

The use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) features by non-African Americans in the construction of gender identities has been noted in recent discussions of crossing among American male youth (Bucholtz 1999, Chun 2001, Cutler 1999). This work has made an important contribution to our understanding of how the indexical meanings of linguistic features can derive from and reproduce their stereotypical associations, such as the ideological linking of blackness and masculinity. Drawing from this literature, this paper examines the use of AAVE-influenced features in the construction of particular kinds of gender and class identities among Korean American girls at a Texas high school. Although drawing its data from 8 different girls, this paper focuses primarily on 4 hours of interaction among 4 friends during which phonological, syntactic, and lexical AAVE-influenced features are used, many of which circulate as stereotypical 'Ebonics' features within mainstream American settings. Some of the features include an AAVE-influenced intonation, habitual 'be' ('My mom be making those stuff. '), double negation ('They don't do nothing'), 'girl' ('Girl, you are nowhere near poor so don't even try'), and 'the bomb' ('She'll be making Katie feel like she's the bomb').

It may seem unsurprising that a group of American girls use AAVE-influenced features given their circulation in the mainstream media; however, this paper demonstrates that the local meanings of these features can diverge from more common mainstream manifestations. While the use of AAVE by non-AAVE speakers has often been linked with the construction of masculine identities in previous sociolinguistic studies, this paper illustrates the ways in which these girls' styles employ these features to construct particular kinds of feminine identities at specific moments of talk. The analysis examines the complex relationship between styles that draw from a single AAVE-influenced linguistic set. For instance, it examines the relationships between styles indexing identities along the axes of gender, class, and ethnicity (masculinity and femininity, working and middle class identities, Korean American, African American, and white identities) as well as the interrelationship of these axes. Importantly, it emphasizes the fact that the meanings of AAVE-influenced features depend on those that circulate within the local context of the school, located in a Texas military town which is predominantly working class and where African Americans constitute the ethnic majority. It also considers the influence of students' social networks on their ideologies of language and social identity, which in turn shape the ways in which speakers shift between language styles to strategically achieve specific interactional meanings, depending on the topic and tone of the conversation. Finally, it recognizes the inherent ambiguity of identifying the boundaries of styles, given the widespread use of AAVE features even among non-African Americans at the school, the overlap between features associated with African Americans and Southerners, and the complex layering of linguistic styles across the local community and during specific interactional moments.