grooming products, sports equipment, even food. At the level of individual agency, however, language may be even more important than the actual acquisition of commodities in the local construction and differentiation of youth cultures embedded in political-economic processes, not only via the use of symbolically freighted linguistic markers – phonological, syntactic, and lexical forms – that index specific youth styles, but also, and more immediately, through interaction about consumption. Language and gender researchers have explored both of these dimensions. Research on teenagers' reception of popular media demonstrates that as girls move into adolescence they become increasingly enmeshed in the gendered discourses of media and consumer culture (Coates 1999), and studies of gender and youth style show that young people's linguistic practices converge with gendered semiotic practices closely tied to consumption, such as clothing choices, in order to produce distinctive local categories of identity like jock, nerd, or gangster (Bucholtz 1999c; Eckert 2000; Mendoza-Denton 1999). In addition, a small amount of research has been done by language and gender scholars on how adolescents and preadolescents orient to and negotiate consumer products such as cosmetics for their own ends (Eckert 1996; Mendoza-Denton 1996), laying the foundations for a more extensive interactional study of how young people use talk about consuming to make social sense of commodities and their own place within late capitalist society.

Interactional analysis, like ethnography, focuses on the local sociocultural meanings of the practices in which social actors engage and thus provides a firm empirical testing ground for theoretically or politically derived claims about the social world. Close analysis of social interaction as it unfolds allows researchers to show how large-scale social phenomena like class or identity are produced in real time rather than residing in free-floating "discourses", ideologies, or structures that are theoretically prior to and hence unmoored from specific social actors and situations. As Mark Liechty notes in his ethnography of an emergent middle-class consumer culture in Nepal, "More than simply locating (*ex*cluding) the middle class's 'others,' ... narrative practices are also central to the project of creating an inclusive, collective space for the middle-class social self. Here the *language of consumption* – how people *talk about* middle-class consumer goods and consumer desire – is especially important" (2003: 256, original emphasis).

I investigate the question of how language mediates consumption among youth by drawing on ethnographic data from a year-long study carried out in 1995–96 of a racially and economically diverse urban high school in the San Francisco Bay Area, which I call Bay City High School. Focusing on European American students who affiliated with a variety of locally salient youth-cultural identities, I argue that as with the Nepalese middle-class youth studied by Liechty, through discourses of consumption – talk about where they shop and what they buy – young people at Bay City High positioned themselves as economic agents while locating themselves and others as particular kinds of classed, gendered, and racialized subjects. This process was supported by teachers' discourse concerning identity, in which consumption was promoted as the route to subjecthood through the acquisition and display of an individual style created through commodities. It is thus through the combination of the top-down workings of corporate advertising and the bottom-up cultural practices and discourses of consumption among youth and those they interact with that the styles and subjectivities of American youth cultures come into being.[2]

3. Youth culture and consumer culture

At Bay City High, like most other U.S. high schools, students' lives were permeated and structured by commodities throughout the school day (see also Klein 2000; Schor 2004). They ate fast food from national chains at the school canteen and purchased soft drinks from corporate-sponsored vending machines on campus, a longstanding fundraising arrangement in many public schools.[3] While the integration of corporate advertising into public schools is a nationwide phenomenon, the need for such corporate

support is especially acute in California. In 1995, when I conducted my research, California was one of the twelve wealthiest states in the nation, but ranked 48th with respect to per-student funding in K-12 schools. The declining funding and quality of California's public schools is widely attributed to Proposition 13, the 1978 act limiting property taxes; as a result of its devastating effects teachers and administrators have been forced to turn elsewhere for educational materials. At Bay City High, materials donated by corporations and emblazoned with their logos appeared throughout the school, from record-company posters advertising the latest releases by popular music groups, which lined the walls in several classrooms, to the Coca-Cola logo on the scoreboard in the football field.

Yet even when the financial constraints of the school did not demand reliance on corporate resources, teachers often encouraged students to orient themselves to commodity culture. For example, in a health course that was mandatory for all sophomores at the school, the teacher had the students decorate their own three-ring paperboard binders with images and slogans from advertisements and articles in mass-market magazines to create a collage representing the kind of person they felt themselves to be. Most students clipped captions and photos from fashion and sports magazines, although some subverted the assignment by leaving their folder unadorned or by taking images from unsanctioned sources like the pro-marijuana magazine "High Times." Despite these few exceptions, students tended to acquiesce to this activity, for it further naturalized what was already a familiar experience to most teenagers: defining one's identity through discourses, images, and ideologies of consumption.[4]

Given that most American high schools, by necessity as well as by choice, are steeped in consumerism, commodity talk can be undertaken in almost any interactional context in school settings. Speakers regularly compliment one another on their acquisitions,[5] comment on their own and others' possessions, and jointly recall past and plan future acts of consumption. Indeed, talk about shopping was so prevalent among Bay City High School students that although my research was not primarily concerned with this topic I soon added it to the list of issues that I inquired about during ethnographic interviews. The data on which the present analysis is based comes from such interviews and from informal peer interactions at which I was present. I did not conduct fieldwork on students' actual shopping practices; however, talk about such practices is a rich source of information about language and consumption in its own right, for regardless of whether students were accurately reporting their buying habits, their decisions about how to represent their own and others' consumer activities in interactions with me and their peers revealed a great deal about the identity positions they claimed for themselves and assigned to others.[6]

I focus here on an issue that frequently emerged from teenagers' talk about consumption: *branding*, or the association of brand names with social groups.[7] This term has been used in nonlinguistically oriented cultural studies to describe the top-down processes whereby corporations create and impose a semiotics of commodities on consumers, especially the highly desirable youth market (e.g., Klein 2000; Lury 2004; Quart 2003). Naomi Klein, the most influential critic of the global branding phenomenon, traces the practice back to the beginnings of mass production, when the uniformity of goods demanded symbolic differentiation through the creation of brand images. Branding later extended to the corporation as a whole, in part due to the shift of production overseas and hence the need to highlight the corporation over the commodity, which it was no longer producing directly. Branding is accomplished via relentless advertising to reinforce the brand and to penetrate the distracted awareness of prospective consumers whose lives have been saturated by marketing. In order to do so, striking language and images and new advertising venues are used to present the brand as not simply a logo but a total way of life. Nike in particular is identified by Klein and other writers as one of the quintessential success stories (or horror stories, depending on one's view) of marketing the brand rather than the commodity. Klein characterizes current branding practices as "the project of transforming culture into little more than a collection of brand-extensions-in-waiting" (2000: 31).

