Constructing meaning, constructing selves :
Snapshots of language, gender and class from Belten High[1].

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1.   INTRODUCTION

During the course of their lives, people move into, out of, and through communities of practice, continually transforming identities, understanding, and world view. Progressing through the life span brings ever-changing kinds of participation and non-participation, contexts for "belonging" and "not belonging" in communities. A single individual participates in a variety of communities of practice at any given time, and over time: the family, a friendship group, an athletic team, a church group. These communities may be all male or all female; they may be dominated by males or females; they may offer different forms of participation to males and females; they may be organized on the presumption that all members want (or will want) heterosexual love relations. Whatever the nature of one's participation in communities of practice, one's experience of gender emerges in participation as a gendered community member with others in a variety of communities of practice.

It is for this reason that Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992a,b) argued for grounding the study of gender and language in detailed investigations of the social and linguistic activities of specific communities of practice. Following the lead of a number of feminist social theorists (see, e.g., Bem 1993, Butler 1994, Connell 1987, Thorne 1993 and

the papers in diLeonardo, ed. 1991), we warned against taking gender as given, as natural. A major moral we drew: the study of sex differences in language use does not automatically give insight into how gender and language interact in particular communities of practice. Rather, we proposed, the social and linguistic practices through which people construct themselves as different and as similar must be carefully examined. Many of the papers in this volume (see esp. Part III) aim to do exactly that.

Gender constructs are embedded in other aspects of social life and in the construction of other socially significant categories such as those involving class, race, or ethnicity. This implies that gender is not a matter of two homogeneous social categories, one associated with being female and the other with being male. As important, it also implies that no simple attributes of a person, however complex a combination is considered, can completely determine how that person is socially categorized by herself or by others, and how she engages in social practice. Suppose, for example, we categorize someone as a heterosexual middle-class African American professional woman. The attributes that make up this particular characterization--"heterosexual," "middle class," "African American," "professional" and "woman"--all draw on reifications that emerge from and constitute conventional maps of social reality. These reifications structure perceptions and constrain (but do not completely determine) practice, and each is produced (often reproduced in much the same form) through the experience of those perceptions and constraints in day-to-day life.

Language is a primary tool people use in constituting themselves and others as "kinds" of people in terms of which attributes, activities, and participating in social practice can be regulated. Social categories and characterizations are human creations: the concepts associated with them are not pre-formed, waiting for labels to be attached, but are created, sustained, and transformed by social processes that importantly include labeling itself. And labeling is only part of a more complex sociolinguistic activity that contributes to constituting social categories and power relations among members of a community. How people use language--matters of "style" that include grammar, word choice, and pronunciation--is a very important component of self-constitution. How people talk expresses their affiliations with some and their distancing from others, their embrace of certain social practices and their rejection of others--their claim to membership (and to particular forms of membership) in certain communities of practice and not others. And within communities of practice, the continual modification of common ways of speaking provides a touchstone for the process of construction of forms of group identity--of the meaning of belonging to a group (as a certain kind of

member). It is a resource for the orientation of the community and its participants to other nearby communities and to the larger society, a resource for constructing community members' relation to power structures, locally and more globally.

To give concrete substance to these abstract musings, we will examine some social and linguistic practices within several communities of practice related to one another and to a particular institution, a public high school in suburban Detroit. Our data come from Penny's sociolinguistic study[2] of a speech community as defined by that high school, which we shall call Belten High. For this study, Penny did three years of participant-observation in the early 1980s, following one graduating class of 600 kids through their sophomore, junior and senior years in high school. (More detailed reports on various aspects of this project appear in, e.g., Eckert 1988, 1989, 1990a). Her research yielded a taped corpus of about three hundred hours of speech, including one-on-one interviews, group discussions, and a variety of public events. The original study did not focus on gender issues, and that so much material relevant for thinking about gender construction emerged anyway is testimony to its pervasiveness in this community's practices. In this chapter, we draw on eighty of the one-on-one interviews, emphasizing phonological variation (in particular, pronunciation of certain vowel sounds) and sample stretches of students' talk with Penny about social categories and socially relevant attributes. We use a combination of linguistic and ethnographic data to give a partial picture of how gender, class, and power relations are being mutually constructed in this particular setting. What kinds of identities and relations are the students making for themselves and for others? How does this construction of their social landscape happen? How do different communities of practice get constituted and what is their relation to one another and to the institution of the school? Being female or male, athletic, studious, popular, a cigarette smoker, a beer drinker, staying out all night, wearing certain kinds of clothes and make-up, owning a car, using a certain vocabulary and style of speech, engaging in heterosexual activities such as cross-sex dating, wearing a constant smile, using illicit drugs--constellations of such attributes and activities constitute the raw materials from which the social categories of the school are constructed. It is the significance attached to these constellations and their constituents--their socially recognized meaning--that turns them into socially relevant categories mediating power, affiliation, desire and other social relations.

Who lunches with whom? Who talks to whom about what? Who touches whom and how (and where)? Who controls which resources? Who is admired or despised by whom? When the answers to such questions depend systematically on people's being

classified as belonging to one category rather than another, the social categories involved can interact with communities of practice in two ways. (1) They often form the basis for the formation of category-exclusive communities of practice, defined by their mutual orientation to the school and engaged in finding a mutual life in the school based in this orientation. (2) The categories themselves and the opposition between them can become the object of practice, defining a larger but more loosely connected community of practice focused on conflict over the practices of everyday life in the shared space community members inhabit. Thus communities of practice can overlap in significant ways. What makes them all communities of practice is not any shared attributes of their members, but the orientation of those members to joint participation in some endeavor, and in a set of social practices that grow around that endeavor.

2. SCHOOLING IN CORPORATE PRACTICE

The US public high school is designed to dominate and structure the lives of the adolescent age group--not just to provide academic and vocational instruction, but to provide a comprehensive social environment. The school organizes sports, musical and dramatic groups, social occasions such as dances and fairs, some social service such as canned food drives, and governing activities in the form of such things as class offices and student government. These activities are not simply organized by the school for the students. Rather, the school provides the resources and authority for the students themselves to organize these activities, and institutional status and privilege for those who do the organizing. Although an organizational framework with adult supervisors is provided, e.g., athletic teams have coaches, bands and choirs have directors, clubs have faculty sponsors, students themselves play substantial organizing roles (e.g., as team captains, band and club officers).

It is important to emphasize that while participation in this extracurricular sphere is optional, it is also expected. Extracurricular activities are viewed as integral to one's participation in school, and indeed, one's extracurricular career constitutes an important part of an entrance dossier for colleges and universities. The school is the community in which adolescents are expected to participate--a community extracted from the larger adult-dominated community that it serves. It is seen as a community designed especially for--and in the interests of--adolescents, and adolescents are expected to base not only their academic lives, but their informal social lives, in that institution. Adolescents who do not embrace this community are, therefore, seen as deviant: as "not caring."

Students are expected to compete for control of roles and resources in the production of extracurricular activities, and to base their identities and alliances in this production. This leads to a tight student hierarchy based on institutional roles and on relations with others (both student and adult) in institutional roles--in short, a hierarchy based on control of aspects of the institutional environment, and on the freedoms and privileges associated with this control. Those who participate in this hierarchy are not simply participating in individual interesting activities; they are building extracurricular careers and engaging in a corporate practice that has as much to do with visibility in and control over the school environment as with the content of the individual activities that constitute their careers.

For students participating fully in the extracurricular sphere, then, social status is constructed as a function of institutional status, personal identities are intertwined with institutional identities, and social networks are intertwined with institutional networks. Embedded as they are in a mobile hierarchy, social relations are competitive, and change with institutional responsibilities, alliances, and status. Students are constrained to monitor their behavior carefully in order to maintain a "responsible" public persona, and to focus their interactions on the network of people in the same school and even the same graduating class who are engaged in this endeavor. In this way, the school offers an introduction into corporate practice. Of course, corporate status and its concomitant freedoms and privileges come at a price. Participating in this hierarchy requires a certain acceptance of the institution's rules and values as articulated by the ultimate institutional authorities, the adults who occupy official positions in the school.

In schools across the United States, communities of practice develop around participation in parts of the extracurricular sphere (a cheerleading squad, a "popular" crowd, a class cabinet), and a broader overarching community of practice develops around engagement in the extracurricular sphere and the mutual building of extracurricular careers. Participants build careers in the extracurricular sphere and achieve a merging of their personal and school networks, of their personal and their school-based identities. This is a community based on an adolescent version of corporate, middle class social practice. Although this specific community of practice arises in response to the school institution, it is based to some extent in communities that have been emerging since childhood. Indeed, across the country, the students involved in the school's corporate affairs tend to be college bound and to come from the upper part of the local socioeconomic range. Many of them have already learned aspects of corporate practice at home, both through exposure to their own parents'

participation in such practice and through the middle class family practices and values that support corporate practices. (For example, middle class parents generally do not encourage their children to "hang out" in the neighborhood, but to cultivate friendships through school; and they commonly discourage their children from having a best friend in favor of having a more fluid network.)

