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Where does the social stop?

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In recent years, studies in the Third Wave (Podesva 2007; Eckert 2008a; Zhang 2008; Eckert under review) have been expanding the kinds of variables we study, and expanding as well our understanding of the kinds of meanings they carry. Focusing on style and the use of variation in the construction of personae leads us in quite new and unexpected directions, expanding our understanding of what actually enters into social meaning. Ivan Fónagy aptly summed up the implications of the direction we are taking:

Verbal style is a precious accomplishment which integrates, with linguistic - that is grammatical and conscious - communication, psychic elements which would otherwise remain unexpressed...a voluntary, transient regression, a well-organized “descent into Hell” which permits the liberation and expression of repressed emotions and fantasies. (Fónagy 1971)

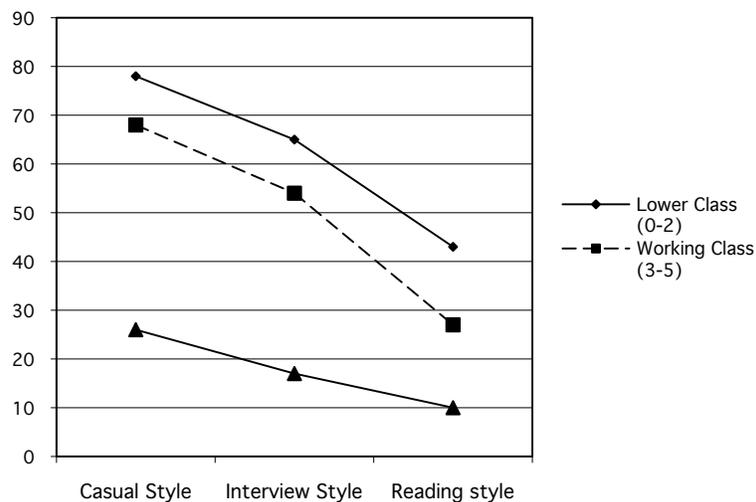
### *1. Pushing on the meaning of variation.*

Class and style correlations of the kind first offered in William Labov’s study of New York City (Labov 1966) have been the bread and butter of variation study. Figure 1 shows the class and style stratification of /th/ - stopping (the fortition of [θ] to [t]). This is a common variable that is not known to be a local or regional dialect feature, although it is no doubt regionally specialized in virtue of its common origin as an ethnic feature. Since interdental fricatives are marked across languages, the stop pronunciation of /θ/ and /ð/ is an unsurprising second language feature in English. It has been nativized in American communities as a marker of German (Rose 2006), Mexican (Mendoza-Denton 1997), and Cajun (Dubois and Horvath 1998) ethnicity. In each of these cases, this feature has moved beyond simple marking of ethnic identity, to indexing salient aspects of that identity, eventually making it available to index those aspects independently of ethnic membership. In a Wisconsin farm community, it has come to index hard work, most particularly hard work on the land, considered a German farmer virtue (Rose 2006). In a California Mexican-American community, it is associated with gang affiliation (Mendoza-Denton 1997), and in a Cajun community in Louisiana it has come to be associated with the entrepreneurship of the Cajun renaissance (Dubois and Horvath

1998). In other words, this feature has spread from what is without doubt its origin in association with ethnic groups – its first order of indexicality (Silverstein 2003) – to take on some aspect of the social evaluation of that origin.

So what does the class stratification have to do with these meanings? Presumably, the maintenance of some distinct ethnic identities – and perhaps most particularly the use of very obvious second language features to express these identities – is class stratified. There is, thus, a robust reproductive relation between macro-sociological structure and the very most local – and continually changing – stylistic practice.

Figure 1. Class and Style Stratification of /t/-stopping in New York City. From Labov (1966).



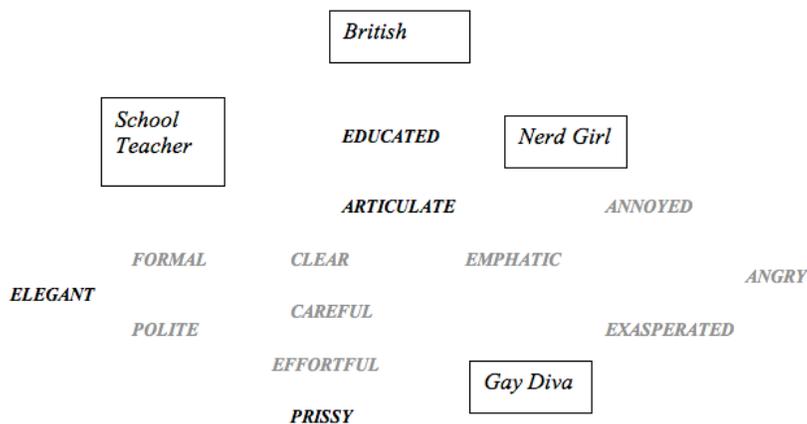
It is this changeability that makes variation such a powerful indexical resource. Meaning accrues to variables in the course of situated talk, as ways of speaking and elements of those ways of speaking come to be associated with perceived and momentarily salient properties or characteristics or actions of their utterers. A momentary social judgment accrues to an ongoing construction of understanding of things related to that situation, bringing about small adjustments to the listener's understanding of the why and wherefore of a particular linguistic form. That ongoing construction can be seen in terms of a field of indexical meanings, in which any meaning can be pushed or pulled through immediately relevant cultural associations.

