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APPENDIX 2(c). Terms for women, defined by Linguistics 55 students, spring 1992

Lexical entry	Meaning	Student comments about slang users or usage	S	Ethnicity
six-pack beauty queen	unattractive woman	college students	f	Latino
skank	nasty, cheap	skaters	f	Asian
skank	flirtatious girl	Los Angeles	m	Asian
skank	extremely ugly girl, who is also promiscuous	college students	m	European
skank	dirty, nasty, unprincipled (woman)	Black/Hispanic college students	m	European
skank-ho	very ugly person who is also promiscuous (female)	New York	m	Asian
skank-ly ho	slut, ugly girl	Los Angeles guys	f	European
skeezer	filthy, slutty person	high-school and college students	f	European
skeezy	gross, nasty		f	Asian
slime	the act by a female of walking home from a boy's house after a night of partying	frat guys	f	0
slut	easy girl, willing to put out	high-school students	m	European
stank	ugly girl	college students	m	Mixed
strawberry	girl who sleeps around to obtain drugs	college students	m	Asian
strawberry	prostitute who works for drugs	street term	m	Asian
swamp	fat unattractive girl	South San Francisco high school	m	Asian
sow				
tetunca	very fat girl	Indian word for buffalo; frat guys	m	
thumper	promiscuous female	from a movie; high school	f	Asian
thunder thighs	fat female wearing a short skirt	teenagers	m	Asian
trinket	slut	freshman girls in high school	f	Asian
troll	ugly girl	frat guys	f	
tug	fat and ugly girl	Los Angeles	m	Asian
boat				
tuna	a slut	teenagers in Hawaii	m	Asian
tuna	slut, whore, or just a derogatory term for females	Hawaiian high-school students	f	Asian
wicked				
witch of the west	mean woman	college students	m	Asian
yeti	big girl	high school in Pennsylvania	m	European

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A synthetic sisterhood:  
False friends in a teenage magazine

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper I present a fragment of a larger study entitled *Language, Intertextuality and Subjectivity: Voices in the Construction of a Consumer Femininity*. This work is contributing to the development of a linguistic model of discourse that integrates linguistic and social theoretical perspectives, so that discourse can be analyzed both as interaction between individuals and as socially reproductive and constitutive of subjectivity. On the practical side I am trying to locate points of focus for taking up a critical (more specifically, feminist) reading position in discourse analysis.

From an intertextual perspective, a text is a textual dialogue. It consists of a mesh of intersecting voices, an indeterminate population. It is not the product of a single author; the author herself is multiple, fragmented, and part of the population of the text. And what's more, so is the reader. In reading a text, she is drawn into a complex of intersecting voices. An adequate presentation of this model in a short paper would be impossible.<sup>1</sup> All I am going to attempt are a few words about power in the mass media (who wields it and how), a brief outline of the notion of women's magazines as "synthetic sisterhood," and then a little detail on the simulation of a friendly relationship in a two-page feature from a British publication for teenagers called *Jackie*. I will conclude with some discussion of how "unsisterly" this feature really is.

DISCOURSE IN THE MASS MEDIA AND THE LOCATION OF POWER

Reading is nonreciprocal discourse. It takes place on the reader's terms; she can stop whenever she wants to, skip over fragments, reread others, etc. The reader is in control of the discourse. However, the mass media bestow a position of power on producers. In contrast with face-to-face interaction, media discourse is one-sided. Producer and interpreter are sharply divided and distant from one another. So, even though mass-media texts are always read or viewed by actual people, because of this distance producers cannot "design their contributions for the particular people they are interacting with" (Fairclough 1989:51). Addressing a mass audience imposes (1) on mass-media producers, the need to construct an ideal subject as addressee; (2) on mass-media interpreters, the need to negotiate with the position offered in the ideal subject.

The need to construct an ideal subject bestows a position of power on the producers of the mass-media texts. They have the right to total control over

production, such as what kinds of representations of events are included, and how they are presented. In the construction of an ideal subject as addressee, the mass media are in a position to present assumed shared experiences and commonsense attitudes as givens to a mass audience. Actual addressees in the targeted audience are likely to take up the position of ideal subject sharing these experiences, attitudes, etc. In addition, the producers of mass-media texts, unlike their addressees, are professional practitioners. Producers do not work blind in postulating subjects as addressees; mass-media discourse is targeted for specific audiences. These have been measured by sophisticated market-research practices, which in particular scrutinize kinds of discourse.