At the same time that these students base their activities, networks, and identities in the corporate sphere of the school, others reject the school as the basis of social life. Indeed, in polar opposition to the corporate community of practice, there is a community of practice based on autonomy from the school. These students base their social lives, not in the school, but in the local neighborhoods and in the urban-suburban area more generally. Their friendships are not limited to the school or to their own age group, and their activities tend to arise from their alliances rather than vice-versa. These students are largely from the lower end of the local socioeconomic hierarchy, and embrace, strongly and consciously, working class norms of egalitarianism and solidarity. They consciously oppose the norm of corporate practice in the school, and they reject the institution as a locus of identity and social life. Because they are bound for the workforce immediately after high school, furthermore, the extracurricular sphere has no hold on them as qualification for future success; rather, it appears to them as a form of infantilization and as a hierarchy existing only for its own sake. Their focus is more on the local area, and on its resources for entertainment, excitement, and employment; they reject environments developed specially for their own age group and seek to participate in what they see as the real world. Furthermore, in this rejection of the school's adolescent environment, they seek independence from adult control over everyday life, body, activities and consumption.

This latter oppositional category always has a name: hoods, greasers, stompers, stoners, grits (depending on the region and the era) and, in the school in question, burnouts (or burns) or jellies (or jells, from jellybrain). The two main local names reflect the symbolic status of controlled substance use for the oppositional category in this particular school at this particular time. These names are used by all in the school, and embraced by those to whom they apply as well as to those who choose to apply it to others. On the other hand, the activities-oriented category in schools is not always given a name, a point we will discuss in Section 3. The group may, however, be called something like collegiates, preppies or soshes (from socialite), or, as in the school in question and other schools around the region, jocks, drawing on the symbolic status of athletic achievement for this social group.

In general usage, <u>jock</u> designates a committed athlete--and the prototypical jock is male. Except for the jocks themselves, students in Belten High use <u>jock</u> to designate a network of girls and boys who achieve visibility through their committed engagement in school-sponsored activities. (As we explain in Section 3, this labeling dispute connects to the absence of a name for the activities-oriented category in some schools; both reflect the near hegemony achieved by the activities-oriented network.) Although sports do provide the surest route to jockdom, especially for boys, other activities also confer that status.

The name <u>jock</u> points then to one important way in which school corporate culture constructs male dominance. The male varsity athlete is seen by the school institution as representing the school's interests, and this gives him institutional status and privilege. Competing as they do with other schools, boys' varsity athletics is the most direct way of establishing and defending the school's status and honor. Thus the status that a boy gains in varsity sports is connected directly to the luster he brings to the school--not to himself personally. This is a useful lesson to learn. Achieving individual status through one's efforts on behalf of an institution--being able to identify one's own interests with institutional interests-- is a hallmark of much successful competition in adult corporate practice.

Athletics is also the route that boys are expected to take to prominence. In a conversation with Penny, a group of male athletes extolled the skill, coolness, and hard work of a male student government officer. But they pointed out that he had had no choice but to seek a key student office because he wasn't athletic. In general, male athletes see non-athletic activities as an aside--as something one can do casually, as requiring no special skill, but possibly as one's civic duty. And the status associated with varsity athletics can be a tremendous advantage for a star athlete who chooses to seek student office--an advantage that can overturn the candidacy of a non-athlete with a long history of experience and service.

Although male varsity athletes can count on their accomplishments to establish their value to the community, their status, there are no parallel accomplishments in school that lend the same kind of status for girls. Since sports still do not yield the same payoff for girls as for boys (in Section 4 we discuss some of the reasons for this, and also note some changes in progress), the domain in which girls are expected to achieve prominence is already designated as second best. Girls may receive recognition through prominence in student government, through cheerleading or through participation in musical or dramatic activities. But for both boys and girls, achieving

recognition through these activities seldom if ever evokes the kind of vicarious pride of schoolmates that gives good athletes their special distinction. The female supportive role is formalized in high school in the pairing of such activities as girls' cheerleading and boys' varsity athletics; and in the feminization of organizational activities such as holding bake sales, organizing dances, etc. Girls tend to do the majority of the behind-the-scenes work for school activities, while boys predominate in top managerial roles (class president, student body president, etc.).

Thus in a number of ways school corporate culture continues students' education in the male dominance characteristic of most American institutions and American society at many levels. It also continues and indeed intensifies education in what Rich 1980 dubbed "compulsory heterosexuality." High school brings an institutionalization of traditional gender arrangements, heterosexuality and romance. The institutionalization of the heterosexual couple is embodied formally in the king and queen of the high school homecoming and prom. Heterosexuality and romance are also publicly constructed in high school through formal activities like dances and informally in the status of dating and in each class's "famous couple." When the yearbook depicts a "cutest couple," the relation between social status and success in the heterosexual marketplace is made visible.

Although adult corporate practice doesn't recognize the "cutest couple" in an institution, socializing outside the workplace is still largely driven by business and professional alliances and still mainly organized around heterosexual marriage partners. The support role of female cheerleaders for male athletes is succeeded by wifely hosting and presumptive willingness to follow wherever a husband's career trajectory leads. But there are signs of rupture in this conflation of the personal and the institutional in both adolescent and adult practice, and it is driven by ongoing larger-scale changes in gender relations. Just as girls are beginning to reject cheerleading at boys' sports events in favor of playing on their own teams, corporate wives' own careers are making them unavailable to host dinner parties. Gender transformations have begun to challenge the all-encompassing character of corporate practice, albeit on only a small scale.

And in a few places, openly gay or lesbian highschoolers are beginning to resist the heterosexual imperative of traditional mixed-sex schools. For example, a group of Los Angeles highschoolers recently organized an alternative "gay prom," which was reported nationally. Fifteen years ago gay and lesbian students were not "out" at Belten High. We don't know to what extent this may have changed, but it is a safe bet that when the yearbook depicts a "cutest couple," they won't be of the same sex.

The names of the categories that correspond to <u>jock</u> and <u>burnout</u> at Belten High, and the specific styles and activities that signal their opposition (use of controlled substances, leisure activities, clothing, musical tastes, territorial specialization, etc.), vary regionally and locally, and change through time. But it is close to universal in US public high schools for two opposed social categories to arise that represent some kind of class split and that constitute class cultures within the school. And so far as we know, the construction of these cultural groups always interacts in interesting ways with the construction of gender identities and relations (though of course the nature of that interaction may vary significantly). In most US schools, race and ethnicity also enter into the interaction, but in this particular virtually all-white school those other social dimensions are salient only inasmuch as they provide the overarching discourse within which whiteness is constructed and differentiated. Indeed, everything that we have discussed and will discuss is at the same time part of the construction of white hegemony.

The jocks and the burnouts arise as class-based communities of practice in response to the school institution. Each is based in the endeavor to build a way of life in and out of school that makes sense and that provides the means to construct valued identities. The jocks emerge out of many students' mutual desire to build lives within the school institution, and to develop identities and careers based in the extracurricular sphere. The burnouts emerge out of many students' need to find ways to exist in the school that neither implicate them in corporate practice nor cost them their participation in the institution, ways that at the same time allow them to foster a strong sense of identity and participation in their own broader community.

The jocks' and burnouts' opposed orientations to the school, to institutions, and to life, are the terrain for daily struggle over the right to define school, adolescence, values. Both categories are seeking autonomy, but in different places. Jocks seek autonomy in the occupation of adult-like roles within the institution, in building individual identities through school-based careers, and in benefiting from the kinds of institutional freedoms and perks that are the rewards for participation in these careers. Burnouts seek autonomy in the avoidance of adult-run institutions, in laying claim to adult prerogatives, and in the development of networks and activities in the local community that will be the site of their adult lives. The jocks work the center of the school institution, while the burnouts work its margins.

Because it is so basic to life in school, the jock-burnout opposition comes to define the landscape of identities at Belten. Those who are neither jocks nor burnouts commonly

refer to themselves as <u>in-betweens</u>, and nuances of identity throughout the school are described in the same terms that construct those two categories. Thus the jock-burnout opposition constitutes the dominant discourse of identity in the school, and one could say that orientation to that opposition engages almost every student in the school in an overarching community of practice. But while both communities emerge from strongly held and positive values, they do not emerge as equal within the school. The jocks embody the institution-- their personal relations are inseparable from formal institutional relations and their activities are inseparable from school activities,. This bestows an institutional legitimacy and function on their activities and their alliances, including their heterosexual alliances, that stands in stark contrast to the illegitimate status accorded to burnouts' activities and alliances. The co-construction of social category and gender is indeed intimately connected to the construction of institutional power--a power in which boys and girls do not share equally.

3.   LABELING, CONFLICT AND HEGEMONY

Gender and social category are not constructed independently of each other, nor do they exist independently of practice; rather, they are continually co-constructed in the course of day-to-day practice. In the same way, labels do not exist independently of the social practice in which categories are constructed--the use of labels is not simply a matter of fitting a word to a pre-existing category. Rather, labels arise in use in relation to real people in real situations: people label as they chat, make observations and judgments about people, point people out to others, challenge people, and so on. It is through such activities that labels are endowed with meaning.

We have already referred to some students as <u>jocks</u>, others as <u>burnouts</u>. But this is misleading inasmuch as it obscures the very important fact that labeling is a socially significant and contested practice within the school, and part of the continual construction of the categories it designates. The use of the term <u>jock</u> or <u>burnout</u>, and of terms related to the salient issues around which these categories are constructed (e.g. <u>slutty</u>, <u>cool</u>, <u>snobby</u>), is part of the process of constituting categories and identities.