However, such a perspective is overly deterministic, missing the ways in which consumers themselves engage with commodities in local symbolic and material economies – engagements that are not always anticipated or embraced by marketers.[8] My own emphasis is therefore on how young people respond to the hypercommodification of youth culture within interaction. In my analysis I draw on my recent collaborative work with Kira Hall on the relationship between language and identity, in which we develop a model of identity informed by current and canonical sociocultural linguistic theories and methods (Bucholtz and Hall 2004a, 2004b) and a set of principles for investigating identity as a fundamentally interactional phenomenon (Bucholtz and Hall 2005).

4. Language, class and identity

As part of our framework, we adopt and expand Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) notion of *distinction* to characterize the process of social differentiation that is one effect of identity work. In our use, distinction need not be tied to socioeconomic class but may apply to any dimension of differentiation between social groups; however, it is important to remember that the origin of the concept in Bourdieu's writings lies in social class. For Bourdieu, distinction between social classes arises through practices of the cultivation of taste; thus the bourgeoisie distinguishes itself from the proletariat not only on economic grounds but also, crucially, by claiming for itself a greater sense of aesthetic discernment – that is, the ability to differentiate between that which is held to be desirable and that which is not. Though not always formulated in such terms, discernment is pivotal in linguistic research on consumption, as seen in the connoisseurship among yuppie wine aficionados (Silverstein 2003) and coffee drinkers (Gaudio 2003), fashion knowledge as a marker of cosmopolitan modernity in Tonga (Besnier 2004), and even the symbolic trappings of social difference produced by New York City department stores (Labov 1972). This original sense of *distinction* is vividly illustrated in young people's discourses of consumption, for in positioning themselves within consumer culture, teenagers simultaneously position themselves as discerning members of that culture. It is not the case, however, that discernment emerges directly from internal cognitive and affective processes. To be sure, a robust cultural ideology in late capitalist societies such as the United States locates discernment, and taste more generally, in the individual preferences of an autonomous consuming subject. Yet in fact discernment is a thoroughly social and cultural phenomenon, produced through the accumulated effects of interactions in which taste is socialized and shaped.[9]

At the interactional level, discernment is produced as a discursive effect through habits of stance, a concept that has become an important part of sociocultural linguistic analysis. *Stance* has been generally defined as speakers' discursively displayed epistemic and/or affective orientation to ongoing talk. Thus it involves an orientation to knowledge on the one hand and to emotion on the other. Discernment combines these two elements of stance, for it bases the notion of taste not merely on what one likes and dislikes, but more fundamentally on knowing what one *should* like and dislike. Contrary to American discourses of taste, then, discernment is a social rather than an individual phenomenon, and it is one that is created and reproduced almost entirely within discourse.

The linguistic analysis of stance has received increasing attention in recent years. For my analysis here, I use the stance framework developed by John Du Bois to characterize the relationship simultaneously forged among stance object (the entity toward which a stance is taken), speaker, and addressee through the taking of a stance in interaction. Du Bois (2007: 163) describes the act of stance taking as follows: "I evaluate something, and thereby position myself, and thereby align with you." Stance is therefore both a subjective and an intersubjective process, for social identities may be built up through the habitual taking of stances, and interactional dynamics may sediment into social relations (Ochs 1992, 1993). This cumulative effect of stance has been called *stance accretion* (Du Bois 2002; Raunio-maa 2003), and it is a primary means of constructing social identities and the relationships between them. In this way stance accretion interactionally contributes to habitus, the accumulated and habitual social practices that constitute class and other categories (Bourdieu [1972] 1978, 1984).

One of the most obvious kinds of social identity that is inscribed through discursive practices of displaying discernment is socioeconomic class. Yet as Eckert (2000) has demonstrated, the class identities speakers construct in social practice do not necessarily correspond tidily with the class positions assigned to them by the capitalist economic system. Indeed, it was extremely difficult for me to determine students' socioeconomic status solely through participant-observation in the school setting, for even many extremely poor students were strongly oriented to trendy – and costly – youth-cultural commodities. For example, I eventually learned that one student had been homeless throughout the study, yet his self-presentation through clothing and other possessions gave no indication of his family's dire economic situation.

Moreover, students tended not to talk about social class, instead framing social organization in racialized terms, which – unsurprisingly, in the context of U.S. racial inequities – usually correlated with class. In this way class became a largely invisible yet highly salient dimension of social positioning (see also Ortner 1991, 1998; Rampton 2003). Other types of social division were often more explicitly addressed in discourse, especially among the middle-class European American students who made up the bulk of the study participants. Thus one white girl informed me that "classism" was widespread at Bay City High; when I inquired further it became

clear that the class warfare she had in mind was drawn along lines of class year: freshman, sophomore, junior, senior.

One indicator of class identity, if not actual class status, was the stores where teenagers told me that they shopped for clothing. Upper-middle-class European American teenagers tended to name stores in the expensive downtown shopping areas, while lower-middle-class and working-class African American teenagers listed stores in malls and shopping centers in suburban areas that had a largely nonwhite clientele. Here social class outweighed race, with well-to-do African Americans naming the same kinds of stores as their European American counterparts. But because students of widely varied socioeconomic backgrounds often oriented to the same kinds of commodities, social class is less useful than consumption style in investigating the ways in which teenagers positioned themselves and others in the political economy of consumer capitalism.

