17 The Whole Woman: Sex and Gender Differences in Variation

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The tradition of large-scale survey methodology in the study of variation has left a gap between the linguistic data and the social practise that yields these data. Since sociolinguistic surveys bring away little information about the communities that produce their linguistic data, correlations of linguistic variants with survey categories have been interpreted on the basis of general knowledge of the social dynamics associated with those categories. The success of this approach has depended on the quality of this general knowledge. The examination of variation and socioeconomic class has been benefited from sociolinguists' attention to a vast literature on class and to critical analyses of the indices by which class membership is commonly determined. The study of gender and variation, on the other hand, has suffered from the fact that the amount of scientific attention given to gender over the years cannot begin to be compared with that given to class. Many current beliefs about the role of gender in variation, therefore, are a result of substituting popular (and unpopular) belief for social theory in the interpretation of patterns of sex correlations with variation.

Sociolinguists are acutely aware of the complex relation between the categories used in the socioeconomic classification of speakers and the social practice that underlies these categories. Thus, we do not focus on the objectivized indices used to measure class (such as salary, occupation, and education) in analyzing correlations between linguistic and class differences, even when class identification is based on these indices. Rather, we focus more and more on the relation of language use to the everyday practice that constitutes speakers' class-based social participation and identity in the community. Thus, explanations take into consideration interacting dynamics such as social group and network membership, symbolic capital and the linguistic marketplace, and local identity. The same can be said to some extent of work on ethnicity and variation, where researchers have

interpreted data on ethnic differences in variation in terms of complex interactions between ethnicity, group history, and social identity. The study of sociolinguistic construction of the biological categories of age and sex, on the other hand, has so far received less sophisticated attention (Eckert, Edwards, & Robins, 1985). The age continuum is commonly divided into equal chunks with no particular attention to the relation between these chunks and the life stages that make age socially significant. Rather, when the full age span is considered in community studies, the age continuum is generally interpreted as representing continuous apparent time. At some point, the individual's progress through normative life stages (e.g. school, work, marriage, childrearing, retirement) might be considered rather than, or in addition to, chronological age. Some work has explored the notion of life stage. The very apparent lead of preadolescents and adolescents in sound change has led some researchers to separate those groups in community studies (Macaulay, 1977; Wolfram, 1969), and some attention has been focused on the significance of these life stages in variation (Eckert, 1988; Labov, 1972b). There has also been some speculation about changes of speakers' relation to the linguistic marketplace in aging (Eckert, 1984; Labov, 1972a; Thibault, 1983). Most interestingly, there have been examinations of the relation of age groups to historical periods of social change in the community (Clermont & Cedergren, 1978; Laferriere, 1979). But taken together, these studies are bare beginnings and do not constitute a reasoned and coherent approach to the sociolinguistic significance of biological age.

Like age, sex is a biological category that serves as a fundamental basis for the differentiation of roles, norms, and expectations in all societies. It is these roles, norms, and expectations that constitute gender, the social construction of sex. Although differences in patterns of variation between men and women are a function of gender and only indirectly a function of sex (and, indeed, such gender-based variation occurs within, as well as between, sex groups), we have been examining the interaction between gender and variation by correlating variables with sex rather than gender differences. This has been done because although an individual's gender-related place in society is a multidimensional complex that can only be characterized through careful analysis, his or her sex is generally a readily observable binary variable, and inasmuch as sex can be said to be a rough statistical indication of gender, it has been reasonable to substitute the biological category for the social sampling. However, because information about the individual's sex is easily accessible, data can be gathered without any enquiry into the construction of gender in that community. As a result, since researchers have not had to struggle to find the categories in question, they tend to fall back on unanalyzed notions about gender to interpret whatever sex correlations emerge in the data and· not to consider gender where there are no sex correlations.