Students coming into the school see the institution as unchanging--they see institutional roles waiting to be filled. But they see their participation or non-participation in the school as a creative endeavor. Even though there have "always been" jocks and burnouts, girls and boys, kids coming into high school are actively and mutually engaged in constituting selves within the constraints of what has, in their view, always been--and engaging with those constraints in the process.

The jocks and the burnouts seek to define right and appropriate practices, given their relation to the institution of school. Each sees the other community of practice as embodying wrong and inappropriate practices. For the burnouts, the jocks are "about" competition, hierarchy, advantage, elitism, ambition, image-building. Girl jocks especially are seen as phony—as obsessed with popularity. For the jocks, the burnouts are "about" drugs, trouble, hedonism, lack of ambition. And girl burnouts are often seen by jocks as sleazy, if not slutty. This conflict about category "content" can present itself as a dispute over what category labels "really" mean, but of course words as such are never the real issue. The real issue is the normativity of particular practices and the deviance of others. In the following sections, we will examine labeling practices as part of the construction of social category and gender (along with other aspects of identity such as class, age, etc.). We begin with the issue of what it means to have a label at all.

Because of the deep ideological nature of the split between jocks and burnouts, it is not surprising that the terms <u>jock</u> and <u>burnout</u> are used differently by people in different places in the school. As we have noted, jocks resist accepting that label--or indeed any label--as a name for a social category defined by extracurricular orientation. Jocks, and particularly male athletic jocks, promote exclusive use of the term <u>jock</u> to refer to someone as an athlete. This is illustrated by the following response by a male varsity athlete to Penny's question, which calls the very term into question ("I don't know really...what that means")[3]:

1. Do you consider yourself a jock? Somewhat I guess, yeah. Just - I don't know really what, you know, what that means. Just, I play sports and stuff I guess, you know.

In accepting a self-designation <u>jock</u> purely on the basis of athletics, jocks reject any "derivative" meanings. This has more than one effect. Although "playing sports and stuff" might in principle be socially no more consequential than preferring apples to oranges, the status of <u>jock</u> is not a socially neutral one. The jock (male) athletes' use of the term <u>jock</u> to refer to someone as "simply" being involved in sports suppresses the connection of that involvement to social status, membership and opportunities. At the same time, given that within the school this term is used to refer to a more generally powerful group in the institution, laying claim to it for athletes alone can have the effect of emphasizing the centrality of athletes to the institution. This latter effect depends, of course, on others' use of the term as a label for the socially dominant activities-oriented group.

The relation between corporate participation and athletics is brought home particularly in the following quote from one of the outstanding athletes in the school. He had been participating in an independent soccer league, in which the level of play was far above that in the school, and explained why he gave up that league to play for the school:

2. WHEN YOU HAVE A TEAM LIKE THAT WHY DO YOU GO INTO HIGH SCHOOL SOCCER? l don't, well, because - because that's - it's - you know, you want to play - recognition, I don't know. We should have stayed but what you do is, when- you - there's high school sports, more people are apt to play that than play in another league, you know, because you have the recognition, scholarships, like that.

In spite of the male athletes' insistence on the narrow meaning, most people in Belten do not use the term <u>jock</u> to refer to a person in school simply as an athlete. Rather, they use it to talk about a community of practice--all the people, male and female, who build their lives around school activities. In example 3, a burnout boy directly challenges the equation of jockdom and participation in sports proposed by the (athletic) jock:

3. I - well - some kids uh who went out for football in seventh grade turned into jocks. Pretty much. But it doesn't - you can - it doesn't make you a jock if you go out and play a sport. Because I played in football in junior high and I wasn't considered a jock. I used to get high before the games.

Being an athlete doesn't make you a jock if you don't adhere to jock values. Here we see that jocks ought not to get high--or at least not be so overt in their defiance of school regulations (the ambivalence of jocks in relation to substance use is discussed in Section 4.)

Only one male jock in the corpus explicitly admitted that the label could legitimately cover more than athletes. He was a past class president and a talented musician but not an athlete. Note that he does not call himself a jock but does acknowledge that athleticism is not all there is to jockdom:

4. You get your super jocks that - hell they play track and basketball and baseball, and I'm sure those people are going to - "Hey, jock!"   that's their middle name practically.   But, um, I think you don't have to play sports to be a jock.

In fact, this boy, a leading singer in the school, recognizes that he is frequently referred to as a <u>choir jock</u>. The choir, which travels internationally, is a prestigious activity in the

school and similar to sports in bringing recognition to the school through competition with representatives of other schools. Students have specified a difference between a member of the choir and a choir jock--a choir jock is a choir member who gets involved in more than just the singing, as described by two different choir members:

5. . . . that's that clique. That's what everybody knows about, the concert choir jocks. . .I guess it's the officers, you know, the people that are involved, like Dan Smart, our president. I don't know, he's, you know, he's always involved in choir. Then there's Cheryl Smith. Herbie Jackson, he's always, you know, that's his highlight of our school.

6. IS THERE A CROWD OF PEOPLE THAT ARE CHOIR JOCKS? Oh, yeah. Definitely. We always talk about them, Kim and I. . . . We're not involved in choir that much. Yeah I mean we go to a few activities once in a while, but we don't make sure we attend all of them.

But why do so many jocks protest being labeled as members of a social category? Why do they keep trying to explain their being called jocks as just a matter of describing athleticism, a socially neutral attribute? A plausible explanation lies in the near hegemony jocks achieve during the course of the transition from junior high to the senior year of high school. That ascendancy is threatened by being seen as such; jocks' interests require obscuring the social processes that subordinate non-jocks generally and burnouts in particular. It's important for jocks not to see themselves as denying others access to valuable resources by exclusionary processes. It's important for them to constitute the activities on which their community of practice centers and from which they reap advantage as normative, with those not so engaged defined as socially deviant and thus directly responsible for any disadvantages they may suffer in the school. If the dominant category is not even labeled (and, as we noted earlier, in many schools it is not), then its distinctive interests are somewhat easier to ignore, its hegemonic control over social values and institutional norms more readily established. Two category labels in direct opposition reflect a live ongoing social struggle.

The jocks' unmarked status emerged in the course of junior high school. The jock and burnout categories reportedly emerged in seventh grade as apparently equal rivals, with core people in them pursuing different activities and espousing different values. In the following quote, one burnout girl describes the original split in junior high as just such a matter of competing values and choices; she notes explicitly that category labels were used by each group to "put down" the other:

7. Yeah, OK, there was, you know, kids that got high and smoked and thought they were really cool like us ((laughter)) and then the other ones that didn't party or anything, were always getting into sports and being goody-goodies and, you know, all that stuff so we just started putting down those people, calling them <u>jocks</u> and everything, and they call us <u>burns</u>, and that was just going on for a while, while we were all at [junior high].

A self-designated "in-between"--a girl with primary burnout connections and interests, but also with many jock ties and interests--describes quite poignantly the regulative power of the polarized labeling and the conflicts, internal and public, that those labeling practices helped produce.

8. That's - that's where all the - the jock/burn or the jock/jelly thing started. Because I didn't hear anything about it in elementary school. But once I hit [junior high], you know, that's all you heard was, "She's a jock," "She's a jell," you know. And that's all it was. You were either one. You weren't an in-between, which I was. I was an in-between ((laughter)) because here I was, I played volleyball, now what, three years. Baseball, I'll be going on my eighth year, OK? So, I get along really good with, quote, jocks, OK, and I get along really good with jellies, because I'm right - I'm stuck right in the middle. And in my ninth grade and tenth grade year, that kind of tore me apart a little bit too. Because I didn't - my parents wanted me to make a decision. "Now which way are you going to go?"

Near hegemony had, however, been achieved by the beginning of high school. Early on in her fieldwork, one of the burnout boys asked Penny whether she'd yet talked to any "normal" people, reflecting his (perhaps wry) admission of being relegated to deviant status. With apparently less ironic distance, a girl who is a star athlete and popular jock denies hearing people insult one another by labeling.

9. The jocks sort of stay to themselves, and the burnouts stay to themselves and everybody else kind of stayed to themselves too. So you really - if you didn't have to you didn't mix.

She then responds to Penny's query as to whether she thinks of jocks and burns as separate groups:

10. The burns, yes. Well, not so much in high school. Like jocks - you're not really aware of it.

Though jock hegemony is not total, there is every indication that jocks now often manage to present themselves and be taken as the "unmarked" or "default" category, of which "you're not really aware." Only the opponents of the institution are seen as taking a stand with respect to the institution. Although jocks are highly visible, many no longer see themselves as actively orienting toward institutional values in opposing jells. Rather, their own attitudes and choices seem "normal" or inevitable in the absence of some kind of social pathology. They no longer see jells as in serious conflict with them, presumably at least in part because they now are more or less sure that jells will never "lead" them, will not be in controlling positions. In the following example, a jock girl from a burnout neighborhood talks about being the only jock at the bus stop:

> 11. But, you know, it doesn't really bother me, I just figure ((laughter)) who cares what they think of me, you know, they're not - they're no uh, you know, president, that they can cut me down.