I have used the release of intervocalic and word-final /t/ in American English as an example of the functioning of an indexical field (Eckert 2008a). While British speakers commonly aspirate intervocalic /t/ and release word-final /t/ (I will refer to both as released /t/ from now on), American speakers generally flap intervocalic occurrences and occurrences between a liquid and a vowel, and do not release final ones. /t/ release in the speech of an American is marked, and situational and social correlations indicate that it has a wide range of potential meanings. Bucholtz (1996) has identified /t/ release as a

salient aspect of some California girls' construction of a "geek" style; Benor (2001) and Levon (2006) have identified it as a salient aspect of Jewish styles; and Podesva (2004) , also with Roberts and Campbell-Kibler (Podesva, Roberts, et al. 2002) have identified it as a salient aspect of gay styles. This variable certainly does not on its own mark each of these three identities. But if we consider the wider range of meanings that it can index, we can see how these meanings cohere, and we can see how they can contribute to styles associated with a range of social categories.

If we begin with only the acoustic properties of released as opposed to unreleased /t/, we can see that the released version is both a hyperarticulation and a fortition. It is, by virtue of these, both clearer and more emphatic than the unreleased. Clarity can be associated with formality, effort, articulateness, and with the educational settings and personnel in which these properties are valued and taught. Furthermore, formality, effort and articulateness can be seen as components of politeness and elegance. These associations are strengthened by the opposition, central to American cultural discourse, between the rough spontaneous American and the refined and circumspect Brit. Fortition, meanwhile, can contribute to emphatic speech which, in turn, can be positive or negative, expressing anything from enthusiasm to anger – from sincerity to sarcasm. Which of each of these someone hears a particular occurrence of /t/ release to express depends on the context in which it occurs, which includes more general linguistic style. Putting these potential meanings together, we describe an indexical field as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Indexical field of /t/ release. From Eckert (2008, p. 469).



An obvious difference between this variable and most of the variables that we study is that it is not obviously a dialect feature within the US. Like (ING), it is a stylistic resource that all speakers use, and while it may in fact show regional differences, it isn't generally thought of as part of a regional dialect. Another difference, and more relevant to the following discussion, is that its indexical value appears to be fairly directly related

to its acoustic quality. In other words, the association of /t/ release with clarity and emphasis is not completely arbitrary. I will return to the issue of arbitrariness below.

## ***2. How do kids learn the meaning of variation?***

Andersen, in her 1990 study of small children's stylistic practice, recorded three-and-a-half year-olds playing familiar domestic roles. She found that the children varied their voice quality, intonation, and segmental phonetics in performing roles such as mother, father, child, doctor, and nurse. Most interesting in this context is that when children played 'father', they lowered their pitch, decreased their pitch variability and increased their amplitude. In addition, they often backed and lowered their vowels in a manner that produced an almost 'sinister' accent', pronouncing yes as [jʌs] and bad as [bɑd]. I have argued elsewhere (Eckert 2000) that small children begin processing variation through its association with affective displays. Emotion is central to adult-infant and adult-child interaction, and affect – the expression of emotion – should be seen as an integral part of communication at this stage. The linguistic components of affective displays, therefore, are among the early conventions that children learn, and the association between affect and social roles first in the family and gradually beyond are the building blocks of social meaning in variation. I've speculated that the association of power with 'standard' phonology or hyperarticulation begins with parental scolding, and then extends to teachers once they reach school. If this is so, then what people generally think of as social categories builds on affective categories.

While I have not worked with small children, I have been drawn more to this hypothesis through my research with preadolescents. Preadolescence is the life stage in which children move towards adolescence, and in which an age cohort of children develops a peer-based social order. It's at this point that one would expect them to begin constructing non-family-based social categories and claiming membership in them, and distinguishing among people in terms of such categories. And one would expect them to begin employing variation in this process. I traced part of this move to adolescence in a longitudinal ethnographic study of a cohort of kids as they moved from fifth through seventh grades, or from roughly 10 to 13 years of age. During this time, the cohort organized itself into and around a "popular" crowd – a community of practice focused on dominating the cohort's move to adolescence.