Gender differences are exceedingly complex, particularly in a society and era where women have been moving self-consciously into the marketplace and calling traditional gender roles into question. Gender roles and ideologies create different ways for men and women to experience life, culture, and society. Taking this as a basic approach to the data on sex differences in variation, there are a few assumptions one might start with. First, and perhaps most important, there is no apparent reason to believe that there is a simple, constant relation between gender and variation. Despite increasingly complex data on sex differences in variation, there remains a tendency to seek a single social construction of sex that will explain all of its correlations with variation. This is reflected in the use of a single coefficient for sex effects in variable rule or regression analysis of variation. This perspective limits the kind of results that can be obtained, since it is restricted to confirming the implicit hypothesis of a single type of sex effect or, worse, to indicating that there is no effect at all. Second, we must carefully separate our interpretation of sex differences in variation from artifacts of survey categories. I would argue that sociolinguists tend to think of age and class as continua and gender as an opposition, primarily because of the ways in which they are determined in survey research. But just as the class effect on variation may be thought of in terms of the binary bourgeois–working class opposition (Rickford, 1986), and just as there is reason to believe that the age continuum is interrupted by discontinuities in the effects of different life stages on people's relation to society and, hence, on language, variation based on gender may not always be adequately accounted for in terms of a binary opposition. ...

Labov and Trudgill have both emphasized a greater orientation to community prestige norms as the main driving force in women's, as opposed to men's, linguistic behaviour. Trudgill's findings in Norwich led him to see women as overwhelmingly conservative, as they showed men leading in most change. Furthermore, women in his sample tended to overreport their use of prestige forms and men tended to underreport theirs. He therefore argued that women and men respond to opposed sets of norms: women to overt, standard-language prestige norms and men to convert, vernacular prestige norms. Overt prestige attaches to refined qualities, as associated with the cosmopolitan marketplace and its standard language, whereas covert prestige attaches to masculine, 'rough and tough' qualities. Trudgill (1972:182 – and see Chapter 14) speculated that women's overt prestige orientation was a result of their powerless position in society. He argued that inasmuch as society does not allow women to advance their power or status through action in the marketplace, they are thrown upon their symbolic resources, including language, to enhance their social position. This is certainly a reasonable hypothesis, particularly since it was arrived at to explain data in which women's speech was overwhelmingly conservative. However, what it assumes more specifically is that women respond to their

powerlessness by developing linguistic strategies for upward mobility, that is, that the socioeconomic hierarchy is the focus of social strategies. There are alternative views of exactly what social strategies are reflected in women's conservatism. An analysis that emphasizes the power relations implicit in the stratificational model was put forth by Deuchar (1988), who argued that women's conservative linguistic behavior is a function of basic power relations in society. Equating standard speech with politeness, she built on Brown's (1980) and Brown and Levinson's (1987) analyses of politeness as a face-saving strategy, arguing that the use of standard language is a mechanism for maintaining face in interactions in which the woman is powerless.

I would argue that elements of these hypotheses are correct but that they are limited by the fact that they are designed to account for one aspect of women's linguistic behavior only: those circumstances under which women's language is more conservative than men's. Based on the multiple patterns of sex, class, and age difference that he found in Philadelphia sound changes in progress, Labov (1984) sought to explain why women are more conservative in their use of stable variables but less conservative in their use of changes in progress and why women lead men in some changes and not in others. Although his data do not show women being particularly conservative, he based his analysis on the assumption that women's linguistic choices are driven by prestige. What he sought to explain, therefore, are cases where women's behavior is not conservative. Based on his Philadelphia data, Labov argued that women lag in the use of variants that are stigmatized within the larger community, that is, stable sociolinguistic variables and changes in progress that are sufficiently old and visible as to be stigmatized within the larger community. Women's behavior in these cases, then, is driven by global prestige norms. At the same time, women lead in changes that are still sufficiently limited to the neighborhood and local community to carry local prestige without having attracted a stigma in the larger Philadelphia community. In this case, Labov argued, women's behavior is driven by local prestige norms. If this explanation account for the Philadelphia data, it does not cover the New York City cases of (aeh) and (oh) (Labov, 1966), where women led in sound changes that had grown old and stigmatized. But more important, I can see no independent reason to seek explanations for women's behavior in prestige. ...

What I will argue is that gender does not have a uniform effect on linguistic behavior for the community as a whole, across variables, or for that matter for any individual. Gender, like ethnicity and class and indeed age, is a social construction and may enter into any of a variety of interactions with other social phenomena. And although sociolinguists have had some success in perceiving the social practice that constitutes class, they have yet to think of gender in terms of social practice.