5. Branding the self and the other

If the shopping areas that students named are a clue to class, then the brands and labels that they wore and discussed are a clue to youth cultural style. This local practice of branding, as the counterpart of global corporate branding, discursively associated social groups with corporate trademarks and thus provided a commodity-mediated means by which social identities could be claimed by the self or ascribed to others. Other-branding typically involved negative evaluations, while self-branding was more complex, allowing for a range of stances from pride to (mock) shame. For some students, self-branding was a practice akin to patriotism or rooting for a sports team, involving symbolic acts of loyalty as well as financial acts of economic support through regular purchases of the company's products. Nike and Polo were among the brands that attracted this sort of loyalty among teenagers at Bay City High during the period of the study.

For some students, especially those for whom trendy fashion was an integral part of their identities, branding was synonymous with social identification. Example (1) illustrates this situation. The example is taken from an ethnographic interview I conducted with two European American boys, Willie (age 17) and Brand One (age 16), both juniors, who based their close friendship in large part on their shared fashion aesthetic, which they called "pretty-boy". Although these teenagers' fascination with fashion may be considered gender-atypical by outsiders, it should be noted that many boys

at Bay City High were deeply interested in clothing and it was not generally considered unmasculine to display such an interest. Indeed, it is some indication of the shift in gender ideologies among California youth over the past several decades that Brand One and Willie were able to maintain an intensely homosocial relationship, to dress and wear their hair nearly identically and share each other's clothing, and to proudly and openly describe themselves as "pretty boys" without being the targets of homophobic suspicion among their peers. However, the degree of interest these two boys showed in clothing and fashion was unusual among the male students in my study.

The pretty-boy style involved baggy ironed pants, oversized basketball shoes, and neatly ironed oversized shirts over a white T-shirt. Heavily influenced by the hip-hop fashions popular with African American students, Brand One and Willie's style was rare among European American teenagers. In fact, the boys claimed that they had invented the style, a claim that could be heard as credible only if the origins of the style among African American youth were discounted or ignored. At the time the study was conducted, such styles were strongly racialized as black by both black and white students, and so Brand One and Willie may also be seen as locating themselves racially as white innovators rather than as wannabe blacks. This position was reinforced by their assertions that other (white) boys tried to imitate their style.

In example (1a), Willie is describing elements of his and Brand One's style to me; I had previously learned about their "pretty-boy" style in a separate interview with Brand One. In the example, Willie responds to my question about style by naming the brand of his athletic shoes:

(1a)

```
1  Mary:    What--
2           How would you (.) describe your style?
3           (1.7)
4  Willie:  .h::
5           Well like Nikes,
6           h: u:h h:
7           I haven't bought a other kind of pair of shoe,
8           (0.8)
9           since like fourth grade.
```

Brand One and Willie's style is influenced not only by the clothing fashions of African American youth culture but by the linguistic practices as well; the emblematic use of recognizable features of African American

Vernacular English (AAVE) can be seen, for example, in line 7, in Willie's regularization of the indefinite determiner in *a other kind* and his use of zero plural marking in *pair of shoe*. Here language enters into the same symbolic economy in which clothing circulates, as a resource for the construction of style. At the same time, these boys' use of AAVE is tied quite directly to material economic processes. Their access to AAVE features was largely mediated by consumerism, for it was their consumption of commercial rap music even more than face-to-face interaction with AAVE speakers that allowed the boys to adopt emblematic features of the variety. Among European American students, such appropriation of African American clothing and speech styles was gendered insofar as it was both more common and more accepted among boys than girls.

Practices of branding arise at numerous points in this short excerpt. In lines 7 to 9, Willie offers a testimonial, a speech event characteristic of consumerism in late capitalism (Bucholtz 1999b): *I haven't bought a other kind of pair of shoe, (0.8) since like fourth grade*. The stance of discernment that he takes here is achieved through his testimonial of brand loyalty, which bespeaks an expert knowledge of the excellent qualities of the endorsed product.

Later in the same interaction, brand names surface again in Willie's talk when he describes the kind of shirts he and Brand One wear:

(1b)

```
109 Willie:    .h And mostly like (.) shirts and stuff,
110            like name brand,
111            like (1.0) Tommy Hilfiger,
112            Nautica,=
113                    =like this is Nautica right here,=
114 Brand One:                                          =This is Polo.
```

The first descriptor Willie offers is not oriented to visual style but to the status of the commodity – *name brand* (line 110) – and he goes on to list the particular brands that he wears, all of them labels that in advertisers' branding practices at the time were associated with a clean-cut, preppy, country-club image. These labels were appropriated and resignified by hip-hop fans and performers in the mid-1990s as part of an urban youth style (see also Cutler 2003). The resignifying practices involved in this appropriation are maintained by Willie and Brand One, who do not represent themselves as having a preppy style. The fact that preppy clothes may not signify a preppy style is part of the display of knowledge necessary for discernment.

A knowledgeable stance is further constructed as the boys rapidly identify the labels of the shirts they are wearing and display them for me, an act that visibly illustrates their style. This meticulous attention to and keen awareness of corporate brands recalls Marjorie Harness Goodwin's (2002) discussion of brand monitoring among preadolescent girls in California and is extremely widespread within consumer culture. These students' brand consciousness can even be found in the self-selected pseudonym *Brand One*, a name that positions the boy himself as a commodity. Through the self-branding practices they engage in, Willie and Brand One jointly align both with the stance object – the brand – and with each other as discerning consumers of the brand. Such social meanings come to be built through the kind of discursive work that these boys carry out here.

But when branding is applied to others, especially absent others, it is more commonly used in ways that create social distance rather than affiliation and similarity. Speakers can establish a relation of distinction between themselves and others by specifying the brand name of products that others use that they themselves do not and would not. These practices of distinction rely once again on discernment as a stance toward commodities. In some contexts, merely attributing the use of particular brand-name products to others is in itself sufficient to signal social distance and disapproval.