Early on in the process of constructing institutional affiliation and opposition and the other aspects of class and gender practice found in the school, jock ascendancy was being asserted more directly, according to this jock boy:

> 12. There was like - at least once a week it was, "jocks are going to fight jells after school," you know. DID THEY REALLY? DID YOU GET IN FIGHTS OR WAS IT JUST A LOT OF TALK? Never. Talk. They started it every time. We'd about kill them. Because we had the whole football team, and they wanted to fight the football team. You know. DO YOU REMEMBER WHICH GUYS WANTED TO GET IN FIGHTS? None of the guys on the football team, really, you know - they didn't care.

Note that the quote reveals an awareness of jock as a category label used in conflict - and also note this guy's bravado and (retrospective) claim of fearlessness. We now turn to the matter of this focus on physical prowess in constructing class-based male social relations.

4.   SPORTS AND TOUGHNESS: CATEGORY MEANINGS AND MALE POWER

Although the jock boy quoted in example 12 above claims that physical strength was concentrated in jock hands, the jock-burnout split really became visible and contentious when some excellent athletes among the burnouts refused to play on school teams (cf.

example 3 above). Both jock and burnout boys staunchly claimed their group could beat the other in any physical contest, whether a game or a fight.

As a number of writers have observed (see, e.g., Connell 1987 and Segal 1990), practices aimed at developing and displaying superior physical strength and skill and confidence play a central role in constituting a hegemonic masculinity in America and many other "Western" nations. "Hegemonic" here implies not pervasiveness in fact but power as a (partly fantasy) ideal of manliness. The body aimed at is muscular and tough, able successfully to withstand physical attacks and defend others against them, able to win in attacks on others. Competitive sports are a primary arena in which such a masculinity is constituted, at least as an ideal.

Organized sports continue to enter into the practices constituting adult masculinities. Even relatively inactive men watch and talk about football games every week of the season. A number of writers have noted the prominence of sports metaphors in business talk, politics, and other areas of corporate life. That "level playing fields" have generally not been thought of as having females running down them is clear. The "locker room talk" that prototypically occurs among teammates before and after games constructs women as men's sexual prey. Male camaraderie excludes women and includes other men as fellow "tough guys," to be slapped on the back, playfully punched around in certain contexts.

Such kinds of talk and bodily demeanor are, of course, not confined to the corporate world but are part of many male- dominated workplaces. The form in corporate lunchrooms is different from that in factory cafeterias, but a "macho" style of masculinity and male-male interaction rooted in sports and, more generally, physical toughness is common. Indeed, working-class men are often taken as exemplary of this ideal. Jobs that institutionalize force, strength, and even violence- -e.g., building trades, police and prison work, military combat--are low on the class hierarchy but high on the scale of hegemonic masculinity. (See McElhinney, this volume, for discussion of ways women now being hired as police officers are finding to share in normative conceptions of what it means to be a good police officer without jeopardizing their sense of themselves as "feminine.")

Although the burnouts in this school are certainly not the super tough gang members that are so frequently studied in the city, they are urban-oriented, and pride themselves on their relation to the streets-- to fights, to encounters with the police, to the criminal justice system. Much of the early oppositional behavior between jocks and burnouts in

elementary school involved contests of physical prowess-- both athletic and combative challenges. The burnouts were viewed as "tough," and the jocks were hard pressed to maintain their own prowess in the face of the burnout challenge.

Hegemonic masculinity emphasizes the possibility of physical force. It has been a central symbolic component in constructing heterosexual men as different from both women and homosexual men--in principle able to beat up either one. Of course, both women and gay men have begun to challenge this view of straight men's superiority in physical strength. Note, e.g., the enormous increase in female participation in organized sports and such activities as body building in recent years and the emergence of the "clone" style among gay men since the gay liberation movement began. But a focus on physical strength remains prominent in constituting heterosexual masculinity and, though in different ways, in constructing the picture of a prototypical jock and a prototypical burnout.

For the jocks, then, this physical prowess centers on participation in school-sponsored sports, violence that is tamed and put into service for the institution. The notion that jocks have tamed their violence is a crucial aspect of a more general emphasis on the control of one's urges that is an important component of corporate practice. This control is seen as requiring additional strength and autonomy. (In Section 6, we will discuss how this control translates into control of sexual urges for jock girls.).

Although girls' varsity athletics is increasing in importance at Belten High as elsewhere, it still has not achieved the same institutional importance as boys'. This is only partly because girls' sports are less well attended and thus girls are less able to bring glory to the school and vicariously to those who identify with it. It is also important that the association of the athlete with physical prowess conflicts with feminine norms, with notions of how a (heterosexual) girl "should" look and behave. Heterosexual femininity is constructed as directly contrasting with the superiority in physical strength embodied in hegemonic masculinity. Too much athleticism and physicality in a girl suggests a "butch" style of femaleness. Thus, it is problematic for an athletic girl to refer to herself as a jock because of the "unfeminine" image that label implies.

In example 13, an accomplished female athlete, who is part of the popular crowd, denies being a jock.

> 13. . . . like there's some girls that play baseball and basketball and track, and they're just always - they play football and they just do everything, you know, the real, you know, girl - you can tell, they walk down the halls pushing each

other, and, you know. That kind of jock. Yeah, yeah, those kind you know? I wouldn't call my- myself a jock, I'd say. I can be athletic or something like that, but, like people don't call me "jock," you know.

The disassociation of femininity and athletic prowess presents a powerful double bind for girls, for varsity sports are seen as the ultimate demonstration of accomplishment (and as a kind of accomplishment with greater institutional status than a superb artistic performance). The association of sports with accomplishment is commonly contrasted to other visible school activities, particularly those that are associated with female status, which are seen as relying on popularity. This emerges in the conversation of both male and female jocks, as in the following female athlete's observation, when discussing whether you had to know the right people to do a lot of things in high school:

14. You can't say that for the team sports and stuff -- you have to be good. But it is nice to know those people, and to be in the committees and stuff you still have to be interviewed, but if you're interviewed by kids and they like you, you're probably in. The uh student council, that's — if you know a lot of people, that's just like popularity, sort of. Yeah. I don't know if it is all popularity, but—

Being the girlfriend of a star male athlete is at least as sure a route to female achievement in the jock network as being a star athlete oneself (and perhaps less risky, given the possibility of jeopardizing success in the heterosexual marketplace through being too athletic). We will discuss jock girls' pursuit of popularity in the next section. Popularity draws not on the athleticism and physicality associated with prototypical male jockdom but on its visibility.

For burnouts, the labels at Belten focus on substance use rather than physicality. But being a burn invokes an orientation away from school and toward urban streets and the toughness to walk them freely, being able to protect oneself in a fight. The image is decidedly not female. While burnout girls can fight, they do not gain the same status as burnout boys for doing so. On the contrary, while being tough in a fight is seen as somewhat admirable for men, women's fighting is quite generally looked down upon and viewed in terms of kicking and scratching rather than "real punchouts." Further, and more important, while girls can fight among themselves, and a few do, they cannot and they do not fight boys. Thus they cannot walk the urban streets with the same sense of personal autonomy that boys can. Burnout girls remain vulnerable to male violence. They cannot really establish their anti-institutional burnout status through

being ready and good fighters who need not fear others' attacks on their persons. They can, however, draw on other components of burnout toughness to constitute themselves as true "burns." In the next section, we will discuss the important place of "coolness" in burnout girls' construction of themselves.

5. POPULARITY AND COOLNESS: CATEGORY MEANING AND FEMALE AGENCY

The fundamental meaning of being a jock is orientation toward the institution and the possible rewards for ascending its hierarchical structures. The fundamental meaning of being a burnout is resisting the institution and its regulative constraints. These fundamental category meanings are, as we have already seen, overlaid with much else. In particular, girls are effectively barred from the practices most central to establishing category membership-- the pursuit of athletic achievement, on the one hand, and of urban toughness on the other. They then must engage in other practices to construct their identities as jocks or as burnouts. The pursuit of popularity for jock girls and of coolness for burnout girls allows them to actively constitute themselves as embodying the same basic meanings as the prototypical category members, their male peers. Going out with a jock boy helps the jock girl achieve popularity; going out with a burnout boy or, even better, a guy already out of school, reinforces the burnout girl's claim to coolness. Jock girls are not the only ones pursuing popularity, burnout girls do not monopolize coolness. But popularity and coolness do play central roles in constructing class-based ways of being female. We will start with popularity, but coolness comes in almost immediately as connected to burnout popularity in junior high.

Popularity is a complex that combines some kind of likability and good personhood with visibility, community status, and number of contacts. The pursuit of the latter three are integral parts of corporate practice, necessary for gaining control of (and strategically dispensing) resources. Inasmuch as the jocks embody the school institution, their networks in some sense define the school community. Thus their institutional positions not only lend them opportunities for visibility, contacts and status, but center them in a community as circumscribed by the school. A burnout or in-between may well have as many social contacts as a jock, but to the extent that these contacts extend outside the school, they remain "unfocused" and do not contribute to a communally constructed visibility. Furthermore, even if one's many ties are in the school, to the extent that they do not include those in power in the school, they cannot provide the opportunities for visibility that contribute to "school" popularity."