#### MASS-MEDIA AND COMMUNITIES: THE NOTION OF SYNTHETIC SISTERHOOD

The ideal subjects postulated by mass-media producers are constructed as members of communities. I will briefly attend here to the kinds of community constructed in women's magazines and advertisements. The targeted audience of women's magazines is addressed, simply by virtue of its femaleness, as a single community. As Ferguson says:

The picture of the world presented by women's magazines is that the individual woman is a member not so much of society as whole but of *her* society, the world of women. It is to this separate community that these periodicals address themselves. Their spotlight is directed not so much at the wider "host" society, as at that host society's largest "minority" group: females. (1983:6)

This bogus social group has been described as a kind of surrogate sisterhood by various writers (e.g., McRobbie 1978; Ferguson 1983; Winship 1987). Within this female community, which appears to ghettoize women, magazines are targeted for different socioeconomic groups. *Jackie* magazine has a predominantly working-class, young readership (the target audience is young teenage: 12 to 14; its actual readership is predominantly younger than this).

A word or two about imaginary communities. Think of advertisements: as well as informing consumers about what is available, they also present to audiences the concept of communities based on the consumption of commodities. Advertisements offer consumers membership in imaginary communities; to belong, we only need to buy and use products. Leiss, Kline, and Jhally explain that in the transition from industrial to consumer culture, "'consumption communities' . . . , formed by popular styles and expenditure patterns among consumers, became a principal force for social cohesion in the twentieth century, replacing the ethnic bonds that people had brought with them to the industrial city" (1986:53). In the consumer feature I am going to discuss, producers and readers are set up in a synthesized "sisterly" relationship in a community based on the consumption of lipstick.

An increasingly common feature of types of discourse used to address mass audiences is *synthetic personalization*. The term comes from Fairclough, who explains it as "a compensatory tendency to give the impression of treating each of

the people 'handled' *en masse* as an individual" (1989:62). This synthetic personalization is extremely common in the mass media, in magazine advertisements and articles, front-page headlines, junk mail, etc. It involves the construction of an ideal subject as if it were an actual individual and also the construction of a persona or ideal subject for the producers. It involves addressing an anonymous audience as thousands of identical *yous*, with attitudes, values, and preoccupations ascribed to them.

#### SYNTHETIC PERSONALIZATION AND FRIENDSHIP IN A MAGAZINE FOR TEENAGERS

I intend to concentrate on the mass-media producer's identity as a friend and the synthesized friendly relationship set up between producer and audience in a single sample of mass-media discourse: a consumer feature from *Jackie*. There are certain kinds of linguistic features (proliferating in advertising and the mass media in general) that contribute to synthetic personalization and the establishment of an informal friendly relationship between the producers of mass-media texts and their audience. I shall briefly present (1) the simulation of friendship and (2) the simulation of reciprocal discourse.

#### THE SIMULATION OF FRIENDSHIP

How do we establish friendship? In part, by communicating, "I know what you're like, and I'm like that too." Aspects meriting attention in examining the producer's construction of a friendly persona for herself are use of the pronouns *we* and *you*, relational and expressive values of lexis and punctuation, the setting up of shared presuppositions and projected facts (beliefs, etc., attributed to the reader, to "us" or just to some vague common sense), and a variant on this, negating the reader's supposed assumptions. In focusing on these specific linguistic features, I am attending to the way the producer realizes her simulation of friendly interaction with her audience, how she shows she knows who the reader is, and how she establishes herself as a member of the same social group. The text reproduced in excerpt (1) shows part of the consumer feature on lipstick: a column of text on the history of lipstick, fashion changes, etc.

- (1) Ask any clever advertiser how to suggest femininity with a product, and he'll probably tell you "a kissprint." Lipstick on a collar, a glass, his cheek—they all suggest a woman was there. When men think of make-up they think of lipstick.