In examples (2a) and (2b), four middle-class girls, also 16- and 17-year-old juniors, are discussing what they perceive to be the practices of preppy people, a social category in which they do not include themselves. The girls, who called themselves Bob, Fred, Kate, and Loden in this study, were described by themselves and others as nerds, and they were largely indifferent to or disdainful of commodity-based youth culture of any kind, instead constituting themselves within an alternative, nonsexualized femininity.[10] Although some of the girls in this group loved to shop, they preferred destinations like craft stores and the local reptile pet shop over clothing boutiques. In fact, the only store they ever mentioned to me as a place where they shopped for clothing was the Salvation Army thrift store. The girls' skepticism regarding fashion- and status-conscious teenagers is evident in their discussion of how to identify preppy students. In line 10, which opens the excerpt, Fred is returning to a previously unfinished statement about how preppy people get to school:

(2a)

```
10 Fred:  dropped off in front of the school in--
          {(0.6)} <snaps fingers twice> big bucks (.) little car,
```

```
11          <[u]>
12  Bob:    [BMW!     ]
13  Fred:   [Vol↑vo:?]
14  Bob:                [[BMW!       ]]
15  Fred:               [[Volvo with]] leather seats.
16  Bob:    BMW.
17  Fred:   Whatev--
18          No,
19          [Volvo with leather seat]s,
20  (?:     [x father's car          ]
21  Bob:    [My BROTHER'S            ]
22  Fred:   it's all about Volvo with leather seats. h
23  Bob:    No,
24          my (.) brother drives a Volvo,
25          believe me,
26          he's--
27          he's not preppy.
28  Fred:   (h)Okay.
29  Bob:    hhh
```

In the next excerpt, a little while later, I ask if preppy people dress in a particular way:

(2b)

```
44  Bob:    Sweaters.
45          (1.5)
46  Fred:   Sweaters,
47          (1.1)
48          like,
49          (1.1)
50  (Kate:)hhhh You're wearing a sweater. <sniff>
51  Bob:    Well,
52          but,
53  Fred:   [(Not like that.)]
54  Bob:    [Sweaters with    ] V necks.
55          <laughter>
56  Fred:   .h:: But (.) not--
57          [but their shoes match.]
58  Loden:  [(That is x though.)    ]
59  Bob:    Their shoes match?
60  Fred:   That's right.
61  Loden:  Yeah!
62          And you know how their socks match their shirts?
63          (2.0)
64  Fred:   It's very careful dressing.
65          It's very careful dressing to (p-) kinda try to look like
            (0.7) what they see./
66  Mary:                       /Mm./
67  Fred:                           /On TV,
68                                          or [xxx     ]
```



```
69  Bob:                                        [Gap.
70                                                  G]ap.
71                                                   They buy at Gap.
```

As in the examples in (1), in these excerpts branding is used as a resource for social positioning, and as before, speakers hasten to name particular brands and fashions that typify a social category. But the speakers use these practices to carry out very different kinds of interactional work. Thus where Willie and Brand One produce high-status name brands with ease and familiarity, in lines 10 and 11 Fred uses multiple repair initiation strategies to signal that the kind of car she has in mind is not immediately accessible information: self-interruption, pausing, snapping her fingers, and offering a descriptor of the intended referent (*big bucks (.) little car*). When she does finally propose a brand, it is prosodically marked as tentative through vowel lengthening and rising intonation (line 13, *Vol↑vo:?*).

And even when brand names are treated as items the speaker can easily produce in talk, the effect is very different from that in the previous examples. Most notably, Bob's repeated use of one-word turns referring to brands or products seems designed not as discernment as a consumer of these brands but as part of a general stance of knowledgeability. Such turns are found, for example, in lines 12 (*BMW!*), 44 (*Sweaters.*), and 69 (*Gap.*). Bob's rapid production of commodity labels is consistent with the nerdy ideology valuing knowledge and intelligence (Bucholtz 1996, 1999a). Her turn shape, speed, and intonation all invoke a frame in which knowledge is displayed competitively. Such an interactional dynamic recalls that of a game-show contestant, or perhaps an eager student who wants to be the first to show that she knows the answer to the teacher's question. Indeed, in classroom contexts nerds use similar interactional strategies to gain the floor and respond to the teacher before other students.

Bob's nerdy interactional style here, then, is not part of a stance of discernment. She uses brand names as an incidental but convenient resource; the names of commodities are not important in their own right but only as information, which is more fundamentally valued. However, these girls do also take stances toward the commodities they mention. In each case, their stances distance themselves and associated others from the preppy social category. Thus Bob rejects the classification of Volvos as preppy on the grounds that her brother drives one (lines 23–27), and she denies that her own sweater is preppy on the grounds that it lacks a V neck (line 54). What is displayed here is not discernment but rejection of discernment, an inter-

actional stance that over time accrues into nerds' rejection of trendy youth culture more generally. Similarly, in example (3) several of the girls collaborate to characterize the "very *care*ful dressing" (line 64) of preppy teenagers: *their shoes match*, line 57; *their socks match their shirts*, line 62; (they) *kinda try to look like what they see. On TV* (lines 65, 67). Finally, Bob's branding of the preppy style (*Gap. Gap. They buy at Gap.*, lines 69–71) both distances preppy students from herself through the use of the third-person pronoun and implies that the semiotic valence of the clothing store Gap in youth culture is preppiness.