The crowd pioneers, above all, heterosexual practice, and the formation of the kinds of alliances and peripheral activities that support that practice. The crowd brought girls and boys together in a new collaborative enterprise of making and unmaking boy-girl pairs. These pairs were sanctioned by the crowd, and existed primarily for the construction of the crowd – the status as couple was a public, not a private, one. Thus the individual pairs involved did not interact with each other to speak of, and couples not resulting from crowd transactions were illegitimate. Couples played a role in a system of social value, with each pairing-up contributing to the establishment of value for the individuals being paired up, and for the agents who negotiated the pairing – particularly those who had negotiating power with the other gender.

The girls dominated activity in the heterosexual market, as social engineering became a new source of excitement, compensating for the more physical kinds of excitement that were becoming the prerogative of boys and considered childish for girls. The formation of the crowd required alliances among smaller friendship groups, particularly among the girls, whose childhood groups tended to be smaller than the boys'. The process of alliance required groups to winnow out members not wanted by the other group, resulting in considerable exclusionary activity. The result was constant drama, primarily around girls' friendships, but also around heterosexual pairing, with fights within couples a particularly rare and advanced form of drama. And this drama was not simply personal drama, but an essential part of what made one part of the crowd, making emotional display central to the social order. Much of this drama was public – it unfolded in public and it produced information of public interest as the crowd became the center of attention for the cohort. The crowd gained enhanced visibility both through its control of central spaces on the playground, and through its coordinated activities on the playground, in the lunchroom, and in the classroom. This created an opposition between people who had one or a few friends and those who claimed everyone in the crowd as their friend. And this visibility put crowd members in a position to do public displays of connections and to achieve symbolic dominance. Engagement in the heterosexual market was also public emotional engagement, and emotional expressions that in earlier life stages had been reserved for other kinds of drama become integral parts of a new, adolescent, heterosexual style.

The crowd emerged as the legitimate social sphere in the cohort, making non-crowd drama and non-crowd couples seem childish. This does not mean that non-crowd kids did not engage in such activities, but their activities had no legitimate status as they were seen as the product of naïve individual actions. But non-crowd girls fought over boys, they teased each other about boys, they told each other's secrets and outed each other's crushes on particular boys. And drama broke out also as some became interested in boys while their friends didn't – as some moved towards adolescence faster or slower than their friends. And as some simply entered into the excitement of conflict. In this way, drama and the expression of affect was closely tied to the business of maturation.

I have argued (1996) that girls' search for excitement in social engineering and conflict is behind their engagement in flamboyant stylistic practice, hence their lead in the use of innovative variants such as sound changes in progress. Understanding the development of variation in the preadolescent cohort, then, involves understanding how affect interacts with the emergence of the new social order, and how the signs of affective speech (or its lack) interact with other kinds of variables. In what follows, I will show how two girls in the preadolescent cohort made indexical use of sound symbolism. Both girls, one part of the crowd and the other not, are very lively and socially active.

There is some evidence that crowd membership is involved in emerging patterns of phonological variation (Eckert 2008b). However, it is not as clear-cut as it is in later adolescence (Fought 1999; Eckert 2000; Moore 2003). Among other things, the cohort is negotiating specifically the move from childhood to adolescence. And childhood is dominated by affect – *crybaby* is an enormous insult for children, and in preadolescence

it is rarely used and completely damning when it is used. Accusations of watching Barney, a popular children's TV program, are a common age-related insult. At this stage, in addition to the crowd – non-crowd distinction, there is a distinction based more generally on maturity. Who's still a "kid" – who's still playing on the jungle gym rather than engaging in the cool games like wall ball. It stands to reason, then, that the management of affective displays is a central linguistic strategy in the construction of preadolescent personae.

### ***3. Size, Affect, and Sound Symbolism***

The backing and lowering of vowels that Andersen noticed in children's 'father' performances may be to some extent a side effect of lowering pitch. But it's also probable that the backing of the vowel has its own significance. The association between F2 and size has been a well-known kind of phonetic symbolism since Sapir's early experiments (Sapir 1929). Hearing nonsense syllables differing only in the vowel, speakers consistently judged the form with [a] to denote a large object, and the form with [i] to denote a small one. Stanley Newman (1933) soon after expanded on this finding, showing that this relation is continuous – as the vowel becomes more back, the object being denoted is judged to be larger. Ohala (1944) has associated vowels with higher F2 with a more general *frequency code*, which associates higher frequencies of F0, as well as in consonants and vowels, with smaller size. He argues that the frequency code is universal to vocalizing species, all of which use lower frequencies in agonistic displays to signal larger size. And while there are arguments against the universality of this phenomenon in human languages, there is no question that it is common to many languages, and that as a kind of synesthesia (an association across sensory modalities), it lies somewhere between the natural and the conventional.