There is one important way in which gender is not equivalent to categories like class or ethnicity. Gender and gender roles are normatively reciprocal, and although men and women are supposed to be different from each other, this difference is expected to be a source of attraction. Whereas the power relations between men and women are similar to those between dominant and subordinate classes and ethnic groups, the day-to-day context in which these power relations are played out is quite different. It is not a cultural norm for each working-class individual to be paired up for life with a member of the middle class or for every black person to be so paired up with a white person. However, our traditional gender ideology dictates just this kind of relationship between men and women. If one were to think of variables as social markers, then, one might expect gender markers to behave quite differently from markers of class or ethnicity. Whereas the aggressive use of ethnic markers (i.e. frequent use of the most extreme variants) is generally seen as maintaining boundaries – as preventing closeness – between ethnic groups, the aggressive use of gender markers is not. By the same token, the aggressive use of gender markers is not generally seen as a device for creating or maintaining solidarity within the category. To the extent that masculine or feminine behavior marks gender, its use by males and females respectively is more a device for competing with others in the same category and creating solidarity with those in the other category, and aggressive cross-sex behavior is seen as designed to compete with members of the other sex for the attention of members of the same sex.

Two other things follow from the specialization of gender roles, which may apply also to other kinds of differences such as ethnicity.

1. To the extent that male and female roles are not only different but reciprocal, members of either sex category are unlikely to compete with (i.e. evaluate their status in relation to) members of the other. Rather, by and large, men perceive their social status in relation to other men, whereas women largely perceive their social status in relation to other women.[1] Thus, differentiation on the basis of gender might well be sought within, rather than between, sex groups.
2. Men and women compete to establish their social status in different ways, as dictated by the constraints placed on their sex for achieving status. This is particularly clear where gender roles are separate, and in fact when people do compete in the role domain of the other sex, it is specifically their gender identity that gets called into question. ...

Since to have personal influence without power requires moral authority, women's influence depends primarily on the painstaking creation and elaboration of an image of the whole self as worthy authority. Thus, women are thrown into the accumulation of symbolic capital. This is not to say that men are not also dependent on the accumulation of symbolic capital, but

that symbolic capital is the *only* kind that women can accumulate with impunity. And, indeed, it becomes part of their men's symbolic capital and hence part of the household's economic capital. Whereas men can justify and define their status on the basis of their accomplishments, possessions, or institutional status, women must justify and define theirs on the basis of their overall character. This is why, in peasant communities as in working-class neighborhoods, the women who are considered local leaders typically project a strong personality and a strong, frequently humorous, image of knowing what is right and having things under control.

When social scientists say that women are more status conscious than men, and when sociolinguists pick this up in explaining sex differences in speech, they are stumbling on the fact that, deprived of power, women must satisfy themselves with status. It would be more appropriate to say that women are more status-*bound* than men. This emphasis on status consciousness suggests that women only construe status as being hierarchical (be it global or local hierarchy) and that they assert status only to gain upward mobility. But status is not only defined hierarchically; an individual's status is his or her place, however defined, in the group or society. It is this broader status that women must assert by symbolic means, and this assertion will be of hierarchical status when a hierarchy happens to be salient. An important part of the explanation for women's innovative and conservative patterns lies, therefore, in their need to assert their membership in all of the communities in which they participate, since it is their authority, rather than their power in that community, that assures their membership. Prestige, then, is far too limited a concept to use for the dynamics at work in this context.

Above all, gender relations are about power and access to property and services, and whatever symbolic means a society develops to elaborate gender differences (such as romance and femininity) serve as obfuscation rather than explanation. Whenever one sees sex differences in language, there is nothing to suggest that it is not power that is at issue rather than gender *per se*. The claim that working-class men's speech diverges from working-class women's speech in an effort to avoid sounding like women reflects this ambiguity, for it raises the issue of the interaction between gender and power. Gender differentiation is greatest in those segments of society where power is the scarcest – at the lower end of the socioeconomic hierarchy, where women's access to power is the greatest threat to men. There is every reason to believe that the lower working-class men's sudden downturn in the use of Australian Question Intonation shown in Guy *et al.* (1986) is an avoidance of the linguistic expression of subordination by men in the socioeconomic group that can least afford to sound subordinate.