It's hardly a modern invention—women have been adding artificial colour to their lips for centuries now. Before the days of lipstick as we know it, ladies used vegetable or animal dyes like cochineal—beetle's blood—to colour their lips.

The reason behind it wasn't simply to make themselves more beautiful—superstition lingered that the devil could enter the body through the mouth, and since red was meant to ward off evil spirits "lipstick" was put around the mouth to repel his evil intentions!

These days there are more complicated (and ruder!) theories. Experts in

human behaviour say that it's all to do with sex (what else?!).

Other "experts" claim that the shape of your lipstick can reveal a lot about your character —i.e., if you wear the end flat you're stubborn, if it's round and blunt you're fun loving, etc. etc.—but don't seem to take into consideration the fact that each brand of lipstick is a different shape to start with and it's easiest just to use it accordingly. So much for the experts!

What is interesting is the way that fashions in lipstick have changed over the years. When lipcolour first came into fashion at the beginning of this century, dark colours and the style of "drawing" on little pursed lips meant that women looked cutesy and doll-like. Later on, in the forties, film stars wanting to look lovable and "little-girl"ish continued this, while the newer breed of dominant business-like women opted for a bolder look, colouring right over the natural "bow" in the lips. By the sixties "women's lib" was in style and most girls abandoned lipstick altogether, or used beige colours to blank out the natural pink of their lips, and concentrated on over-the-top face painting instead.

Now, in the eighties, there are more colours available than ever before—right down to blue, green, and black! "Glossy" lips, popular for a while in the seventies, are out again, and the overall trend is for natural pink tints, with oranges and golds in summer, on big full lips.

Large cosmetic manufacturers will have upwards of 70 shades available at a time, introducing a further three or four shades each season to complement the fashion colours of that time. And with some companies churning out batches of lipstick at a rate of 9,000 an hour, that's an awful lot of kisses to get through...!

### Pronouns

In excerpt (1), there is an example of the inclusive *we*, referring to both producer and audience together: *lipstick as we know it*. Elsewhere in the feature, use of exclusive *we* (i.e., the "editorial *we*") contributes to setting up the producer as a team; the anonymous group voice is a friendly gossip in the orientation beneath the title (see excerpt 2).

### (2) LIPS INC.!

We kiss and tell the whole story behind lipstick!

Pronominal reference to the reader as if she were an individual addressee is quite frequent. There is an example of it in the first sentence in excerpt 1: *Ask any clever advertiser how to suggest femininity with a product and he'll probably tell you "a kissprint."*

### Relational and expressive values of lexis and punctuation

The informality of some lexical terms contributes a little to the construction of a youthful, female identity for the writer, matching the targeted audience by approximating the sort of vocabulary that teenagers might be supposed to use among themselves (*awful, cutesy*, in excerpt 1, *dying to look grown up*, in excerpt 4 below). The frequent exclamation marks seem to add some kind of expressive value, attributing to the writer a friendly, enthusiastic emotional state. The use of scare quotes contributes to setting up the familiar and the normal for the reader: the

writer makes out *she* knows what is and what isn't normal usage for her readers.

*Common ground: Projected facts, presuppositions, etc.*

In the column of text in excerpt (1), the writer negates an assumption attributable to the reader, concerning the modernity of lipstick: *It's hardly a modern invention*. Similarly, in some instructions (reproduced in excerpt 3 without the accompanying photographs), the writer negates the reader's assumed pessimism about using lipstick successfully: *You can achieve a long-lasting look!*

### (3) LIP TRICKS!

Choosing the right shade of lipstick is easy—making it stay on is a bit more tricky. But by applying lipcolour correctly, you *can* achieve a long-lasting look!

1. Outline the lips with a toning pencil—this will help stop your lipstick from "bleeding" around your mouth (a touch of Elizabeth Arden's Lip-Fix Creme, £4.95, provides a good base to prevent this, too).
2. Fill in using a lip brush loaded with lipstick—a lip brush gives you more control over what you're doing, and fills in tiny cracks more easily.
3. Blot lips with a tissue, dust over lightly with face powder, apply a second layer and blot again.