The opposition between large and small appears to move into the social arena through salient social differences associated with size. Hamano (1994) shows a relation between the palatalization of Japanese alveolars with childishness and (presumably by extension) immaturity. He then enumerates the additional extended meanings of "instability, unreliability, uncoordinated movement, diversity, excessive energy, noisiness, lack of elegance, and cheapness" (1994, p. 154). In his study of the sound symbolism of Greek [ts] and [dz], Joseph (1994) focuses on a similar extension, positing a *relatedness network* of meanings associated with words containing these segments. This network relates smallness to deformity and what appears to be a more generally pejorative series ('tight', 'miser', 'sting', 'bite'...). Furthermore, something akin to pejoration surfaces in pairs of words in which the word containing [ts] or [dz] has a 'slangier' or 'more evocative' meaning.

Silverstein brought sound symbolism into the realm of sociolinguistic variation, by pointing out its indexical value. Silverstein (1994) discussed a diminutive-augmentative system in the Wasco-Wishram dialect of Chinookan, that involves both consonants and vowels, and in which, for example, subphonemic fronting and backing of /a/ heightens diminution and augmentation respectively. His observations show a series of meanings as

the metaphorical value of smallness and largeness involves a range of oppositions in which the larger term has what I would call a negative force: “intimate;dear” vs. “distanced;off-putting”; “desirable vs. “to-be-shunned”; “personal” vs “impersonal”; “pleasing;satisfying” vs. “gross;disgusting”. Silverstein identifies the larger diminutive-augmentative system as applying not simply to the denotation of lexical items, but as having indexical force as well – as “affectively engaging” smallness and largeness. Thus the use of these consonantal and vocalic variants expresses something about the speaker’s attitude or orientation to the lexical item’s denotatum. In the case I will discuss below, I would go as far as to say that the indexical value can be completely independent of the denotatum of the lexical item that the variant occurs in.

Gordon and Heath (1998) go one step further, arguing that the frequency code predictably links sexual dimorphism in vocal tract size to gender differences in phonological variation and change. Based on their observation that women regularly lead in changes involving the fronting and raising of vowels, they argue that sexual dimorphism offers up sound-symbolic features which serve as a resource for gender expression. Their extensive discussion emphasizes that this is not simply an expression of membership in the dichotomous categories “male” “female”, but that size is deeply embedded in social differences involving gender. This is a promising direction, and I believe that the data I will present below will ultimately be inseparable from gender, although for the present, my focus will be on size and age.

Meanwhile, it would be unwise to conclude anything on the basis of the fact that Hamano’s, Silverstein’s and Joseph’s extended sets of meanings seem to connect smallness with positive, and largeness with negative, force – and that those I will present below do as well. Silverstein emphasizes the conventional nature of sound symbolism, and the cultural specificity of the meanings it engages. And indeed, the direction of the extension of positive and negative meanings themselves is quite dissimilar from one language to the other. What is compelling is the fact that in all cases there is a field of meanings, not unlike the indexical field I have posited for sociolinguistic variables (Eckert 2008a). The relations among meanings in this field are not accidental; they are an indexical order (Silverstein 2003) the result of an accumulation of connections made in discourse over time. Thus they encode ideological issues that are central, and particular, to the community of speakers.

Inasmuch as age and maturation, and opposition between babies and in-control autonomous teenagers, are central to developments in the preadolescent age cohort, the potential meanings of variation in F2 might reasonably be quite salient. And indeed they are. In what follows, I will show how two preadolescent girls vary the F2 of back and low vowels to index a complex but coherent set of meanings and, in Silverstein’s terms, affectively engage smallness and largeness. Individual uses, I will argue, emerge from the most salient aspect of size for this age group, which is self-consciously moving from childhood into adolescence.

### 3.1 Colette

Colette was a lively and quirky girl. She was not part of the crowd, but had a best friend, Sonja, who was very quiet and shy. In fifth grade, she could often be found with Sonja climbing on playground equipment to observe the activities of the crowd, who dominated the central space of the playground. It's particularly significant that Colette, who played soccer in a league outside of school, was simply an observer of the soccer game that unfolded at every recess in the center of the playground. Regardless of her athletic ability, she would probably not have been a welcome participant in the crowd's activity. As Colette moved into sixth grade, she came down from the jungle gym and spent more time walking around with a new friend who liked to talk about boys, a key sign of moving towards adolescence. She also engaged in chasing and teasing boys – indication of her interest in boys, but childish from the crowd's perspective.

