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Corporations are people: Emblematic scales of brand personification among Asian American youth

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the use of corporate names as personal nicknames for Asian American youth. The analysis traces the meanings of these nicknaming practices through the concepts of BRAND PERSONIFICATION (how figures of personhood are recruited as embodiments of corporate brands) and EMBLEMATIC SCALES (how signs of personhood emerge across trajectories of use and scales of time). Within the crossracial institutional structure of an Asian American supplementary school, these nicknaming practices not only formulate speech, participants, relationships, and settings as informal, but also infuse the nicknamed with brand qualities linked to race, nation, class, and status. These practices also generate fleeting and stable frameworks of group distinction and adequation that operate simultaneously or cyclically and that maintain or transgress classroom roles and racial boundaries. This article demonstrates how an attention to temporal dimensions enables researchers to explore the ways in which small-scale activities accumulate across events and assemble into wider scale structural change. (Nickname, brand, emblem, timescale, trajectory, Asian American youth, race, classroom discourse)*

INTRODUCTION

By the title of my article, "Corporations are people," I do not wish to agree with politicians, such as Mitt Romney, who famously retorted, "Corporations are people, my friend," while campaigning for the US Republican presidential nomination in 2011. Nor do I wish to reaffirm US legislative action beginning in the nineteenth century, which has increasingly granted rights of natural persons to corporations as "legal persons." Instead, I wish to look at the ways in which "figures of personhood" (Agha 2005) are recruited as embodiments of corporate brands, what might be called BRAND PERSONIFICATION. Here I am not interested in how celebrities or politicians develop their own brands, such as the "Obama brand" (Harfoush 2009). Just as brands can be created for persons, so too can "persons" be created for brands (Lury 2004). It is this latter notion that is my

concern. Marketers may refer to this as developing a "brand personality" (Moore 2003), where brands are developed AS IF they are existing public figures or circulating social types with corresponding human characteristics (Hanby 1999). In East Asia in particular, brands are often represented by character figures with which consumers can identify and form relationships (Manning 2010; Silvio 2010).

In this article, I look at a particular kind of brand personification: the use of corporate names as personal names. In 2006–2010, Apple, Inc. ran a highly successful "Get a Mac" advertising campaign where precisely this was done (see also Nakassis 2012). It involved conversations between a casual, fit, well-coiffed, affable, and confident twenty-something white male named "Mac," and a stiff, plump, balding, defensive, and insecure forty-something white male named "PC" (see Figure 1). This is brand personified: the creation of social personae to resemble brands, to be emblematic, or iconic, of them (Agha 2011). Yet this is also a rather simple case of how advertisers attempt to "indexically regiment" (Bucholtz 2011) signs to yield a relatively unambiguous reading of the personified qualities of a brand. How names of brands are taken up as names of people in social life, however, can be much more complex. Such instances are not entirely controlled by marketers, but reach out into the hands of social actors in the world, exposing the pliability and fragility of brands as corporate-names-as-nicknames are assigned by and for individuals. Because nicknames (and, of course, brands) can yield different meanings, I look at how they function as competing signs of personhood across trajectories of use and scales of time. I illustrate how it is crucial to trace such EMBLEMATIC SCALES not only of nicknames themselves, but of the USE of nicknames as well.

FIGURE 1. John Hodgman (left) as "PC" and Justin Long as "Mac." (Online: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Get_a_Mac; image retrieved January 10, 2012)

This article examines the use of corporate names as personal nicknames for Asian American youth. The analysis traces the meanings of these nicknaming practices through the concepts of BRAND PERSONIFICATION (how figures of personhood are recruited as embodiments of corporate brands) and EMBLEMATIC SCALES (how signs of personhood emerge across trajectories of use and scales of time). Within the crossracial institutional structure of an Asian American supplementary school, these nicknaming practices not only formulate speech, participants, relationships, and settings as informal, but also infuse the nicknamed with brand qualities linked to race, nation, class, and status. These practices also generate fleeting and stable frameworks of group DISTINCTION and ADEQUATION (Bucholtz & Hall 2004) that operate simultaneously or cyclically and that maintain or transgress classroom roles and racial boundaries. This article demonstrates how an attention to temporal dimensions enables researchers to explore the ways in which small-scale activities accumulate across events and assemble into wider scale structural change.

EMBLEMATIC SCALES

Used to examine a range of human activity, the concepts of timescales and trajectories recognize social processes as dependent upon the continual outcomes of interactional practices across time and events. Three such timescales are crucial to the analysis of nicknaming in this article: shorter timescales, such as interactional moments in which nicknames are used; intermediate timescales, such as a semester or academic year across which the use of nicknames recurs; and longer timescales, such as the decades or centuries over which what it means to use nicknames has gained a more stable cultural significance. Lemke (2000) argues that an analysis of human activity must attend to a configuration of interconnected processes across several such scales (cf. Blommaert 2007; Gal 1998).