The writer is the reader's best friend and knows what she thinks, or rather claims to know. The writer minimalizes the social distance between herself and her readership, claiming common ground and a social relation of closeness. With her implicit claims to common ground in presuppositions and projected facts she is setting herself up as a member of the same social group as her readers. So for each example, two agreed-upon and interesting facts in excerpt (1) are that each brand of lipstick is a different shape, and that fashions in lipstick have changed over the years (these are projected by the fact-nouns *fact* and *way*, respectively).<sup>2</sup> The shared knowledge that the writer assumes relates to historical details about "breeds" of women and kinds of "looks," to fashion changes, to choice and ownership of lipstick, to details about lipstick as a commodity subject to fashion change, to the boringness of experts, and so on.

### THE SIMULATION OF RECIPROCAL DISCOURSE

In the sample I have chosen, this simulation of two-way discourse is most striking between the writer and various characters set up in the text, more so than between the writer and the audience. The effect is an impression of overhearing gossip.

Various features used to simulate reciprocal discourse contribute to constructing relationships on the page:<sup>3</sup> response-demanding utterances (commands and questions in particular), adjacency pairs (including absent-but-assumed first pair parts and sequentially implicated second pair parts), and interpolations.

*Producer-audience*

Response-demanding utterances directly addressed to the reader occur notably in excerpt (3). They are commands requiring a mode of action as response (highly conventional in instructions scripts):

- [stage 1] Outline the lips with a touting pencil ...
- [stage 2] Fill in using a lip brush ...
- [stage 3] Blot lips with a tissue, dust over lightly, ... apply a second layer, ... blot again.

In excerpt (1), the writer begins with a command addressing the reader: *Ask any clever advertiser. ...* In the same text, she interpolates her own comments twice:

- Statement: ladies used animal dyes like cochineal
- Interpolation: —beetle's blood—
- (Statement): to colour their lips
- Statement: These days there are more complicated
- Interpolation: (and ruder!)
- (Statement): theories.

There is another interpolated remark in a caption in a group of testimonials (see excerpt 4): *[Clara] wouldn't tell us her age!*

*Representations of dialogue*

The opening sentence in excerpt (1) places the reader in an imaginary dialogue with a male advertiser. This dialogue consists of a two-part question-answer exchange, in which the reader asks the advertiser for some information and he provides it:

- Question: how to suggest femininity with a product
- Answer: a kissprint

Simulation of reciprocal two-way discourse is particularly noticeable in the testimonial section of the *Jackie* consumer feature. These testimonials are reproduced (without their accompanying photographs) in excerpt (4).

(4) MARGARET (15)  
 "I wear it all the time, because I always wear make-up. My favourite shade's a sort of brown-and-red mixture—I usually buy Boots 17 or Max Factor lipstick. I got my first one when I was 10, for Xmas—it was a sort of pink colour, I think it was just for me to play with."

EMILY (12)  
 "Usually I just wear lipstick when I'm going out, but sometimes for school, I

like pinks, oranges and plain glosses. I was about 7 when my mum gave me a bright red lipstick to experiment with—I think I've worn it ever since!"

CLARA (wouldn't tell us her age!)  
 "I always wear red—dark red—and usually from Mary Quant or Estee Lauder. I don't know if I can remember my first lipstick—wait! yes I can! It was called "Choosy Cherry" by Mary Quant—everyone used to ask me if I was ill when I was wearing it!"

RHONA (18)  
 "I like pinks and deep reds. I don't wear it all that often. My first lipstick? I stole it from my sister's drawer—I was about 12—dying to look grown up even then!"

To make any sense at all of these testimonials we need to postulate a set of questions by an interviewer, first pair parts that don't appear on the page. They are reconstructed interviewee responses to three questions: "How often do you wear lipstick?", "What's your favorite shade?", "When did you get your first one?". Notice the questioning repeat in the fourth testimonial.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The audience is being offered sisterhood in consumption. Synthetic personalization and the need for adult femininity catch readers up in a bogus community in which the subject position of consumer is presented as an integral part of being feminine. Members of this community other than the reader and her friendly editorial "big sister" are media celebrities, the testimonial-givers, and other wearers of lipstick (including "most girls in the sixties" in excerpt 1).

In the beauty feature, womanhood is a pattern of consumption. Teenagers aspire to adulthood. What girls aspire to be as women is presented as a matter of what kind of look they will "opt" for.