The data in this study consist of many episodes lasting anywhere from 5 to 45 minutes, determined by the school schedule and the rhythm of the kids' activity. The episodes include individual and group conversations, and a wide range of interactions among the kids, primarily on the playground. I will focus here on two conversations between Colette and myself, each lasting about ten minutes. The first, which took place in fifth grade, focused on her friends and activities. This was early in our relationship, and while she was quite comfortable with me, she presented herself to me as a “nice” girl, talking about the games she played, her friends, the boys she liked. The only topic in this conversation that had negative content was a brief mention of two girls in her neighborhood that she had stopped having anything to do with – one who got mad for dumb reasons, and one who was a bad influence on her sister. In this conversation, she portrayed herself as a happy, lively tomboy. I call this episode *Nice Colette*. The second episode, in sixth grade, was a conversation about how things had changed since fifth grade. By then she'd known me for well over a year and was completely secure in the conviction that I didn't care whether she was “nice” or not. In this conversation (as in many of our other interactions), she presented herself as a more savvy sixth grader, full of attitude. When I asked her if she felt different in sixth grade, she said:

COL: Yeah I feel like I'm in – more in power.

PEN: Why?

COL: Cuz I guess kids get afraid of us for some reason. Cuz like we sit under the tree, they ask us sometimes how old we are and I'm all, “we're sixth graders” and then they walk off cuz they get afraid or something.

PEN: Do you like that?

COL: Mm hmm.

PEN: What else is different?

COL: Boys!

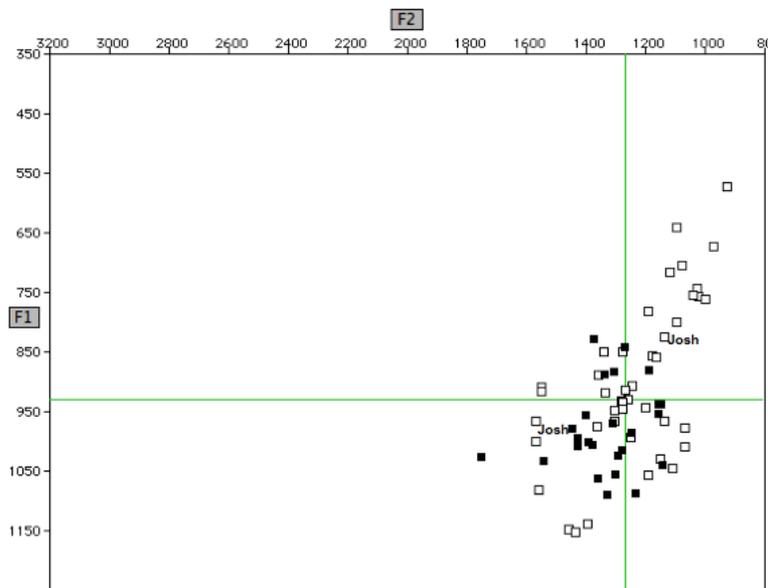
PEN: What about boys?

COL: Well all of them are got so ugly. And they're so rude. Like Jack Caldwell. He sits at my table and he's so rude. All the boys are rude here at Fields.

Throughout the conversation, which for lack of a better term I call *Negative Colette*, Colette focused on her struggle with the negative forces of preadolescence – fights with her friends, rude boys, the unfairness of girls’ exclusion from football (both casual and professional). I might also have called this episode *Colette with Attitude*, as the negativity unfolded from the topic we started with – how have things changed since fifth grade? She was consciously presenting herself as older – part of the oldest cohort in the school and soon to go to middle school. Having these things to talk about – rude boys, fights over boys with friends, gender exclusion – is in itself evidence of older status, and her choice to give a negative slant to just about everything she said was a display of attitude.