Burnout girls do sometimes talk of themselves or others in their network as "popular." The rubric, however, is always applied in the past tense when reminiscing about early junior high and the days when burnouts were still in active competition for school-based prominence. But while this prominence was being constructed within the school population, its focus was not on access to school resources, but on access to activities outside of and "around" school. A girl whom all the burnouts point to as having been popular in junior high, for example, explained to Penny why her crowd was the "big shit crowd":

15. I just think that we used to have a lot of fun, you know, and a lot of - you know, I mean things going outside of school, you know, and a lot of people, you know, looked up at us, you know - "it's really, cool", you know, "I wish I could."

The following burnout girl told why she had wanted to hang out with this same crowd:

16. How did you get to be friends with those particular people? Um, popularity. They - they were the popular ones. . . . By ninth grade, they were the popular ones and, you know, I wanted to be known, I wanted to be known by the guys, and I wanted to be known by this - and I started, you know, hanging around them.

Popular burnouts were highly visible in school as people to hang around if you wanted to join in their fun and "cool" activities outside school. Coolness, as we will see later, is quite overtly aspired to and the early burnout popularity was as well. In response to Penny's query about how she started hanging around the popular burnouts in junior high, the speaker we just heard above explained:

17. Um, well, if I'd hear about, "Well, we're all going over to so-and-so's house tonight" , you know, I'd say, "You think you'd guys mind if I came along" , you know, and, you know, just slowly, you know, I started to get to know them. I was - I'm not shy but I'm not outgoing either. I'm in-between. So I could really, in a way, ask them, and in a way, try to be accepted. That's why I think I started smoking cigarettes. That's when I started drinking beer, and all of that stuff.

In the following quote, a burnout girl talks about two burnout girls who went out intentionally to get popular in junior high. The speaker is an admirer of Joan, the second

girl she mentions, and considers her attempts to get popular to be funny but not reprehensible:

18. I know that one girl, Sally Stella, she's a - I don't know, she was just trying to make friends with everybody so she could be really popular, you know? And she thought she was so beautiful, and she had so many friends, and - I don't know - and Joan Border, like - you know, she can talk to anybody, and she was making a lot of friends too, like - it was like they were competing or something, her and Sally . . . trying to see who could get the most friends and ((laughter)) I don't know

In junior high school when the jocks had not yet come to dominate status in the school, they and the burnouts were two separate visible "popular" crowds competing to define "the good life" in school. Both participated in school activities--burnout girls were cheerleaders, burnout boys played on school teams, and both burnouts and jocks attended school dances and athletic events. However, the two categories engaged in these activities on very different terms. The burnouts viewed school activities as opportunities to "party," and their mixing of school activities with "illicit" activities eventually disqualified them from participation. At the same time, the school's insistence on monitoring these activities as a condition of participation led those who had not been sent away to back away. One might say that the issue of popularity--prominence within the school as someone to hang out with--was closed for the burnouts when they left junior high, as articulated by two burnout girls:

19. Girl 1: Well, nobody's really popular

Girl 2: any more

Girl 1: Yeah, but like they were popular then.

Girl 2: Then they were, yeah.

Penny: WHAT DID THAT MEAN?

Girl 1: To have them be popular?

Girl 2: They were the coolest.

Girl 1: Yeah. They were the ones that had girlfriends and boyfriends first. They were the ones to try everything new out first. They hung around all the junior high kids first. And uh, that's-

Penny : THEY WERE THE ONES EVERYBODY WANTED TO BE WITH?

Girl 1: Yeah, yeah, every time I tried to be with them.

But by high school, the burnouts are firmly oriented outside of the school and many refer to jocks in general as the popular crowd.   Just as jockdom is denied as a social category by those in it, so is the pursuit of popularity by jock girls. In example 20, a girl on the outskirts of the central jock crowd talks about an upwardly mobile friend who left her group to try to get in with the right people:

> 20. WHO DO YOU SUPPOSE SHE THOUGHT WERE THE RIGHT PEOPLE?
>   Um, the popular, the jock people, I think. That's what I think.

But the pressure to deny an interest in popularity for girls aspiring to jock success is so strong that some will use the term jock to mask a concern with popularity as shown by this extract in which the girl spoken of in example 20 is (on a different occasion) talking with Penny.

> 21. My girlfriends, we kind of tend towards the -- I don't know, I -- and none of my girlfriends are going out with, um, -- I don't, I don't like to label people, but, burn-outs. We, I guess we, we mainly go ((laughter)) out with, I guess, the, the athletes, the jocks and stuff.   And, um, or the, um, the-- I wouldn't say popular crowd, but, you know.

As we will discuss further below, Jock girls need to be circumspect about their interest in popularity, but jock boys have a different orientation. For jock boys, popularity is overwhelmingly viewed in terms of contacts, visibility and community status. For them, it is clearly tied up with institutional influence as shown in one class president's discussion of the inevitability of wanting to be popular. He articulates the separation between popularity and likability:

> 22. It starts in sixth grade, I think. You - you want to be popular because you're the oldest in the school. You want people to know you. And then once you get into junior high, you just have to be. I mean just - not because - see, you want to because you - you feel it's the right thing to do. You want to - you know, it's a big thing to be popular, but a lot of people want to be popular for the wrong reasons. They want to be popular because they think it's going to get them friends, or, uh, they think things will be easier if they're popular. But it's not like that.   In fact, it could backfire. You - you create a lot of resentment if you become popular for the wrong reasons.

This boy has a clear sense of the connections among popularity, contacts, and institutional effectiveness. And he displays the sense of institutional responsibility that

won him his position and that indeed made him an unusually effective student government officer. Get popular because "it's the right thing to do": it doesn't get you friends or make your life generally "easier." The following jock boy told Penny that while there is no formula for becoming popular, the sine qua non is getting to know people:

> 23. I think - be really outgoing you know, and don't just stay with one group of friends, you know - if you just stay really - if you don't ever go out and talk to anybody else, then, you know, nobody's never going to know who you are or anything if you're just really - stay home all the time, so - be outgoing, I think.

So jock boys will admit to the pursuit of prominence - high visibility - as a means to the end of playing a leadership role in the school, winning in the competitive governance game. Still, prominence achieved through selection to the all- state football team takes much less social effort - your achievements for the school are all that's necessary for people to "know who you are," much less risky than having to take active steps to get to know people. (We discuss some of these risks in the next section.) And above all, this prominence is clearly based on skill and achievement-- not on looks, charm, or some doubtful social "manipulation."

For girls, institutional success derives less from individual achievement than from the kinds of relations they can maintain with others. In the adult corporate world, wives still frequently derive status from their husbands' occupations, secretaries from the institutional positions of their bosses. School-based prominence for girls depends very heavily on ties of friendship or romance with other visible people. The pursuit of popularity for these girls is not generally acknowledged as such but involves a careful construction of personhood (Eckert 1990). Hence the cultivation of attractiveness, both beauty and a pleasing personality, becomes a major enterprise, to which cultivation of individual accomplishment typically takes a back seat.

This enterprise, we might point out, is supported by a multi- billion-dollar teen magazine industry aimed specifically at adolescent girls, providing them with the technology of beauty and personality (see Talbot, this volume). The adult successors are women's magazines and self-help books (including those to help with communication; see Cameron, in press). So trained, women are far more likely than men to be obsessed with being the perfect spouse, the perfect parent, the perfect friend- the perfect person, most loved and liked. They are far less likely to be obsessed with being the highest-paid CEO or the winningest lawyer or the world's top theoretical

linguist--top star in an openly competitive "game". Personal ambition is not, of course, completely out of the question for girls and women. Feminist challenges over the last 150 years to give middle class women access to educational and occupational equity have opened some alternative routes for women's success. For adolescent girls, as for women in later stages of life (Eisenhart and Holland 1990) however, such ambition has an uphill battle to wage against the "attractive person" obsession.

The following description by a "second tier" jock girl of what constitutes popularity, and her account of her fear of really popular people, foregrounds the importance (and fragility) of a carefully constructed persona and especially one that the "right" boys will find appealing:

> 24. I think personality has got to be the number one, you know - personality is probably the most important. If you've got a really good personality, you know, make people laugh all the time, then you're pretty much popular. Good looks is probably second runner up, real close up there! BUT WHEN YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT PERSONALITY . . . YOU SAY YOU GOT TO MAKE PEOPLE LAUGH AND SO ON, BUT WHAT ELSE IS- Well, just so that when you're around them you feel comfortable and not, you know, really tense or anything - That's probably the best. ARE THERE PEOPLE THAT MAKE YOU REALLY TENSE? Yes ((laughter)) Like who? Um, boys in particular. Really popular ones. I get really tense around them. I'm not - I don't know. The boy atmosphere is just kind of ((laughter)) I've really been close to girls all my life. I've really had really close friends, so it's kind of hard for me - I get really tense around people like that. But - even still - really popular people, I'm still really tense around. Maybe I'll say something wrong, maybe, you know, I'll do something wrong, and then they'll hate me, and then ((laughter)) you know.

What is essential for jock girls is approval from those already prominent, especially but not only boys. To be seen by those able to grant entry to the inner circle as desiring such entry is to jeopardize the chances of getting it.