The beauty feature is not a piece of sisterly advice or an exchange of sisterly secrets; it is covert advertising, a consumer feature. Its producers' aim, apart from cheaply filling two pages in the magazine, is to promote lipstick as a commodity. The advice it does provide for readers—that is, the instructions for professional application of lipstick—is curiously inappropriate for the age range. These instructions seem to be calculated to encourage experimenters to consume extravagantly by playing at being movie star and beautician rolled into one.

Girls need peer-group membership; they turn to other girls for friendship and to learn how to behave like a teenage girl. Consumer femininity is a real part of adolescent patterns of friendship. The consumer feature, however, offers no real human relationship. The testimonials are an example of how, at puberty, girls are drawn into synthetic consumption communities of commodity users. Whether based on actual interviews or invented altogether, they are manipulative. Cosmetics use is presented as a natural part of a woman's identity, making demands on her discernment, her creative energies, and her time. In reading the feature, girls are "associating" with business people. Fashion and beauty alone are newsworthy. The only practices cultivated relate to being a competent consumer; in fact, readers

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are encouraged to ridicule the scientific/analytical.

The sisterhood offered in the consumer feature is also "unsisterly" because it is patriarchal. The feature makes a small contribution to the shaping of the "paradigms for women's production of appearances" (Smith 1988:39) that are formed for women by the manufacturing, advertising, fashion, and magazine industries. In the opening paragraph of excerpt 1—in which the "kissprint" is presented as a symbol of femininity—this symbol is provided by a male character. It is a man who is the authority on femininity. The same passage goes on to present lipstick smudges as indications of a woman's presence. These are located on a man; to be feminine is to be (hetero)sexual. Feminine identity is achieved in consumption and in relationships with men. The author, the friendly "older sister" writing for *Jackie* magazine, betrays her young readers, tying up their self-definition with external patriarchal standards of femininity. And for what? In order to plug a product.

#### NOTES

1. For discussion, see Talbot (1990, 1992, and forthcoming).
2. Following M. A. K. Halliday (1985).
3. There is some interesting work by Martin Montgomery on simulated reciprocal discourse on BBC's Radio 1 (Montgomery 1988).

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## The construction of conversational equality by women<sup>1</sup>

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The interest in how women talk among each other arose only after years of investigating mixed-sex conversations, i.e., after giving ever new detailed analyses of how men dominate and control women in conversations. Unfortunately, the research focusing on the question of how women talk among each other was extremely short-lived, proving within academic research what is common knowledge outside the academic community: that women's talk is irrelevant, that what women say to each other is not worth listening to and how they say it is not worth describing. Even feminist researchers have by now almost given up the topic of women's talk before we found out much about it.<sup>2</sup>

Being in the privileged position of being independent of academic fads and academic approval, which means by and large the fads and approval of academic men, I do not follow this trend. I am interested in pursuing the properties of women's talk that turned up in the initial descriptions by Edelsky (1981), Jenkins (1984), West (1985), and Troemel-Ploetz (1984a, 1984b) in the early 1980s, properties pointing toward collaboration, creative atmosphere, balance of speaking rights, cooperative style, symmetry, and mutual support when women talk with each other. These characteristics of women's talk I am describing as special conversational abilities. To study them is important because of the political consequences: making the competence of women visible in all the fields that rely on language as their main instrument—i.e., law, medicine, teaching, politics, journalism, counseling, psychotherapy, consulting, management, etc.—means changing the evaluation of women in these fields; it means being able to perceive them as better equipped and better qualified than most of their male colleagues.

I am investigating the conversational competence of women in certain professions: interview journalism, management, and psychotherapy. Among various properties of women's conversational style that contribute to their achievement of excellence in these professions, one characteristic emerges that I will concentrate on for the purposes of this paper: the construction of equality among speakers.

In order to place this property in perspective and to provide some context, I want to list a few other properties that I have found in the analysis of television discussions and television interviews among women.<sup>3</sup> For reasons of space limitation, I cannot give any illustrations.

### 1. Fairness

The following mechanisms that I observed I ascribe to a basic fairness in the conversational practice of women: