developed my confidence and my best ideas. It is also the place where I met Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, who have been an enduring source of inspiration, love, and intellectual friendship that has extended far beyond IRL's walls. Their ideas are everywhere in this book.

A university is a very different kind of institution from a small interdisciplinary institute, offering the complementarity of vast intellectual resources, a constant challenge from both colleagues and students, and a strong disciplinary pull. I am fortunate to be able to divide my time between IRL and the Department of Linguistics at Stanford, which is an unusually congenial academic environment, particularly for a sociolinguist, and challenging in the most wonderful ways. I am grateful to my students and colleagues for their excellence, inspiration, and friendship, and for their apparent appreciation of my style of sociolinguistics.

As my interest in gender developed during this study, my casual friendship with Sally McConnell-Ginet turned into a very close and wonderful intellectual partnership. I have learned a tremendous amount from my joint work with Sally, and I have gained a lifelong friend in the process.

I can never write anything major without thanking Bill Labov. Looking at the big picture, I'm grateful to him for inventing the study of sociolinguistic variation for heaven's sake. And at the level of the ephemeral, I'm not sure I could have tolerated graduate school had it not been for him. I am forever grateful to Bill for his teaching, his brilliant example, his friendship and encouragement, and for his forbearance when I get mad at him.

In the course of this project, I made three job moves and I got married. Ivan Sag, with whom I engaged in the latter, has been my continual and ever-patient linguistic sounding board, and a gratifying fan of my work. The field of sociolinguistics has suffered vastly from Ivan's decision to do syntax instead of variation, and I really wish he'd do fieldwork with me. I have benefited immeasurably from his receptive and constructively critical ear, from his companionship and encouragement, and from all kinds of things that have nothing to do with this book.

Finally, I could not have done this work without the support of the Spencer Foundation, which funded the pilot project, and the National Science Foundation (BNS-8023291), which funded all of the analysis. Like many, many linguists, I am personally grateful to Paul Chapin for his work at NSF on the behalf of linguists and linguistics. I feel particularly indebted to Paul for offering me extraordinary help and encouragement when I needed it most.

Introduction: Variation and Agency

> Judy slouches in her chair, lifts her right foot to her knee and toys with the fringe on her rawhide boot. ". . . we used to tell our moms that we'd, uh she'd be sleeping at my house, I'd be sleeping at hers, we'd go out and pull an all-nighter, you know. I'd come home the next day, '*Where were you?*' 'Joan's.' '*No you weren't*' because her mom and my mom are like really close – since we got in so much trouble they know each other really good."

Judy's tight laugh seems to match her tight jeans, her speed-thin body, her dark eye liner, and her tense front vowels. In everything she does, Judy embodies and projects her style: independent but strung out, on the edge, restless, fierce. Judy is a burnout. To the rest of the people in her class she stands as the prototypical burnout – a "burned-out burnout." Her dress, her manner, her actions, her speech are all extreme versions of burnout style. Her every move, her every utterance seems to thumb her nose at the school, at adults, at fear.

Our attention to sociolinguistic variation begins with observations like these. We notice people's clothing, their hair, their movements, their facial expressions, and we notice a speech style – a complex construction of lexicon, prosody, segmental phonetics, morphology, syntax, discourse. And we come to associate all of these with the things they do and say – with the attitudes and beliefs they project, and with the things they talk about. It is individual speakers who bring language to life for us, and whose behavior points us to the social significance of variables. But these observations, and many of the insights that they embody, rarely find their way into our scientific accounts of sociolinguistic variation. With our eyes fixed firmly on statistical significance and the global picture, we repackage individuals as members of groups and categories, and we speak of those categories in terms of the characteristics that their members share, losing the local experience that makes variation meaningful to speakers. Ultimately, the social life of variation lies in the variety of individuals' ways of participating in