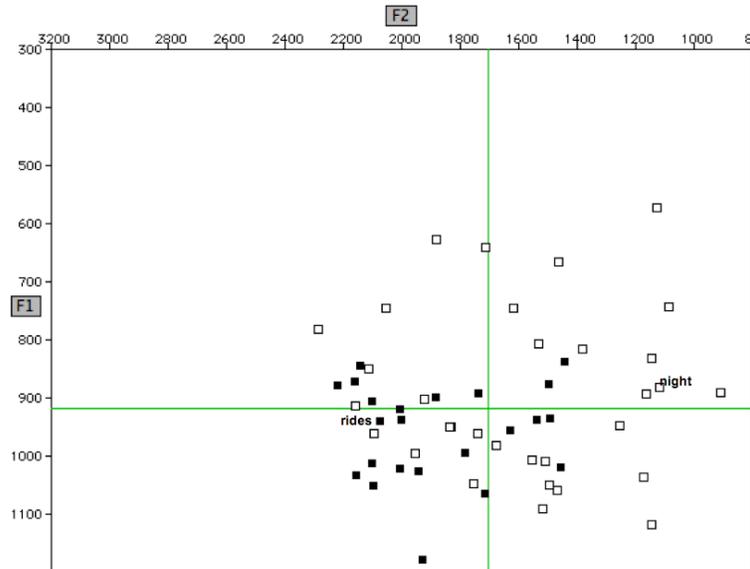
Colette’s pronunciation of /o/ and /ay/ in these two episodes differs dramatically, with *Negative Colette* using significantly more backed (and raised) values than *Nice Colette*. Figures 3 and 4 are F1-F2 plots of all measurable tokens<sup>1</sup> of /ay/ and /o/ in these two episodes. The black squares represent *Nice Colette*, and the empty squares represent *Negative Colette*, showing that *Negative Colette* uses significantly more high and back pronunciations of both vowels than *Nice Colette*. To eliminate extreme coarticulation effects, tokens of /o/ before liquids and in the word *got* are excluded, and tokens of /ay/ after /w/ are excluded.

Figure 3. F1-F2 plots for realizations of /o/ in *Nice Colette* (black squares) and *Negative Colette* (empty squares). Sig. F1 < .001, F2 <.025.



<sup>1</sup> Measurable tokens are a minimum of 50 ms. long, and sufficiently free of playground noise to yield a clear measurement.

Figure 4. F1-F2 plots for realizations of the nucleus of /ay/ in *Nice Colette* (black squares) and *Negative Colette* (empty squares). Sig. F1 < .025, F2 <.001.



These aggregated data are based on the general tone of the two conversations – the positive “nice girl” tone of the first, and the more savvy tone of the second. The stark nature of the use of vowel quality is even clearer when we focus on individual passages. Early on in the first episode, I asked Colette if she had any friends who were boys. She told me about one boy that she knew, Josh:

One that I really know is **Josh** and we – we give him **rides** after school.

Everything in this passage exudes sweetness and light, with an emphasis on relationships in the neighborhood, and Colette’s mother’s care for Josh, a neighborhood child. In sixth grade, though, Josh became a problem. Colette had a crush on him, and complained about his new bad behavior: he was rude and he often acted like a jerk. He was also the source of conflict with her best friend, who also had a crush on him. In what follows, she told me about one particular occasion on which she and her friend got into a fight over him, and everything in her style as she talked about the stupid cause of her fight with her friend exuded annoyance with herself, her friend, and Josh:

We got in this mad because of **Josh** or something and um the next day cuz she was spending the **night** I’m all “wait a minute why should we get mad over a stupid boy!”

Colette’s pronunciations of /o/ in *Josh* in the two conversations are labeled in Figure 3, and her pronunciations of /ay/ in *rides* and *night* are labeled in Figure 4. In both cases, the

trajectory towards the back of vowel space from *Nice Colette* to *Negative Colette* is striking. In the case of /ay/, the trajectory spans just about the entire /ay/ vowel space.

At the moment, it seems clear that the fronted variants are associated with a kind of childlike innocence, while the backed variants are associated with a more complex set of meanings having to do with issues of adolescence. The conflicts she brings up center on issues related to adolescence, and while she talks about them in an overwhelmingly negative tone, she's clearly enjoying it. In other words, the negativity is as much about her status as someone who has these things to complain about as about her actual complaints.

### 3.2 Rachel

Rachel was a prominent member of the crowd, widely known as a drama queen. Her drama was a foregrounded playground attraction as she was constantly fighting and making up with her friends and frequently teasing or arguing with boys. At the center of her persona was her status as young for her grade, which came up in all kinds of contexts. On the one hand, she pointed to the fact that she hadn't reached puberty, and that she didn't shave her legs or wear a bra, as evidence that she couldn't be expected to behave according to her older classmates' norms. She also invoked her immaturity as a pretext for teasing from boys:

But sometimes they're like really mean to me because I don't shave my legs, and they go, "Get away from me, hairy. You don't shave your legs." I go, "Excuse me, I'm – I'm a little young for my age." 'Cuz I'm really ten and all my other friends are eleven. They shave. But I can't shave for a while.