Despite nerds' overt disengagement from youth culture, then, they too show themselves to be keen observers of those who are so engaged. Although the meaning of preppiness, like any social category, is contestable, the general characteristics of the category identified by Bob and her friends are mentioned by other students as well. Their closely observed analysis of wealthy teenagers' style is in fact borne out in another ethnographic interview I conducted with two upper-middle-class European American girls. In example (3a) Josie (a 16-year-old junior), one of the wealthiest students who participated in the study, describes her dress practices in ways that echo Fred and Bob's characterization:

(3a)

```
8  Mary:                          =So you guys don't dress that way.
9  Josie:  Mm,
10         no,
11         mm we're kinda preppy. .h
```

In line 8 I ask Josie and her friend Zoe (a 17-year-old senior) if they dress in the baggy style associated with hip hop. In response, Josie offers the label *preppy* to classify their style. Later in the same interview, Josie provides additional information about her style, which she characterizes as a "confession" (line 93):

(3b)

```
89  Josie:  <sniff> And um,
90          but,
91          and then--
92          I like the Gap.
93          {That's my confession for the ↑day.} <tensed vocal folds>
94  Zoe:    That's ↑fi[:ne.           ]
95  Mary:             [There's no shame] [[in that.]]
96  Josie:                               [[And J   ]] Crew.
97          I'm obsessed with J Crew.
```



```
98          (0.6)
99  Zoe:    h
100 Josie:  But,
101         that's oka:y.
102         {I like to shop.} <whisper>
```

As in the previous example, again the interaction provides evidence of local challenges to dominant ideologies of consumption, albeit more indirectly. Josie jocularly frames her fashion aesthetic as a guilty secret for which she must receive absolution (offered by Zoe in line 94, by me in line 95, and by Josie herself in line 101). This framing only makes sense if it is recognized that for many students, to shop at mainstream, mass-market clothing stores like Gap or J. Crew was to demonstrate a conformist bent that belied a lack of discernment. Importantly, the equally commercialized and mass-produced clothing of Tommy Hilfiger, Nautica, and Polo was relatively immune to this charge, insofar as it had been resignified as part of an edgy and authenticated street-based style. (The fact that Gap clothing is less expensive than such designer brands seemed irrelevant to these teenagers; it appears that it is Gap's savvy marketing and wholesome yet hip image rather than high-end pricing that make it a much-coveted commodity for certain kinds of young people.) It is also significant that here the implicit charge of lack of discernment attaches to an extremely wealthy and high-status girl. Where for Bourdieu, the practices of distinction cultivated by the bourgeoisie position the proletariat as tasteless, here the cultural authority of street-based youth styles outweighs the structural authority conferred by socioeconomic status. However, Josie defuses the charges leveled against her as a rich girl by treating them in a jocular key, offering what I can only characterize as a "cuteness" defense through such devices as the pouty-lipped production of her fully released final [p] in *Gap* and *shop* (lines 92, 102) and the tiny voice in which she makes her admission, "I like to shop" (line 102), both practices that belong to Bourdieu's ([1972] 1978) notion of hexis, or socially inculcated bodily disposition. Josie's stance toward shopping via self-branding thus accrues toward the construction of the popular, preppy style of femininity that Fred, Bob, and Loden reject.

Branding, stances of discernment, and shopping discourse itself are not inherently gendered practices, and indeed their wide availability across social classes and identities within capitalist society permits them to be used for a variety of local interactional purposes. But as suggested in the foregoing analysis, the styles that young people claim for themselves and attribute to others through the use of these discursive strategies are closely

bound to gendered ideologies of youth cultural identities, from hip-hip masculinity to preppy femininity (as well as their gendered counterparts hip-hop femininity and preppy masculinity).

6. Stances of middle-classness

The critique of economic privilege that Josie reacts to in example (3b) is pervasive at Bay City High School. Like most Americans, most students at Bay City High would describe themselves as middle-class regardless of their actual class position. As already noted, youth-cultural styles do not correlate predictably with socioeconomic status; although the three friendship groups whose discourse is analyzed above had very different consumption styles, all three were middle-class to upper-middle-class. In order to locate themselves as acceptably middle-class in the perception of their peers, students of all socioeconomic backgrounds had to position themselves as neither too low-class nor too high-class.[11] One way to achieve such class positioning was through consumption practices and their visible manifestation in the clothing that students wore to school (as well as other commodities and services such as the food they ate at lunchtime and their means of transportation to and from school). But even more important in constructing the social meaning of such practices and products was the discourse through which these were evaluated as either class-appropriate or not.

One of the paradoxes of this preference for middle-classness among students at Bay City High is that working-class and lower-middle-class students often strove to wear expensive brand-name clothing (frequently the brand names favored by Willie and Brand One), while upper-class students tended to dress down. Indeed, many students described as "preppy" by themselves and others did not conform to the traditional meaning of that term: a polished, neat, conservative style. Rather, preppy students often wore ragged, wrinkled jeans or T-shirts, but usually in conjunction with more expensive items that clearly signaled that their threadbare clothing was a matter of style rather than necessity.

This complex relationship between clothing and class is articulated in Josie's discussion of her style in example (3c):

(3c)

```
15 Josie:              [[(My) history teacher]] my history teacher,
16       the way he put it is that,
17 Zoe:                       Oh ye[ah.
18                                   xx (poverty) right right right.]
19 Josie:                          [we're the s:tudied poor,
20                                                        we're the ]
         s:tudied {poor look,
21       you know  [like]} <smiling quality>
22 Zoe:             [h:  ]
23 Josie: our jeans have holes in the:m,
24       and they're like old,
25       like I buy all my jeans u:sed,
26       but like of course you know .h I like=
27 Zoe:                                          =c(h)an affo(h)rd=
28 Josie: I(h) ca(h)n afford to have {my new jeans you know,}
         <smiling quality>
29       but {that's okay.} <higher pitch>
```

Here Josie reports her teacher's critique of her and Zoe for their inauthentic class representation; their clothing is not a "natural" consequence of low income but is instead designed to produce the "studied" effect of indifference to their class privilege. Such a description may seem to reflect badly on the girls, but it also provides an opportunity for Josie to assert that despite how it may look to an outsider (such as the ethnographer), she does not have to wear old holey jeans; she chooses to do so. Several details make clear that Josie and Zoe both consider it implausible for others to perceive them as poor. The first of these is Josie's use of the epistemic stance marker *of course* in line 26 preceding her statement in line 28 that she can afford new jeans. The second is the use of laughing quality by both girls, precisely on the key words *(I) can afford* (lines 27, 28), which suggests that to think otherwise is quite literally laughable. And indeed, given that it was students from less privileged backgrounds who generally wore pristine, new, neatly ironed jeans (as well as those, like Brand One and Willie, who strove to emulate such students), no Bay City High student aware of this local semiotic divide would have difficulty recognizing from their clothing that these girls were not economically disadvantaged.

The class stance taken in example (3c) allows the speakers to differentiate themselves from poverty. In other interactions, conversely, students take up a class position that separates them from wealth. The examples in (4) that illustrate this point come from a group of mainstream middle-class European American girls, who fall somewhere in the middle on the scale of popularity and coolness; they are the vast group of "normal" teenagers at

the high school, who view themselves and are viewed by many others as unmarked in race, class, and youth-cultural style, in contrast to more socially visible students. The topic of conversation is the Winter Ball, a formal dance at the school. The girls have been discussing whether they plan to attend; as the excerpt opens in line 23 Iris is continuing a list of reasons why she will not attend. She has already provided two reasons: she has a volleyball game, and she has homework to do.

(4a)

```
23 Iris:    [[I: don't want to have]] to go find a dress,
24          I don't have any ti:me,
25          <tongue click>
26 Marilyn: [I'm going on Friday.]
27 Erin:    [Okay.
28                  We get the    ] picture.
29          So am I:.
30 Iris:    ↑Really?
31 Erin:    To g--
32          To the Winter Ball?
33 Marilyn: Oh no,
34          to get a↑dre:ss.
35          (0.6)
36 Iris:    Oh: h: [ho:!]
37 Erin:           [You:] have a dress.
38 Marilyn: I know but,
39          [(1.1)]
40          [<rustling of food packaging>]
41          I changed my mind.
42          (1.6)
43 Mary:    What kind of dresses do you have to wear like (.)
            [<unintelligible>]
44 Erin:    ↑[Aa:h!           ]
45          {You changed [your ] mind!} <high pitch>=
46 Iris:                 [Yeah.]
47 Erin:                                          =Yeah. .h
48          (0.8)
49 Erin:    No,
50          you can't change your {mi:nd.} <smiling voice quality>
51 Marilyn: ↑Why not?
52 Iris:    What,
53          you've got a dress and [now you're (getting) another one?]
54 Erin:                           [You can't buy another          ]
55          {dre:ss:.} <smiling voice quality>
56 Marilyn: {I want to return it.} <high pitch>
57 Erin:    You ↑wore it already!/
58 Mary:                        /[hh    ]
59 Marilyn:                     /[I left] the t(hh)ags o(hh)n.
60 Erin:    ↑MARILYN! [.hhh]
```



```
61 (Marilyn:)       [hh  ]
62 Erin:    I mean--
63 Mary:              hh
64 Erin:                 whatever your na(h)me i(h)s.
65 Iris:    {O:h: you're [so (lame)} .h} <breathy voice quality>
66 (Mary:)               [hh       ]
67          <click>
68 Erin:    .h: (.) Oh [↓no::!]/
69 (Marilyn:)          [hh   ]/
70 Iris:                      /You don't like it anymore?
71          (0.5)
72 Marilyn: I do:,
73          I just want another one.
74                                    [(I'm)      ]
75 Iris:                             [Where'd you] get it from?/
76 Marilyn:                                                  /I'm
           tired of it.
77         (1.1)
78 Erin:   [Nordstro:m,  ]
79 Marilyn: [Uh Nordstrom.]
80         (0.8)
```

As the interaction unfolds, it is revealed that Marilyn is dissatisfied with her dress for the dance and plans to buy a second one. Erin and Iris take up a thrifty, middle-class stance by jointly problematizing Marilyn for her wasteful consumption practices (see Miller 1998 on thrift as a middle-class value). Erin in particular uses a variety of linguistic resources to position herself as shocked by Marilyn's behavior. At the prosodic level, her use of high pitch marks her incredulity (lines 44, 45, 57, 60), while elsewhere her very low, elongated pitch (line 68) signals a scandalized stance. Such exaggerated prosody is used primarily with a variety of response cries (Goffman 1981) to show her disapproval (lines 44–45: *↑Aa:h! You changed your mind!*; line 60: *↑MARILYN!*; line 68: *Oh ↓no::!*). In addition to these affective markers, Erin overtly and repeatedly contradicts Marilyn's statements – *No, you can't change your mi:nd* (lines 49–50); *You can't buy another dre:ss:* (lines 54–55) – and offers reasons why Marilyn's plans are inappropriate: *You ↑wore it already!* (line 57). Although the primary responsibility for stance taking is shouldered by Erin, Iris also contributes to the evaluation of Marilyn and her actions, for example, by explicitly assessing her as "lame" (line 65). Overall, the reasons Marilyn offers both for her plan to buy another dress and her intention to return the first one (line 41: *I changed my mind*; line 59: *I left the t(hh)ags o(hh)n*; lines 72–73: *I do: (like*

it), I just want another one; line 76: *I'm tired of it*) are not accepted by the other girls as adequate justification for her decision.

Despite the outpouring of disapproval from both Erin and Iris, the interaction is in a joking key; Marilyn's behavior, while treated as slightly naughty, is not framed as a serious infraction of social norms. The implication of the frequent laughter and smiling voice quality from all three girls is that Marilyn's behavior is amusingly outrageous; her fickleness about her dress is portrayed as inappropriate not because she or her family is unable to afford a second dress (the issue of cost does not arise in the interaction, and in any event she expresses her intention to return the first dress) but because exchanging a previously worn dress for another at the last minute seems to be viewed as self-indulgent. In this way, Erin and Iris enforce appropriate middle-class consumption practices without seriously condemning Marilyn for her transgression of class norms.[12]

Example (4b) follows directly after this interaction. Following a pause, Iris initiates a change of topic, but Marilyn and Erin do not immediately recognize this shift and respond to Iris's *Oh my goodness* as an evaluation of the prior interaction. As it turns out, however, Iris's use of this discourse marker was a topic-shifting strategy that still focuses on the general theme of dresses for the school dance.