For similar reasons of power, it is common to confuse femininity and masculinity with gender, and perhaps nowhere is the link between gender and power clearer. Femininity is a culturally defined form of mitigation or

denial of power, whereas masculinity is the affirmation of power. In Western society, this is perhaps most clearly illustrated in the greater emphasis on femininity in the south, where regional economic history has domesticized women and denied them economic power to a greater degree than it has in the industrial north (Fox-Genovese, 1988). The commonest forms of femininity and masculinity are related to actual physical power. Femininity is associated with small size, clothing and adornment that inhibit and/or do not stand up to rough activity, delicacy of movement, quiet and high pitched voice, friendly demeanor, politeness. The relation between politeness and powerlessness has already been emphasized (Brown, 1980) and surfaces in a good deal of the literature on gender differences in language. Although all of these kinds of behavior are eschewed by men at the lower end of the socioeconomic hierarchy, they appear increasingly in male style as one moves up the socioeconomic hierarchy until, in the upper class, what is called effeminacy may be seen as the conscientious rejection of physical power by those who exercise real global power (Veblen, 1931) by appropriating the physical power of others.

The methodological consequence of these considerations is that we should expect to see larger differences in indications of social category membership among women than among men. If women are more constrained to display their personal and social qualities and memberships, we would expect these expressions to show up in their use of phonological variables. This necessitates either a careful analysis of statistical interaction, or separate analysis of the data from each gender group, before any comparison.

GENDER AND ADOLESCENT SOCIAL CATEGORIES

In this section, I discuss some evidence from adolescent phonological variation to illustrate the complexity of gender in the social scheme of things. Adolescents are quite aware of the gender differences I have discussed, particularly since they are at a life stage in which the issue of gender roles becomes crucial. By the time they arrive in high school, adolescent girls (particularly those who have been tomboys) are getting over the early shock of realizing that they do not have equal access to power. One girl told me of the satisfaction it still gives her to think back to the time in elementary school when she and her best friend beat up the biggest male bully in their class and of the different adjustment it had been to finding less direct means of controlling boys. In fact, she was very attractive and was aware but not particularly pleased that her power in adolescence to snub troublesome males was as great as her past power to beat them up.

Whether or not they wielded any direct power in their childhoods, adolescent girls know full well that their only hope is through personal authority. In secondary school, this authority is closely tied up with

popularity (Eckert, 1989a, 1990), and as a result, girls worry about and seek popularity more than boys. And although boys are far from unconcerned about popularity, they need it less to exert influence. For a boy can indeed gain power and status through direct action, particularly through physical prowess. Thus, when they reach high school, most girls and boys have already accepted to some extent that they will have different routes to social status. In many important ways, boys can acquire power and status through the simple performance of tasks or display of skills. A star varsity athlete, for instance, regardless of his character or appearance, can enjoy considerable status. There is virtually nothing, however, that a girl lacking in social or physical gifts can do that will accord her social status. In other words, whereas it is enough for a boy to have accomplishments of the right sort, a girl must be a certain sort of person. And just as the boy must show off his accomplishments, the girl must display her persona. One result of this is that girls in high school are more socially constrained than boys. Not only do they monitor their own behavior and that of others closely, but they maintain more rigid social boundaries, since the threat of being associated with the wrong kind of person is far greater to the individual whose status depend on who she appears to be rather than what she does. This difference plays itself out linguistically in the context of class-based social categories.

Two hegemonous social categories dominate adolescent social life in American public high schools (Eckert, 1989a). These categories represent opposed class cultures and arise through a conflict of norms and aspirations within the institution of the school. Those who participate in school activities and embrace the school as the locus of their social activities and identities constitute, in the high school, a middle-class culture. In the Detroit area, where the research I report on was done, members of this category are called 'Jocks' whether or not they are athletes, and they identify themselves largely in opposition to the 'Burnouts.' Burnouts, a working-class culture oriented to the blue-collar marketplace, do not accept the school as the locus of their operations; rather, they rebel to some extent against school activities and the authority they represent and orient themselves to the local, and the neighboring urban, area. The Burnouts' hangouts are local parks, neighborhoods, bowling alleys, and strips. They value adult experience and prerogatives and pursue a direct relation with the adult community that surrounds them. The school mediates this relation for the Jocks, on the other hand, who center their social networks and activities in the school. The Jocks and the Burnouts have very different means of acquiring and defining the autonomy that is so central to adolescents. Whereas the Jocks seek autonomy in adult-like roles in the corporate context provided by the school institution, the Burnouts seek it in direct relations with the adult resources of the local area.