Poutiness was central to Rachel's persona, foregrounding the little girl. I would venture that this is a primary source of the negative affect associated with vowel backing, and that the lip spreading and rounding that accompany fronting and backing bear a synesthetic relation to smiling and frowning. In Rachel's case, though, these little girl expressions were very much part of an adolescent persona, as she often couched her "poor me" complaints in adult discourses. One day on the playground, for example, she sent one of the boys to look for a boy she wanted to yell at. When he didn't come back, she said, "Why isn't Jim coming back? Stupid. See? That's just like uh men. They don't come back when you want them to. They don't listen they don't – they're a big blob." Adding to her adolescent status was her claim to superior adolescent knowledge, much of which she got from her older brother. In fact, she mixed her comparative childishness with her adolescent sophistication to construct a quixotic and "cute" persona – a persona that was indeed attractive, if sometimes annoying, to the boys in her class.

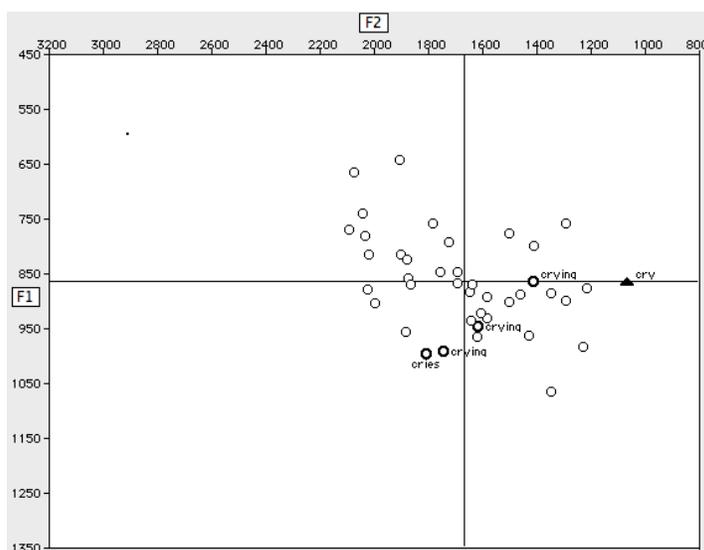
Rachel's stylistic shifts were constant and striking, mixing a childish persona with displays of anger, poor me, and gloomy tales, and interrupting conversation to yell at someone. As a result, her episodes don't separate well along the lines of Colette's, but show swings throughout. In the following, Rachel is telling me about a scary encounter

with a teenage “gang” guy on the street. He recognized her because he knew her brother, and she told of her fear in a trembly, ominous voice:

He's all “hey I know you” I'm all “oh **gosh** I wanna run I wanna run.” I almost like I w- felt like I wanna **cry** so bad because he was near me. I thought like maybe, you know, he'd try to jump me or you know, cuz I was like really close to him. I was like this close to you. And, um, he's all, "I know you. You, your- your name's [Rachel]." I'm all, "Ye-, ye, yeah." Uh, cuz he knows my brother. He used to hang like, around my brother. Cuz my brother and his friends were like the cool kind of people.

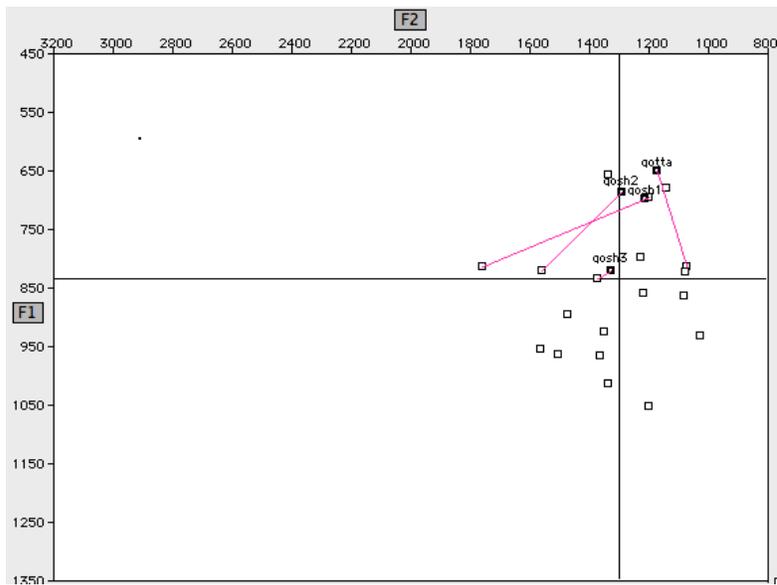
Emphasizing her superior familiarity with, and perspective on, cool people, she went on to set herself apart from some of her peers, saying “And, you know, like, little kids try to hang around the big kids and act cool.” and began talking about which kids in her class had gang pretensions. In this episode, her vowels in the scary part (above) contrast starkly with the vowels in what followed. The light circles in Figure 5 show all the measurable occurrences of /ay/ in the episode in which this narrative occurred. The black triangle marks the position of the nucleus in this occurrence of *cry*, which she drew out to 382 milliseconds. This is the only occurrence of *cry* in the episode, and since one might expect the nucleus of /ay/ to back after a liquid, I have provided (as bolded circles) four other occurrences of *cry*- for the purposes of comparison. These occurrences are from a different episode, in which she tells me about a boy in her class who cries a lot. These tokens occur as she presents herself as his defender – as the only kid in the class who sympathizes and who understands why he cries. The nucleus of /ay/ in the scary gang guy passage is considerably farther back than the nuclei of the other occurrences of /ay/, and of other occurrences of the same lexical item.