(4b)

```
80          (0.8)
81  Iris:   Oh my goodness./
82  Marilyn:                /Yeah.
83  Erin:   Oh my [goodness.]
84  Iris:         [Serena?  ]
85          Went to some store in (.) LA?
86          (0.8)
87  Iris:   and got this (1.1) <sounds of chewing> two hundred
            dollar dress for ten dollars.
88          (1.5)
89  Erin:   Is Serena going?
90          (1.1) <sounds of chewing>
91  Iris:   I think so.
92  Marilyn:            [Oh god.          ]
93  Erin:               [<sound of disgust>]
94  Iris:   hhhhh!
95          <1.2> <sounds of chewing>
96  Erin:   I'm not going. [.hhhh                    ]
97  Iris:                  [She got like (for) twenty] dresses,
98          for ten dollars,
99          I was so mad.
100 Marilyn: [Yeah Lindsay?]
```



```
101 Erin:    [Yeah Lin got ]--
102          Lin got hers for fifty,
103          it was a hundred and eighty dollar dress.
104 Iris:    [{Where'd she get hers?} <muffled>]
105          [<rustle of food packaging>       ]
106 Erin:    She ordered it from LA.
107          (1.1)
108 Marilyn:          {Gosh that is so--} <lower volume>
109 Erin:                                              I know.
110 Iris:                                                    Good.
111 Erin:    It's coming like [(0.6)                   ]
112                           [<rustle of food packaging>]
113          Friday night. hhh!
114 Iris:    Oh really?
115 Erin:    Yeah.
116          (1.2) <sounds of chewing>
117          So if it doesn't fit she's screwed. hhhh!
```

Here again stances are taken toward shopping, but the stance taking is quite different in this context. The topic here concerns bargain hunting, and it is clear that all three girls evaluate this consumption practice positively. This fact can be seen in the way in which the speakers use their evaluation of two other girls' success in bargain hunting to accomplish social differentiation. Lindsay's bargain hunting is evaluated positively (lines 108–110) and Lindsay is thus positioned as a friend (although one whose potential misfortune can still elicit chuckles; line 117), but Serena's bargain hunting is evaluated quite differently: her shopping spree engenders anger in Iris (line 99), suggesting that Iris feels envy (and not, say, disdain) that a girl she does not like has had such good luck in bargain hunting.

This example contrasts with the previous one in that earlier in this interaction heavy consumption – the purchase of a second dance dress by somebody who already owns one – has been assessed as a class-inappropriate behavior if it is motivated merely by a preference for something new. Conversely, in this example heavy consumption – buying twenty dresses for ten dollars each – is assessed as a class-appropriate behavior when it is motivated by the opportunity to get a good deal; here spending is a way of saving (Miller 1998: 59). In this way the girls position themselves not as opposed to heavy consumption but as ready and eager to buy if the price is right. This interaction indicates the parameters of appropriate consumption practices: some awareness of price is important, but for a good bargain it makes sense to spend just as much on ten dresses as one might otherwise spend on a single dress. Thus gender-based talk about ball gowns is simultaneously class-based talk about consumption.

Here and elsewhere in my data, teenagers position themselves as neither rich nor poor, but solidly in between. Overall, white students at Bay City High School tended to position themselves in opposition to the upper class rather than to the lower class, a reflection of the fact that in the liberal climate of the San Francisco Bay Area, white students were often positioned in the discourse of many teachers and by their classmates of color as both economically and racially privileged. European American students were able to evade this imposition of what some called "white guilt" by semiotically and interactionally locating themselves outside of the privileged social class, regardless of their actual economic circumstances (which in fact on average were clearly better than those of most nonwhite students).

7. Conclusion

As consumption eclipses production as the economic terrain on which identity formation plays out, it is increasingly necessary to bring together top-down and bottom-up approaches in the analysis of language, gender, and political economy. Based on the ways in which European American teenagers in the mid-1990s invested commodities with social meanings in discourse, interaction must be recognized as the place where such meanings are forged and negotiated in dialogue with larger economic structures. In discourses about consumption, teenagers oriented to a notion of discernment that allowed them to position themselves and others as both economic and social agents who entered into a variety of relations with youth cultural styles. Discernment emerged particularly within the interactional phenomenon of branding, a resource that gave local semiotic force to commodity labels. At the same time, white youth strove to locate themselves as tasteful (i.e., discerning) rather than classy (i.e., elite and privileged): middle-class stance taking enabled students to interactionally position themselves as neither rich nor poor, an important strategy in a context in which wealth and privilege were viewed as evidence of racial and economic injustice. Hence, gendered youth styles were simultaneously classed and racialized as well.

Rather than granting priority to adult (i.e., outsider) perspectives on this situation, the approach I have taken in this chapter privileges the local interactional and social meanings that young people themselves invested in commodities through the circulation of talk about brands, products, shopping, and consuming. Although new techniques of marketing research and

advertising have infiltrated youths' daily lives, teenagers are not simply willing dupes of unseen hegemonic forces (see also Nava 1992). Instead, in their talk about shopping, young people take up complex positions toward commodity culture that may variously resignify, reject, or reproduce dominant discourses of consumption. Through displays of discerning and nondiscerning stances toward commodities as well as evaluations of their own and others' class positions, speakers bring the economic world into their interactions in ways that are locally meaningful. In this way, they position themselves in relation to others in the commodity-saturated space of late capitalism, a positioning that takes on temporary salience within the interaction but through stance accretion becomes part of habitual social practice – habitus – and thus solidifies into more enduring kinds of identities. These processes are simultaneously top-down and bottom-up, meeting in the middle ground of discourse.

To be sure, these teenagers are not free agents who can simply opt to withdraw from commercialization, which permeates nearly every corner of their lives. Like the working-class British "lads" studied by Paul Willis (1977), whose resistant stances toward school eventually led them into menial jobs with little hope of advancement, in positioning themselves within local social structures, middle-class European American youth inevitably position themselves within larger economic systems as well, and typically in ways that reproduce rather than subvert these systems; even nerds, with their disavowal of trendy consumption, engage heavily in practices of nontrendy consumption. Thus the critiques of corporate marketing strategies issued by Klein, Schor, and other observers are not so much off base as incomplete, by focusing on advertisers' unremitting messages to youth but not attending to the social work accomplished through young people's engagement with commodities.

