Consumption, Identity, and Embodiment in a Suburban Los Angeles High School

Abstract
Focusing on evaluative speech fragments produced in small friendship groups.

Theoretical Framework
Adolescent girls are increasingly invested in the gendered discourses of popular media and consumer culture (Coates 1999).

Methods
Research based on fieldwork conducted June 2005-September 2005 at an all-girl high school in suburban Los Angeles...

Community
11 Girls, Ages 14-17
Multicultural – White, Latina, Filipino, Multiple Ethnicity
Middle/Upper-middle class
Live within 30 mile radius to school
Shared Catholic faith
Members of the high school Varsity Cheer Team

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Data
1) IT’S LIKE HER CLOTHES
1 G1: Sasha is like SO: skinny, oh my Go::d
2 like I totally wish I had her body sometimes
3 G2: I think she looks kinda gross
4 like that girl is bone
5 G3: yeah hot
6 G1: like she totally looks like Giselle (Victoria Secret lingerie model)
7 G2: uh huh yeah right, maybe like Giselle’s flat-chested cousin
8 G4: hahaha
9 G2: no but seriously, it’s her clothes.
10 I saw her at Abercrombie last weekend
11 that stuff makes you look skinny
12 like you always look small
13 G3: yeah but like you look small if you are small
14 G1: ye:::ah bu::t like only skinny people shop at Abercrombie in the first place
15 you have to be hot to feel comfortable going in there
16 its cause it’s supposed to feel like a club
17 like loud music and sexy people

2) CHEAP GLITTER
1 G1: so like e::w
2 her makeup was really gross, she’s so gross
3 G2: hahaha, not kewl no::t kewl
4 like all that silver glitter and shit
5 G1: uh so like where does she even pick that stuff up? ()
6 hahaha
7 G3: hahaha
8 G2: no but it’s like, so seriously
9 where does she even shop
10 G4: hahaha like Target or something maybe?
11 G5: ta::rja:::y
12 G1: hahaha
13 G2: yeah she’s into the cheap stuff
14 like when we go shopping, she’s always into the crap
15 like it’s kinda embarrassing
16 G1: ew well like have fun with that
17 tell her not to go blind for me hahah
18 G5: that is so mean, oh my Go::d
19 G2: dude no but it’s true
20 that girl likes needs to get herself to a MAC counter

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Analysis
• Borrowing from Valley Girl talk, a style specific to California used to mark youth middle-class identity.
  • “Like”: Example 1, Lines 1, 2, 4, 12, 13, 14, 17
  • Example 2, Lines 1, 4, 5, 8, 10, 14, 15, 16
  • “Kewl”: Example 2, Line 3
  • “Dude”: Example 2, Line 19
  • “Oh my God”: Example 1, Line 1, Example 2, Line 18, Example 3, Line 3
• Evaluative commentary and moral assessment of branded items & stores.
  • Example 1:
    • Line 11: that stuff makes you look skinny (in reference to Abercrombie & Fitch)
    • Line 17: like loud music and sexy people
  • Example 2:
    • Line 10, 11: G4: haha like Target or something maybe?. G5: ta::rja:::y
    • Line 14, 15: like when we go shopping, she’s always into the crap, like it’s kinda embarrassing
• Identity, bodily presentation, and embodiment.
  • Example 1
    • Line 14, G1: ye:::ah but like only skinny people shop at Abercrombie in the first place
  • Example 2
    • Line 17: tell her not to go blind for me hahah
  • Example 3
    • Line 2: your ASS looks GInormous in those pants, hahaha.
    • Line 7: G4: Courtney, your ASS is HUGE!!

Conclusion
• Girls embody the projected images of consumer brands, linking clothing and labels to idealized body images and lifestyles belonging to a middle-class identity.
  • This middle-class identity is marked through speech style (Valley talk) as well as practice-produced moral evaluation.
  • Los Angeles youth construct their social worlds through not only their consumption practices, but also through a corresponding language of consumption.
  • This research is significant for understanding California as it explores the ways in which Los Angeles moral values negate European values in favor of glamour and glitz (Davis 1999).