Figure 5. F1-F2 plots for Rachel’s realizations of the nucleus of /ay/.



Rachel also used /o/ to signal affect. But while Colette used a backed monophthong, Rachel produced a falling and opening diphthong beginning at a high back position. Figure 6 shows all the measurable occurrences of /o/ in this episode, most of which are monophthongal. Three words in this episode are diphthongs, and all three are associated with clear negative affect. These three tokens are labeled in Figure 6, with two points in the trajectory of the vowel shown – the highlighted square represents a point ten milliseconds into the vowel, while the light square represents the midpoint of the vowel.

Figure 6. Rachel’s /o/ with dramatic glides (highlighted square is the nucleus).



The first of these occurrences of *gosh*, marked *gosh1*, is the one occurring in the scary guy passage. It is 250 ms long, and shows a trajectory from the high back quadrant of the /o/ space to the front of the space. There are two other occurrences of *gosh* in this conversation, one of which shows the same pattern. *Gosh2*, which is 449 ms long, occurred as Rachel was complaining about how one boy was sometimes mean:

I’m like “Tad can I sit down?” He’s like “no go find your own seat.” Then I’m like “**Gosh**” and he’s like “I’m just joking, Rachel, you can sit down.” Like “Yeah, whatever”. He’s just like being mean. I don’t know what his problem is or what.

There is one more occurrence of *gosh* in this conversation. *Gosh3* is part of a dramatic utterance, but in this case the affect is completely positive. As we were talking, the mother of a friend of Rachel’s walked by carrying her daughter’s costumes for the class play, and Rachel proudly exclaimed about how many changes of costume this girl had to make in the course of the play:

**Oh my gosh** she has- she has like a whole lot of dresses. She needs like eight dresses.

In this utterance, it is *oh* that is lengthened (528 ms) for dramatic effect, while the vowel in *gosh* is only 141 ms seconds long. I have shown the trajectory for this vowel in the same way as the other two occurrences of *gosh*, and this occurrence is clearly monophthongal. The shortness of this vowel does not account for its lack of diphthongization – the third diphthongal occurrence of /o/ in this conversation occurs in *gotta*, and while the vowel is only 134 ms long, it shows a dramatic trajectory from high back to low back. This occurred as Rachel told the sad story of her grandmother’s lung cancer:

And she got lung cancer. Like, um, few months ago. And then I said, “Grandma, you **gotta** stop. Please just do it for me.”

#### 4. Conclusion

Colette and Rachel are not simply expressing affect, but constructing their emerging adolescent personae. And while I emphasize that affect is probably the prime kind of meaning of variation in childhood, I believe that it remains important throughout life. Bourdieu’s notion of the *habitus* (1977) underlines the fact that social position constrains an individual’s experiences, giving rise to a particular view of the world, interpretation of events, and dispositions for acting in the world. The local orientation of working class speakers, expressed in the use of local vernacular forms, is not simply an artifact of life – it is engrained in a person’s belief and emotional systems through life experience. This experience is shaped by aspects of social position such as class, gender, generation and ethnicity. One important aspect of habitus is the emotional responses that devolve from, and contribute to, social position. In the aggregate, African-American people have a practical and emotional experience of racism that white people do not; women have a feeling of physical vulnerability that men do not. In other words, emotional makeup is not independent of one’s place in the social order. Aspects of our affective expression are learned as well. Women, for example, are expected to cry at sad events while men are expected not to. Appropriate crying behavior (both crying and not crying) is learned quite young, as is the appropriate expression of anger and fear. And in the population under consideration here, girls are expected to engage in social drama, while boys are expected not to. There’s little question that this plays an important role in females’ statistical lead in the use of innovative forms. We can no doubt expect to find different affective expressions across macrosociological categories. How to trace these expressions in the study of variation is an interesting, but still quite open, question.

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