Coolness, we have already seen, is central to burnout girls' popularity at the point where being the center of a visible crowd in the school is still an issue. But even after concern with such popularity is left behind, coolness persists as the core of burnout status for girls. Coolness is a kind of toughness without the added implication of physical power associated with male burnouts. Coolness is a viable alternative to institutional popularity--it asserts independence of institutionally imposed norms,

willingness to flaunt the injunctions of authorities and claim all the privileges of adulthood if and when one so desires. Treating conservative or conventional (especially, in this case, school-centered institutional) norms with disdain is one way to constitute oneself as cool, to stake out the territory of burnout status. Just as institutional status is essential to social status for a jock, female or male, coolness is essential to social status for a burnout, female or male. And while a burnout girl may not have access to full burnout status through fighting or other displays of physical toughness, she can be cool, verbally and emotionally tough.

In example 25, a burnout girl describes how she and another friend gained status during junior high as the "biggest burnouts":

> 25. But like we got along with everybody and uh we partied every day and that was the cool thing. And uh we'd smoke in school and that was cool. We used to get E's in classes [a failing grade], that was cool. You know? So, I don't know. I guess that's how.

Coolness stands in stark opposition to the jock girls' squeaky-clean image, and to their concern with being liked by the appropriate people and respected as "responsible" school citizens. But of course, jock girls are not cowering goody-goodies, and this opposition poses a threat to their own sense of autonomy. Thus just as burnout girls view the quest for popularity as part of their childish past, jock girls relegate the pursuit of coolness to childhood. The only time a jock girl mentioned coolness in the entire corpus of interviews was in accounting for burnouts' behavior in junior high school:

> 26. Most of the people that were in junior high doing these kind of things ended up in high school ((laughter)) doing them even worse, so ((laughter)) WHEN DO KIDS START DOING THAT? Probably fifth and sixth grade when you think you're really cool - that's your cool age. Seventh, sixth, seventh and eighth grade is your cool age, and everybody thinks, " hey, I'm really cool, man! I'm gonna smoke! I'm gonna be real cool!". So that's what - where it starts probably.

Here, disparagingly, smoking is seen as putatively "cool" because it represents defiant assertion of adult privilege. Notice, however, that the speaker in example 26 stresses the immaturity of those vigorously pursuing coolness, implying that their claims to adult-style autonomy are sham. She is implicitly defending herself against charges of sheep-like obedience by constituting herself as having been able to uphold norms when "everybody" was urging defiance.

Jock girls are the only ones who do not embrace the notion of coolness. Burnout boys, and the more partying in-between boys talk occasionally about coolness as something to be cultivated, as in example 27, when an in-between boy told Penny why he could stop smoking at any time:

27. Because I don't need them. I only do them for, you know, the coolness.

And burnout girls talk about coolness affecting their decisions with humor, but not with shame, as shown in example 28:

28. I would have liked to done cheerleading or volleyball or something. AND WHY DIDN'T YOU? Some of it was uncool, you know, it was kind of uncool for - because I was considered a big burnout. ((laughter))

And just as jock boys want to insist on their physical toughness, a fair number find coolness appealing. There are tensions in jock status for American boys connected with the need to assert a certain independence of institutionally imposed strictures on activities while at the same time using the institutional resources for enhancing their personal status. It's important for them to be seen as independent actors, not institutionally ruled. Being labeled squeaky-clean can suggest a meek deferring to school (or parental) regulations, whereas there can be a positive value attached to "coolness" - a stance of disregard for others' assessments, a willingness to engage in practices adults have forbidden, an assertion of disregard for possible negative judgments from others, a kind of social courage. So although jock boys do not speak of actively pursuing coolness, apparently because they don't want to appear to be "trying," they do sometimes speak of it as a desirable quality and one that influenced their choice of friends in junior high. At the time of this study in Belten High, smoking, alcohol consumption, and (other) drug use were of great importance for defining burnout status. As we've already noted, the name <u>burnout</u> and the more local name <u>jell</u> or <u>jelly</u> (from <u>jellybrain</u>) refer directly to drug use. And burnouts, both girls and boys, freely define themselves in these terms. After all, drug use is a powerful symbol of their rejection of adult authority and their assertion of adult autonomy. Thus although use in itself doesn't establish someone as a burnout any more than athletic skills confirm jock status, it's important for the burnouts to try to hold the jocks to squeaky-cleanness and to reserve drug use for themselves. If one can violate institutional norms and still reap all the institutional privileges, it becomes hard to see what is gained by eschewing institutionally endorsed roads to success. Thus the well-known fact that many jocks drink, and that a number of jock boys do some drugs leads some to claim that those

people are not actually jocks, or that the category itself no longer exists (again suggesting its becoming unmarked as discussed in section 3). This is illustrated by another quote from the girl who described herself as "in-between" in example 8:

> 29. I've come to believe that there isn't such a thing in Belten, or anybody that I've met, that is a jock. Because I know for a fact that my volleyball ((laughter)) team, after games and after tournaments, we'd have parties, and we'd be drinking. And some of us, you know, I - I play volleyball, and I smoke, and there's a few others that do. And I thought back, and I said, "You guys are supposed to be jocks, what's the problem here?" ((laughter)) you know. And they said, "Hey, you know, we have a good time too". you know.

The opposition that locks jocks and burnouts into these quite divergent identity practices extends its terms into either community of practice as well. Within the broader jock network, there is a good deal of diversity in behavior -- there are clusters of girls who are truly squeaky clean, and there are clusters of girls who "party." The salience of partying in the jock-burnout split leads many jocks to refer to this latter "partying" cluster as "kind-of burnouty." Similarly, among the burnout girls, there are degrees of "burnout-ness."

The main cluster of burnouts is an extensive neighborhood-based network that goes back to early childhood. The girls and boys in this cluster originally engaged in school activities in junior high school, until, as discussed in Section 3, their non-corporate orientation came into obvious conflict with school norms. Quite distinct from this large cluster is another, smaller, cluster that is not neighborhood-based, but consists of a group of girls who got together in junior high school. These girls were never interested in school activities in junior high except for the consumption of dances from which they were quickly excluded for drinking and getting high, and they pride themselves in being quite "wild" in comparison with the rest of the burnout girls. They stand out from other burnout girls as extreme in dress, demeanor, substance use, illegal behavior, etc. One of these girls, in describing who stands where in the school courtyard, which constitutes the smoking section and the burnout territory, demonstrates the strategic nature of labeling. (The speech in parentheses in this quote is directed to passers-by):

> 30. OK, us, you know like the burnout (yeah, 'bye — wait, bum me one) the burnout chicks, they sit over here, you know, and like jocky chicks stand right here . . . . And then there's like um the guys, you know, you know, like weirdos that think they're cool. They just stand like on the steps and hang out at that

little heater. (Say, Hey!) And then the poins are inside in the cafeteria, because they're probably afraid to come out in the courtyard.

In this quote, by referring to a group of burnout and in-between girls who smoke as jocks, the main group of burnout boys as weirdos, and other in-betweens and all the jocks as poins (<poindexters), she is positioning herself and her friends in relation to the rest of the school population. She is defining her group as normative burnouts, and it is not surprising that others have referred to them, in turn, as "burned-out burnouts."

There are many fault lines in the neat divisions we have made between jocks and burnouts, and many in the school find identification with either group deeply problematic. Some of the strongest disapproval of jocks by non-jocks and of burnouts by non-burnouts is reserved for what are seen as typically female modes of seeking popularity and asserting coolness.

6.   SNOBS AND SLUTS

A major character flaw that many in the school associate with jocks is being stuck-up or snobby. Boys can, of course, be snobs. But it is far easier for boys than for girls to achieve institutional prominence without drawing the charge of being stuck-up. The easiest way is just to shine on the football field. But not all boys have that option. Recall the successful class president quoted in example 22 above. He clearly saw the potential for others' resentment when one cultivated prominence. He recommended inclusiveness and tolerance of others as the best strategy for not raising others' hackles:

> 31. . . . if you're not snobby about it, the people tend to - you t- you tend to overcome, and win a lot more people if you become popular but still at the same time not too snobby.   I try to talk to a lot of people now, and like right now, you know, because - because I'm president of the class, there's a lot of people that, sort of like, may know me by name or something, but there's not like really a - a group of people I won't talk to. Because a lot of people, they'll say, "Well, I don't like to talk to people in the courtyard" ((burnouts)) , you know. YEAH. RIGHT. That's just the way it is. But I don't see what's wrong with it. It's not like you're s- you're- you're becoming one.   Which is not, you know - what they do, it doesn't bother me. If they want to do what they do with their life, it's fine. And you shouldn't distinguish between certain types of t- people. You should just want to relate to as many people as possible.

But for jock girls, pursuit of a wide range of contacts carries with it a threat to the persona they struggle so hard to develop. To talk to a burnout girl "in the courtyard" is indeed to run the risk of "becoming one." Why? Because, as we have said in many different ways, jock girls are judged primarily by their associates and only secondarily by their achievements. For boys, in contrast, the achievements come first. It is overwhelmingly girls who describe other girls as excluding people, as pursuing recognition by the school's stars at the expense of those who outside the star circle. This is how one burnout girl accounted for not going out for cheerleading in ninth grade (note that this is not the same girl quoted in example 28):

32. DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN ACTIVITIES AND STUFF LIKE THAT? Um, ninth grade, I was involved in volleyball, because that's when it started. Um, dances, here and there. I just went to talk to people. I wasn't dancing or nothing. I went to listen to the band and that. Um, uh, I can't say I really went to any basketball games or anything like that. DID YOU GO OUT FOR CHEERLEADING OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT? Now that started in the ninth grade. And that's when I - well, how - really know how to explain how I felt. I felt that at that time, I didn't have to do that to be popular. And I thought, "hmm, cheerleaders - everybody's going to look up at them, and they're going to, you know ((laughter)) they're going to be stuck up, and I don't want to be known as a stuck up cheerleader, and - so I steered away from that. I wanted to be one though. You wanted to be one- That's -- that's what was, that --. I did, you know, because I knew I'd enjoy it. And I thought, well, look at the ones that were last year. All the girls look down on them. "She's a stuck up cheerleader" , you know. So -

Here a quintessentially jock activity for girls - cheerleading - is equated with being seen as stuck up (and thus to be avoided whatever its other attractions might be). In example 33, a burnout girl says how she assumes jocks view people like her:

33. I think of like jocks as like sort of higher up, you know, so you think that you know, they'd be saying, "Hey," you know, "let's get rid of these like diddly little people," you know?