Within each category, girls and boys follow very different routes to achieve power and status. The notion of resorting to the manipulation of

status when power is unavailable is in fact consciously expressed in the adolescent community. Girls complain that boys can do real things, whereas boys complain that girls talk and scheme rather than doing real things. By 'real' things, they mean those things that reflect skills other than the purely social and that reflect personal, and specifically physical, prowess. Boys are freer in general. For example, Burnout boys can go to Detroit alone, whereas girls must go under their protection; this seriously curtails a Burnout girl's ability to demonstrate urban autonomy. The Jock boys can also assert their personal autonomy through physical prowess. Although it is not 'cool' for a Jock boy to fight frequently, the public recognition that he could is an essential part of the Jock image. In addition, Jock boys can gain public recognition through varsity sports on a level that girls cannot. Thus, the girls in each social category must devote a good deal of their activity to developing and projecting a 'whole person' image designed to gain them influence within their social category. The female Jocks must aggressively develop a Jock image, which is essentially friendly, outgoing, active, clean-cut, all-American. The female Burnouts must aggressively develop a Burnout image, which is essentially tough, urban, 'experienced.' As a result, the symbolic differences between Jocks and Burnouts are clearly more important for girls than for boys, In fact, there is less contact between the two categories among girls, and there is far greater attention to maintaining symbolic differences on all levels – in clothing and other adornment, in demeanor, in publicly acknowledged substance use and sexual activity. There is, therefore, every reason to predict that girls also show greater differences than boys in their use of any linguistic variable that is associated with social category membership or its attributes.

I have shown elsewhere that the most extreme users of phonological variables in my adolescent data are those who have to do the greatest amount of symbolic work to affirm their membership in groups or communities (Eckert, 1989b). Those whose status is clearly based on 'objective' criteria can afford to eschew symbolization. It does not require much of a leap of reasoning to see that women's and men's ways of establishing their status would lead to differences in the use of symbols. The constant competition over externals, as discussed in Maltz and Broker (1982), would free males from the use of symbols. Women, on the other hand, are constrained to exhibit constantly who they are rather than what they can do, and who they are is defined with respect primarily to other women.

PHONOLOGICAL VARIATION

The following data on phonological variation among Detroit suburban adolescents provide some support for the discussion of the complexity of gender constraints in variation. The data were gathered in individual

sociolinguistic interviews during two years of participant observation in one high school in a suburb of Detroit. During this time, I followed one graduating class through its last two years of high school, tracing social networks and examining the nature of social identity in this adolescent community. The school serves a community that is almost entirely white, and although the population includes a variety of eastern and western European groups, ethnicity is downplayed in the community and in the school and does not determine social groups. The community covers a socioeconomic span from lower working class through upper middle class, with the greatest representation in the lower middle class.

The speakers in the Detroit area are involved in the Northern Cities Chain Shift (Labov, Yaeger, & Steiner, 1972), a pattern of vowel shifting involving the fronting of low vowels and the backing and lowering of mid vowels (Figure 17.1). The older changes in this shift are the fronting of (æ) and (a), and the lowering and fronting of (oh). The newer ones are the backing of (e) and (uh).
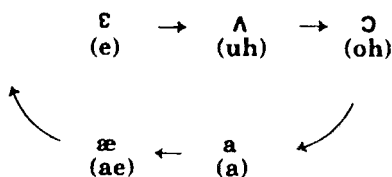

Figure 17.1:   The Northern Cities Chain Shift

The following analysis is based on impressionistic phonetic transcription of the vocalic variables from taped free-flowing interviews.[2] A number of variants were distinguished for each vowel in the shift. Both (e) and (uh) have raised, backed, and lowered variants. Backing is the main direction of movement of both (e) and (uh). In each case, two degrees of backing were distinguished:

$[\varepsilon] > [\varepsilon^>] > [\Lambda]$

$[\Lambda] > [\Lambda^>] > [\mathcal{O}]$

Both variables also show lowering: [æ] for (e) and [ɑ] for (uh). There are also some raised variants [ε^] and [ɪ] for (e) (the latter occurs particularly in *get*) and [ə] and [U] for (uh). The lowest value for (ae) is [æ^]. The movement of the nucleus of (ae) has clearly been toward peripherality (Labov, Yaeger, & Steiner, 1972), as the higher variants show fronting:

$[æ^] > [\check{\varepsilon}] > [\varepsilon] > [\varepsilon^<] > [e]$

Two degrees of fronting were distinguished for (a):

$$[\alpha] > [a] > [\text{æ}^>]$$

(a) also showed some raising to [aˆ] and [ʌ]. Finally, three degrees of fronting were distinguished for (oh):

$$[ɔ] > [ɔ^{<\,\check{}}] > [\alpha] > [a]$$

(oh) also fronted occasionally to [ʌ]. Extreme variants in the main direction of change were chosen for each of the variables to represent rule application. These extreme variants are:

(ae)   nucleus = [e] or [ɛ<], with or without offglide

(a)   [æ] or [a<]

(oh)   [a<] or [a]

(uh)   [ɑ] or [ɔ]

(e)   [ʌ] or [U]

Table 17.1:   Percentage of advanced tokens of the five vowels for each combination of social category and sex (numbers of tokens in parentheses)

	Boys		Girls	
	Jocks	Burnouts	Jocks	Burnouts
(ae)	39.7 $\left(\dfrac{211}{531}\right)$	35.3 $\left(\dfrac{101}{286}\right)$	62.2 $\left(\dfrac{244}{392}\right)$	62 $\left(\dfrac{178}{287}\right)$
(a)	21.4 $\left(\dfrac{117}{548}\right)$	22 $\left(\dfrac{77}{350}\right)$	33.8 $\left(\dfrac{152}{450}\right)$	38.2 $\left(\dfrac{134}{350}\right)$
(oh)	7.4 $\left(\dfrac{44}{598}\right)$	10.2 $\left(\dfrac{34}{333}\right)$	29.8 $\left(\dfrac{134}{450}\right)$	38.7 $\left(\dfrac{131}{338}\right)$
(e)	26.2 $\left(\dfrac{146}{557}\right)$	33.2 $\left(\dfrac{113}{340}\right)$	23.8 $\left(\dfrac{103}{433}\right)$	30.9 $\left(\dfrac{103}{333}\right)$
(uh)	24.6 $\left(\dfrac{122}{496}\right)$	35.3 $\left(\dfrac{65}{184}\right)$	25.8 $\left(\dfrac{94}{364}\right)$	43 $\left(\dfrac{107}{249}\right)$

The two common social correlations for phonological variables in these data are social category membership and sex. Sex and category affiliation are not simply additive but manifest themselves in a variety of ways among these changes. They interact in ways that are particularly revealing when seen in the context of the overall pattern of linguistic change. Table 17.1 contains a cross-tabulation by social category and sex of the percentage of advanced tokens for each vowel. Differences in the percentages shown in Table 17.1 between boys and girls and between Jocks and Burnouts for each of the changes are displayed in Figure 17.2: one line shows the lead of the girls over boys, whereas the other shows the lead of the Burnouts over the Jocks, for each of the changes in the Northern Cities Shift. As Figure 17.2 shows, the girls have the clearest lead in the oldest changes in the Northern Cities Chain Shift whereas social category differences take over in the later changes. Note that each line dips into negative figures once – at each end of the shift. The boys have a slight lead in the backing of (e) and the Jocks have a slight lead in the raising of (ae). The statistical significance of each of the differences is given in Table 17.2. A treatment of variation that views variables as markers would call the fronting of (ae) and (a) 'sex markers,' the backing of (uh) and (c) 'social category markers,' and the fronting of (oh) both.