Linguistics and ethnography therefore have critical roles to play in materialist analyses. As feminist linguists continue to investigate the relationship between language, gender, and political economy, it is necessary to attend to practices and ideologies of consumption as well as production in order to understand the powerful yet never fully complete ways in which capital, symbolic and otherwise, continues to organize social life. And as researchers, like corporations before them, increasingly "go global," we must bear in mind the first lesson of ethnography: that even the most large-scale of social, political, and economic forces can only take shape within local interactional contexts.

Notes

* I am indebted to Bonnie McElhinny for inviting me to participate in "Words, Worlds, and Material Girls: A Workshop on Language, Gender, and Political Economy" at the University of Toronto in October 2003. I am also grateful to her and to audience members there and at the Department of Linguistics at the University of California, Santa Barbara, for useful feedback. Thanks are likewise due to Niko Besnier, Candy Goodwin, and Joan Pujolar for reference suggestions and valuable insights into the relationship of gender, language, and political economy.

1. Although Milner (2004) conducts ethnography as part of his study and attends closely to teenage "crowds" and styles, his focus on high school social structure as a symptom of the negative effects of consumer culture on American lives overdetermines his analysis and conclusions.
2. Unlike in some other parts of the world, among European American middle-class youth consumption does not come automatically laden with discourses of modernity, globalization, and cultural flux; despite the undeniably global nature of both production and consumption, most American consumers are in the privileged position of being able to ignore where their commodities come from, unless confronted with the evidence of sweatshops and other abuses through the work of anticorporate activists (Klein 2000). This obliviousness to the source of commodities is not distinctively American, but the structure of public high schools in the United States, which accommodates the proliferation of distinctive youth styles (Eckert 1989, 2001), tends to facilitate the consumption rather than the interrogation of corporate products (see also Milner 2004).
3. In many school districts in California, including this one, such arrangements have now been banned as part of a national concern with childhood and adolescent obesity.
4. However, in addition to this uncritical use of advertising, the same teacher posted numerous parodies of corporate advertisements in her classroom, mostly with anti-smoking messages. Such "ad busting" is a form of resistance to the relentlessness of marketing (Klein 2000).
5. The details of this conversational routine have been demonstrated to be peculiarly characteristic of capitalist cultures and to operate in distinctively gendered ways (Herbert 1990, 1991).
6. Daniel Miller's (2001) ethnography of shopping practices in North London demonstrates that the relationship between talk about consumption and actual practice is not straightforward and that talk allows for a degree of self-presentation that is not always at the forefront in the act of shopping itself.
7. Although here I limit my consideration of branding to consumption, as linguistic anthropologist Robert Moore (2003) points out in a semiotic treatment of branding, brands involve both production and consumption: branding as carried out by corporate employees, he notes, is a form of labor.
8. This issue is addressed in Klein's (2000) work primarily through the examination of anticorporate activist identities among a small minority of youth.
9. A much more literal example of the cultivation of taste is found in Elinor Ochs et al.'s (1996) research on how parents in different cultures socialize children to develop food preferences. Although many aspects of branding may be inculcated by parents, as children become teenagers brand preferences tend to be elaborated primarily through interaction with youth. Eckert (2003) has noted that autonomy in clothing choice is a marker of the symbolic movement from childhood to adolescence.
10. This is not to say that nerds do not orient to consumer culture at all. One brand-name product that was widely popular among nerds during my study was Converse Chuck Taylor All-Stars canvas basketball shoes, which nerdy teenagers especially cherished for their low cost and range of bright colors, enabling them to wear left and right shoes of different colors. My own preference for such footwear was very helpful in establishing relationships with self-identified nerds at Bay City High School.
11. Not all students sought to position themselves in this way, and one or two students from well-to-do backgrounds visibly rejected their parents' socioeconomic status by wearing tattered clothing, bathing infrequently, and living on the streets by choice. This situation is quite different from students who were forced into homelessness due to economic catastrophe and tended to hide their poverty.
12. It is also worth noting that some branding occurs in this interaction (lines 78–79), at least insofar as the department store where Marilyn bought her dress is mentioned by name. However, it is difficult to determine whether Erin's markedly "disgusted" intonation indicates her stance toward the store or toward Marilyn's behavior.

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Chapter 12
Cosmopolitanism and linguistic capital in China: Language, gender and the transition to a globalized market economy in Beijing

Qing Zhang

1. Introduction

Investigating the complex workings of globalization in a wide range of local contexts, feminist scholars in anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies demonstrate that processes of globalization are integrally gendered (e.g. Freeman 2000; Ong 1987). As Freeman argues, "the historical and structural underpinnings and contemporary forms of globalization are themselves deeply imbued with specific notions about femininity and masculinity and expectations for the roles of women and men" (2001: 1011). Freeman's own work (2000) and those of other feminist scholars have shown that such gendered notions and expectations naturalize and justify gendered division and disciplining of labor (e.g. Chang and Ling 2000; Lee 1998; Ong 1987). Characteristics culturally associated with gender are also naturalized and consequently justified as resources that are tapped into by both individuals and corporations to conduct gendered work in a globalized economy. The gendered incorporation of labor into the local operations of a global economy not only provides women and men access to different work opportunities but also produces new gendered identities in the local sites of global economy.

Sociolinguists have recently begun to investigate the linguistic consequences of globalization (e.g. Coupland 2003; Heller 2003; Leap and Boellstorff 2004).[1] However, little research has been done on the relationships between language, gender, and work in contexts of globalization. One example with particular relevance to such relationships is Cameron's study (2000) of a particular linguistic style prescribed by customer service call centers in the UK that incorporates linguistic features culturally associated