The management of social visibility, as we have seen, preoccupies girls seeking status as a jock. It does not, however, endear a jock girl to those who are not welcomed to her orbit, or who is so busy networking that she has no time for her old friends. Even for a girl who cares only about her status among the activities-oriented crowd, the twin projects of cultivating a pleasing personality and pursuing prominence are hard to

balance successfully. If the pursuit of prominence is too evident, even other institutionally minded folks may well reject the personality thereby produced as stuck-up, snobby. Likability within the jock crowd cannot be sacrificed, because one needs social ties of friendship or romance for success as a jock girl: one must be someone others want as friend or sweetheart. Good personhood ought to make others feel welcome, not excluded.

Girl jocks, then, face considerable difficulty. They must regulate their social alliances with care in order to attain the social visibility they need. But this regulation tends to involve excluding many, which leads naturally to charges of being a snob. Being a stuck up snob, however, is inconsistent with the pleasing personality the successful jock girl needs. And of course the good personhood the jock girl constructs is itself seen as laudable, a special kind of achievement compared implicitly to the not-so-good personhood of others who have not made the same effort to seek such goodness. Such invidious comparisons, however silent they may be, also tend to lead those put down by them to view jock girls' pride in their personae as more evidence of their being stuck-up. Thus part of burnout girls' explicit rejection of popularity by the time they reach high school derives from their despising what they see as the snobbery and sense of superiority of jock girls. But that is not all.

Part of the presentation of a corporate being is as a person who is "in control" of both her professional and her personal affairs. In the interests of presenting an image of corporate competence, jocks uniformly hide personal and family problems from their peers (see Eckert 1989). Jocks, in addition, strive to maintain an image of control over their "urges," and for jock girls, this involves importantly a control over their images as heterosexual beings. Burnouts, on the other hand, emphasize "being yourself," and value the sharing of problems. And while burnout girls do not necessarily flaunt heterosexual engagement, they certainly are not concerned with presenting an abstemious image, a concern that would be decidedly "uncool".

It is important to emphasize that it is above all the heterosexual image that is at issue in this opposition, rather than sexual behavior itself. While a jock girl's unpublicized engagement in sexual relations with a boyfriend may be considered her own business, any appearance of promiscuity is not. Indeed, anything that contributes to such an appearance, including styles of hair, dress, and makeup as well as demeanor, will be seen as "slutty" and can seriously threaten a jock girl's status, losing her girl friends as well as the possibility of being judged an appropriate public partner for a jock boy. One jock girl even considered dating too many boys to be dangerous for one's reputation:

34. Well, maybe there's some, I don't really know, that go out with a different guy every week. Because I-- I don't-- I don't think that's so much true, because you can -- that-- that would kind of give you a bad reputation ((laughter)) I think. I don't know. I'd leave a little space in-between.

To be labeled a <u>slut</u> is to fail in the school's corporate culture. It is not surprising, then, that jocks view the prototypical burnout girl as slutty, and that burnouts view the prototypical jock girl as phony and uptight. The crucial difference is not so much in sexual behavior, but in the fact that burnouts, in opposition to jocks, are not concerned with sluttiness - either in image or in behavior. Burnout girls view so-called slutty patterns of dress and demeanor as simply personal characteristics, which they may or may not think problematic, but certainly not as making someone an unsuitable friend. <u>Slut</u> is a category label that fuses gender and class.

Both burnout and jock girls actively construct their social statuses and they do so in ways that allow them to cooperate with their male peers in constituting the basic social orientation of their respective categories - resistance to institutional norms in the one case and participation in the hierarchical institutionally sanctioned practice in the other. In both cases, however, the girls lack access to the full repertoire of practices that can constitute category status for boys. And the practices open to girls in each category are highly likely to evoke great hostility from girls in the other category. Burnout girls vigorously reject the relation- cultivating popularity so important to jock girls: they hate the snobbiness and the "holier than thou" attitudes that they associate with it. Jock girls in turn are contemptuous of the lack of "self-control" associated with coolness. They see coolness as all too easily leading to sluttiness, which they roundly condemn - and work hard to keep at bay.

Burnout girls and jock girls construct strikingly different solutions to the dilemma created for them by the overarching gender structures they all experience structures characterized by male dominance and heterosexist preoccupation with sexual differentiation. And each group judges the other's strategic moves in response to these constraints very harshly. One result is that the overall differences in normative patterns of practice between burnout and jock girls are far greater than those between burnout and jock boys. After junior high, opposition -- and conflict -- between burnouts and jocks centers on opposition -- and (primarily) symbolic conflict -- between burnout and jock girls. This is reflected with startling clarity in patterns of phonological variation, to which we now turn.

7.   PRONOUNCING SELVES

The depth of the jock-burnout opposition in Belten High is borne out by differences in speech between the members of the two categories: differences in vocabulary, in grammar, in pronunciation. But more important, these speech differences are not simply markers of category affiliation, but carry in themselves complex social meanings that are part of the construction of male, female, jock, burnout—tough, cool, slutty, casual, mean. Finding these meanings through correlations between the use of linguistic variables and indicators of social practice is a major challenge for sociolinguists. In this section, we will focus on several phonological variables that enter into the construction of social identities in Belten High, and that simultaneously are part of what constitutes a "midwest," or Detroit, or Michigan accent. The production of linguistic styles is part of the production of identities, and local and regional pronunciations provide some of the resources that can be put to stylistic use.

The following discussion will focus on two vowels that have symbolic significance in this community. The symbolic significance is associated with recent innovations in pronunciation—innovations that reflect sound changes in progress:

- (uh) as in fun, cuff, but, is moving back so that it comes to sound like the vowel in fawn, cough, bought.

- The nucleus [a] of the diphthong (ay) as in file, line, heist raises to [U] or [O], so that the diphthong may sound more like the diphthong in foil, loin, hoist.

For each of these vowels, pronunciations in the stream of speech will vary from the conservative to the innovative with several stages in between. Most speakers in the community use the full range of pronunciations, and generally within the same conversation. However, speakers will vary in the frequency with which they use the more conservative pronunciations and the more innovative pronunciations. It is in the speaker's average pronunciation, or in the strategic use of one or the other pronunciation, that this variability comes to have social meaning.

The changes described for the vowels above represent linguistic changes in progress, and certain social principles about such changes have emerged over the years (see Labov 1972, Chambers 1995). In general, sound change originates in locally-based, working class communities, and spreads gradually upward through the socioeconomic hierarchy. In this way, new sound changes tend to carry local meaning, and to serve as part of the local social-symbolic repertoire. This means that the speech of locally-based

working class groups will generally show more of the innovative variants discussed above than that of middle class groups in the same community. Middle class speakers, on the contrary, are more likely to avoid clearly local pronunciations inasmuch as they are engaged in corporate institutions that strive to transcend local resources and local loyalties. It is to be expected, then, that burnouts, with their heightened locally-based identities and loyalties, might use more of the advanced variants for these vowels than the institutionally-identified jocks.

Gender, on the other hand, does not correlate quite as consistently with linguistic variables as class. Females quite regularly lead in sound change, but there are cases in which they do not. (see Eckert 1990 and Labov 1991 for a piece of the debate about gender and variation). More interesting, gender commonly crosscuts class, so that for instance while working class women may lead working class men in a particular sound change, middle class women may lag behind middle class men in the same change. Such patterns can only emerge from a co-construction of gender and class, and this co-construction emerges quite clearly in the speech of the kids of Belten High.

In across the board correlations of (uh) and (ay) with sex and social category membership, we find that while the backing of (uh) as in <u>fun</u>, <u>cuff</u>, <u>but</u>, correlates only with social category, with the burnouts leading, the raising of the nucleus in (ay) (<u>file</u>, <u>line</u>, <u>heist</u>) correlates only with sex, with the girls leading. Are we to stop with these correlations, and declare that the backing of (uh) 'means' burnout and the raising of the nucleus in (ay) 'means' female? Are they markers of gender and category membership or are they symbolic of some aspects of social practice and identity that are part of what jocks and burnouts, and males and females are about? In fact, when we dig deeper, we will see that these data reflect a great complexity of social practice.