In the earlier article, I expressed some puzzlement about the lack of sex differences in the backing of (uh), having expected a simple relation between sex and any sound change (Eckert, 1988). More careful examination of the backing of (uh), however, shows that a simplistic view of the relation between gender and sound change prevented me from exploring other ways in which gender might be manifested in variation. In fact, gender plays a role
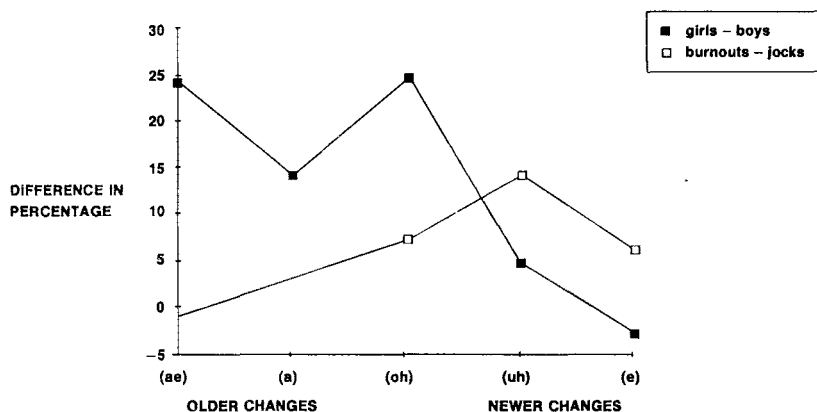

Figure 17.2: Contrast between girls and boys and between Burnouts and Jocks as differences in percentages when calculated for the combined data in Table 17.1

Table 17.2: Significance (yes or no) of social con-
straints on the vowel changes that constitute the
Northern Cities Chain Shift (pl-values of log-likelihood
test calculated for each constraint separately using
variable rule program on data of Table 17.1)

	Sex	*Social category*
(ae)	yes ($p < .001$)	no ($p < .77$)
(a)	yes ($p < .001$)	no ($p < .16$)
(oh)[a]	yes ($p < .0001$)	yes ($p < .001$)
(uh)	no[b] ($p < .04$)	yes ($p < .001$)
(e)	no ($p < .38$)	yes ($p < .004$)

Notes
[a] Both constraints remain significant for (oh) when the
effects of the other are taken into account.
[b] The sex effect loses significance ($p < .19$) for (uh) when
social category is taken into account.

in four out of the five changes in the Northern Cities Chain Shift, although it
correlates only with three out of five of the changes, and the role it plays is
not the same for all changes.

As can be seen in Table 17.2 and Figure 17.2, the oldest change in the
Northern Cities Chain Shift, the raising of (ae), shows no significant
association with category membership in the sample as a whole. The same is
true within each sex group taken separately (girls: $p < .96$; boys: $p > .22$).
However, the girls lead by far in this change. The second change in the
Northern Cities Shift, the fronting of (a), also shows only a sex difference,
once again with the girls leading. The lack of category effect holds true
within each sex group considered separately (girls: $p < .19$; boys: $p > .76$).

The lowering and fronting of (oh) shows a significant difference by both
sex and social category, and these effects appear to operate additively in a
variable rule analysis:

Overall tendency: 0.182
boys: 0.300   girls: 0.700
Jocks: 0.452   Burnouts: 0.548

When the sexes are separated, however, it turns out that the category
difference is only significant among girls ($p < .099$) and not the boys
($p < .14$).

In the backing of (uh), category membership correlates significantly with
backing for the population as a whole, with Burnouts leading, but sex does
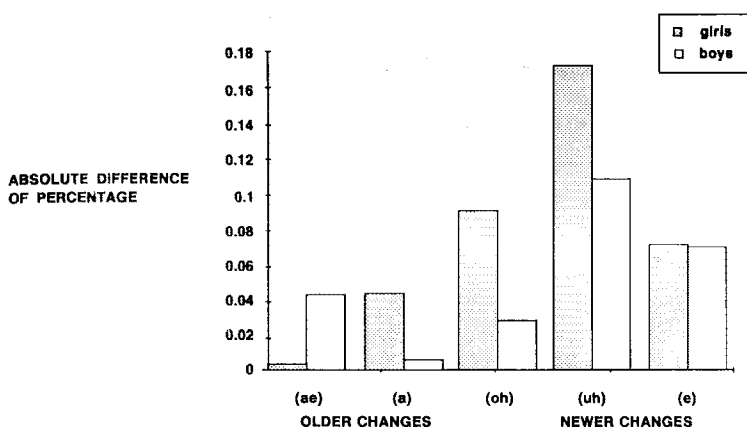not. When each sex is considered separately, however, it is clear that the

Figure 17.3: Absolute differences of percentages for Burnouts and Jocks, calculated separately for girls and boys (note that for (ae), Burnouts actually trail Jocks)

category difference is much greater among the girls. The backing of (e) shows a significant category difference, with the Burnouts leading, but no significant sex difference. In this case, when the two sexes are considered separately, the category difference is the same among the girls and among the boys.

Figure 17.3 compares the differences in the percentages in Table 17.1 between the Jocks and Burnouts, within the girls' and boys' samples separately. None of these differences is significant for (a) and for (ae). For (e) they are significant and identical for the two sexes. For (oh) and (uh), however, there is a clear tendency for there to be greater social differentiation among the girls than among the boys.

These results throw into question general statements that women lead in sound change or that sex differences are indicative of sound change. In fact, in my data, the greatest sex differences occur with the older – and probably less vital – changes, involving (ae), (a), and (oh). I would venture the following hypotheses about the relation of gender to the older and the newer changes in these data. It appears that in both sets of changes, the girls are using variation more than the boys. In the case of the newer ones, the girls' patterns of variation show a greater difference between Jocks and Burnouts than do the boys'. In the case of the older ones, all girls are making far greater use than the boys of variables that are not associated with social category affiliation. I have speculated elsewhere that the newer changes, which are more advanced closer to the urban center, are ripe for association with counteradult norms (Eckert, 1987). The older changes, on the other hand, which have been around for some time and are quite advanced in the adult community, are probably not very effective as

carriers of counteradult adolescent meaning, but they have a more generalized function associated with expressiveness and perhaps general membership. In both cases – the girls' greater differentiation of the newer changes and their greater use of older changes – the girls' phonological behavior is consonant with their greater need to use social symbols for self-presentation.

CONCLUSIONS

I would not, at this point, claim that the relation shown in these data between new and old changes is necessary, particularly in view of the fact that Labov (1984) found that women in Philadelphia led in new sound changes, whereas sex differences tended to disappear in older changes. It is apparent, then, that generalizations about the relation between sound change and gender are best deferred until more communities have been examined.

The first clear conclusion from these data is that sex and social category are not necessarily independent variables but that they can interact in a very significant way. It is the nature of that interaction, which occurs here with (oh) and (uh), that is of interest in this chapter. It is not the case with these phonological variables that there are large sex differences in one category and not in the other. In other words, sex is rarely more 'salient' in one category than the other. One certainly cannot say that the boys and/or girls are asserting their gender identities through language more in one category than in the other. Rather, there are greater category differences in one sex group than the other. In other words, category membership is more salient to members of one sex than the other; girls are asserting their category identities through language more than boys. This is consonant with the fact that girls are more concerned with category membership than boys, as well as with the fact that girls must rely more on symbolic manifestations of social membership than boys. And this is, in turn, the adolescent manifestation of the broader generalization that women, deprived of access to real power, must claim status through the use of symbols of social membership.

These data make it clear that the search for explanations of sex differences in phonological variation should be redirected. All of the demographic categories that we correlate with phonological variation are more complex than their labels would indicate. Indeed, they are more complex than many sociolinguistic analyses give them credit for. Some analyses of sex differences have suffered from lack of information about women. But it is more important to consider that where most analyses have fallen short has been in the confusion of social meaning with the analyst's demographic abstractions.

NOTES

1 This is an oversimplification. Gender inequality imposes a canonical comparison, whereby higher and lower status accrue automatically to men and women, respectively. It is this inequality itself that leads to the tendency for intrasex comparisons and for the different terms on which men and women engage in these comparisons. Men tend to compare themselves with other men because women don't count, whereas women tend to compare themselves with other women with an eye to how that affects their relation to male-defined status. (My thanks to Jean Lave for helping me work out this tangle.)
2 The transcription of these data was done by Alison Edwards, Rebecca Knack, and Larry Diemet.

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