The following tables[4] show figures for correlations of speakers' sex and social category affiliation (as assigned on the basis of network positions and descriptions by self and by others) with the backing of (uh) and the raising of (ay). The correlations in all of these tables are significant at the .000 level, indicating the minimum likelihood that the correlations could be the result of chance. In each table, a probability value is shown for each group of speakers. The absolute numbers are not important, only their relative values: innovative pronunciation is most frequent among the group of speakers for which the number is highest, least frequent among those for which it is lowest. When we tease apart sex and social category membership in the data for (uh), as shown in Table 1, we find that within each social category, the girls lead the boys, although particularly among the jocks this lead is not large enough to be significant in itself. We

also find that the burnouts' lead over the jocks is somewhat greater among the girls than among the boys.

INSERT TABLE 1

Correlations for extreme raising in (ay) show a similar pattern to those for the backing of (uh), as shown in Table 2:

INSERT TABLE 2

What can be drawn from Tables 1 and 2 is that whatever distinguishes jocks and burnouts also distinguishes boys and girls within those categories; or whatever distinguishes boys and girls also distinguishes jocks and burnouts within those sex groups. One would be hard pressed to establish whether the backing of (uh) or the raising of the nucleus in (ay) is associated with femaleness or burnoutness. And indeed, what distinguishes gender from sex is that femaleness and maleness cannot be imagined independently of other aspects of identity, such as jock- and burnout- hood.

If these vowels serve to construct meaning in the high school, and if category and gender interact in as complex a way as shown in the earlier sections, we might expect to find some of this complexity reflected in the vowels as well as in labeling practices. Let us turn to the division among the burnout girls discussed in Section 5, in which burned-out burnout girls distinguish themselves from the 'jocky' burnouts. It turns out that these girls are overwhelmingly in the lead in the use of innovative variants of both (uh) and (ay).

Table 3 separates the burned-out burnout girls from the "regular" burnout girls. While the "regular" burnout girls still back (uh) more than the jock girls, the burned-out burnout girls are far more extreme:

INSERT TABLE 3

A similar pattern shows up for the raising of the nucleus in (ay), in which the burned-out burnouts are overwhelmingly in the lead:

INSERT TABLE 4

Vowels such as these do not just fall into a neutral linguistic space. Consider the following segment of conversation with a burned-out burnout:

35. . . .we used to tell our moms that we'd-- uh-- she'd be sleeping at my house, I'd be sleeping at hers. We'd go out and pull a all-nighter, you know ((laughter))

I'd come home the next day, "Where were you?" "Jane's." "No you weren't." Because her mom and my mom are like really close -- since we got in so much trouble they know each other really good.

Interactions are situations in which social meaning is made. When this girl says to Penny, for example, "we'd go out and pull a all-nighter," raising the nucleus of (ay) in all-nighter so that it clearly sounds like <u>all-noiter</u>, Penny will associate what she perceives about this girl in general, and what the girl is saying in particular with that element of linguistic style. And presumably in speaking to Penny in this way, she is presenting herself as a burned-out burnout--as someone who gets around, does pretty much what she wants, gets in trouble, has fun, doesn't clean up her act too much for an adult like Penny, etc. In the course of this mutual construction, the variable (ay) takes on meaning - perhaps not in isolation, but at least as a component of a broader style. In their extreme speech, then, the burned-out burnout girls are not just using phonetic variants with a meaning already set and waiting to be recycled. Rather, their very use of those variants produces a social meaning. They are simultaneously creating meaning for (ay), and for being a burned-out burnout. Thus, as in the labeling discussed in the earlier sections, the use of phonetic variation and the construction of identities is inseparable.

8.   CONCLUSION

Belten High provides some glimpses of communities of practice at work. Their members are engaging in a wide range of activities through which they constitute themselves, their social relations, and project future life histories. Language, gender, and class are all being produced through such social practices. These practices have locally distinctive features, but they show patterns reflecting the influence of a larger society and its institutions. They also reflect historical location with its particular pasts and prospective futures.

Readers may wonder just which communities of practice there are. Do girls and boys form separate communities of practice? Do jocks and burnouts? What about in-betweens? Jocky-jocks? Burned-out burnouts? Does the student body of the whole high school constitute a community of practice?

Questions like this miss a critical point about communities of practice: they are not determined by their membership but by the endeavors that bring those members (and others who have preceded or will succeed them) into relations with one another (which

may or may not be face-to-face), and by the practices that develop around, and transform, these endeavors. So certainly most - perhaps all - of the student body members belong to a community focused on the issues of curricular and extracurricular activities sponsored by the school or other practices involving students that occur at school or are relevant to what is going on at school. The practices toward which community members are oriented focus around the issues we've briefly discussed, some high-level and others more mundane: how and whether to compete in the school-based hierarchy, how and whether to participate in the heterosexual marketplace, relation to school and family authority, post-high school prospects, who to hang out with during school, what to do directly after school (and with whom), what to do in the evenings and on week-ends, where to eat lunch, whether to use drugs, what to wear, how to talk, and so on. Athletic boy jocks and burned-out burnout girls, for example, have different forms of membership in this large community of practice. And in the process of pursuing these different forms of membership, they attend to communities of practice of their own, based on and constituting specific places and points of view within that larger community.

We don't actually have to worry about delimiting communities of practice in advance. Rather we look at people and the practices mediating their relations to one another in order to understand better the raw materials through which they constitute their own and others' identities and relations. There is not a community focused on linguistic practice, a community focused on gender practice, a community focused on class practice. As we've seen, seeking popularity (or refusing to), aspiring to coolness (or refusing to), and similar practices are saturated with implications for language, gender, and class. Practices of various kinds have at one and the same time implications for language, for gender, and for class. And the constitution of socially significant communities - both their membership and the actual content of the practices that make them into a community - has an ongoing history.

We've explored two aspects of language use at Belten - labeling and other kinds of talk about social categories and relations, on the one hand, and variation in the pronunciation of certain vowels, on the other hand. The first gives us a perspective from linguistic content on how gender and class practice and struggles centered on them proceed. Social labeling discriminates among people and is used as a weapon to divide and to deride. Attempts to define and delimit what labels mean are really attempts to delimit what people and the social structures they build can or should be like. Unequal power in general social processes translates into unequal power in

succeeding in definitional projects. (See, e.g., McConnell-Ginet 1989 for some discussion, albeit more narrowly linguistic, on how social contexts affect definitional success.) The prize, of course, isn't controlling what this or that word means; the prize is controlling the immediate direction of this or that aspect of social life, perhaps continuing existing social structures and relations or perhaps transforming them in some way. Social talk helps in the process of institutionalizing power and gender relations, helps give local force and bite to larger-scale social constructions.

Investigations of phonological variation offer a way to view similar phenomena but at a different level. Actual uses of language always have a formal aspect as well as content, and form always enriches (sometimes contradicts) what is conveyed in social talk. Formal properties of utterances in many cases are the only source of social meaning. Now how one pronounces a particular vowel on a particular occasion seldom receives the same conscious attention that shapes the content of answers to questions about popularity and coolness. Nor are ordinary people as well able to say what someone else's vowels sounded like as they are to report the content of what she said. But as Section 7 shows, the low-level details of pronunciation can give lots of information on how people are actively constituting their own social identities and relations. And it is such subtle variations and the social meanings they express that are the stuff of which long-term and large-scale changes in conventions of linguistic practice are made.

Social talk at Belten made it clear to us that there were not separable processes constructing gender and class. Male dominance and class relations are both involved in issues of physical prowess, forms of female agency and class practices link critically to popularity and coolness, and heterosexism informs the content of class-linked masculinities and femininities. General patterns emerge only when we stop trying to partition off matters of class from matters of gender. Similarly, patterns of vowel pronunciation are clarified when we try thinking about class-gender complexes rather than class and gender as independent. Our extracts from interviews also suggest, however, the messiness of practice, its failure to fit perfectly with neat structural analyses, the social ambiguities and contradictions it embodies. Only by continuing to examine different communities of practice and the complexities within them can we really begin to come to grips with the historicity of language, gender, class and their interactions. Our extracts from interviews also suggest, however, the messiness of practice, its failure to fit perfectly with neat structural analyses, the social ambiguities and contradictions it embodies. Only by continuing to examine different communities

of practice and the complexities within them can we really begin to come to grips with the historicity of language, gender, class and their interactions.

ENDNOTES

[3] All quoted speech is taken from tape-recorded interviews. Penny's speech is printed in upper case. Hesitations, false starts, etc. are not edited out of these materials.

[4] The statistics in this and all following tables were calculated using Goldvarb 2, a MacIntosh based version of the variable rule program, which is a statistical package designed specifically for the analysis of sociolinguistic variation. For information about the analysis of variation see Sankoff (1978)

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TABLES

Female Jocks	Male Jocks	Female Burnouts	Male Burnouts
22.	23.	24.	25.

Table 1: Correlation of backing of (uh) with combined sex and social category.

Female Jocks	Male Jocks	Female Burnouts	Male Burnouts
26.	27.	28.	29.

Table 2: Extreme raising of the nucleus of (ay) with combined sex and social category.

Female Jocks	Male Jocks	Main F. Burnouts	Burned Burnouts	Male Burnouts
30.	31.	32.	33.	34.

Table 3: Correlation of backing of (uh) with combined sex and social category, separating two clusters of burnout girls.

Female Jocks	Male Jocks	Female Burnouts 1	Female Burnouts 2	Male Burnouts
35.	36.	37.	38.	39.

Table 4: Extreme raising of (ay), combining sex and social category, separating two clusters of burnout girls.