The concept of trajectories assists with the analysis of such cross-timescale configuration. Wortham (2006:48), for example, traces trajectories in order to examine how "[s]tability in social identification occurs over time as an individual consistently inhabits a model of identity and as others interpret and/or react as if the individual has that identity." An identity—understood more as an intermediate timescale formation—is thus accomplished not on a single occasion but along a trajectory of many occasions through which it steadily recurs across a series of short timescale events. At the same time, since participants are constrained by the figures of personhood that circulate in a given cultural context, researchers must also consider how such long timescale formations come to bear on trajectories of short timescale events in the emergence of a recognizable identity.

These notions of timescales and trajectories are crucial to my conceptualization of nicknaming as an emblem of a recognizable social position. Agha (2007:235) defines an emblem as "a thing to which a social persona is attached." This "thing" can be a sign or group of signs, such as a hairstyle, an electronic gadget, or a greeting ritual. In all cases, things are emblems if they "formulate persons as

social actors of specific kinds" (Agha 2007:257). For example, disheveled locks might be read as an emblem of a relaxed, bohemian style; the latest portable media device may be understood as emblematic of a trendy, youthful flair; and the performance of a particular conventionalized salutation might be recognized as an emblem of group relative social status. The concepts of "emblem" and "index" somewhat overlap in that they are both indexical; that is, they both rely on situational context for their meaning. However, an emblem is an "indexical icon" (i.e. both pointing to and resembling its object) and is only concerned with signs of social personae. An index, by contrast, need not be iconic and can include other types of signs, such as temporal and spatial. Thus, whereas every emblem is indexical, not every index is emblematic.

Importantly, emblems are not inflexible or determinate, but constantly subject to interactional construal, leading to slight or significant variations of emblematic readings. I use the concept of emblematic scales to explore how such indeterminacy engages with the HETEROGENEITY and INTERRELATIONS of emblems along different trajectories of use and scales of time. In terms of heterogeneity, I examine both the multiplicity and stability of meaning: how some emblematic readings for a sign may steadily recur across time, while others may seem to vanish within minutes or resurface in future events. In terms of interrelations, I investigate how emblems that precede, accompany, or follow other emblems may influence the trajectories of other emblems. This article illustrates how tracing emblematic scales allows researchers to discern the complex social significance of emblems as reliant on temporal degrees of communicative context.

NICKNAMES AND NICKNAME USE AS EMBLEMS

Studies on nicknaming generally agree on two things: that nicknaming practices have multiple meanings and that these meanings vary across contexts (Alford 1988). For instance, research from various disciplinary perspectives and cultural settings illustrates how nicknaming can be tied to a wide range of disparate effects that "express and manipulate social bonds" (Brandes 1975:143): from signaling familiarity or intimacy (Dickey 1997), to asserting status or power (Adams 2008). While much research attends to the specificity of meaning within a given cultural context (Evans-Pritchard 1948/1964) or to the shifts in meaning across social groups within a community (Rymes 1996), this article sets out to examine how, within a single classroom, nicknaming practices achieve numerous, often contradictory, meanings that, while on the surface may appear to be haphazard, are actually quite disciplined. I explore such "orderly heterogeneity" (Eckert 2008:464) through a detailed investigation of nicknaming across emblematic scales.

Yet when exploring the meaning of nicknaming practices, it is important to first tease apart two separate layers: (i) how a nickname can be an emblem, and (ii) how the USE of a nickname can be an emblem.

With regard to the first layer, individual nicknames themselves can indeed be emblems of specifiable social personae. Anthropologists have noted how particular nicknames can be emblematic of personal or group characteristics, including occupation (Collier & Bricker 1970), distinctive physical appearance or behavior (Brandes 1975), and gang affiliation (Rymes 1996). The nicknames "Princess" and "Sport," for example, are widely understood in the US as emblematic of highly gendered social attributes, such as "dainty" and "athletic," respectively. One of the nicknames explored in this article is "Samsung," a prominent Korean electronics corporation. Although Samsung as the name of a major corporation circulates widely in the US, Samsung as a nickname for a person does not. Thus, unlike Princess and Sport, the emblematic value of the nickname Samsung requires a text-level indexical exploration: tracing how the nickname travels across trajectories of short timescale events, and how meanings stabilize at the intermediate timescales of a month or a year. At the same time, a stereotypic indexical approach is required since longer timescale formations that assign certain attributes to the corporate name Samsung also inform how the nickname Samsung is understood.

With regard to the second layer, the use of nicknames, too, can be a widely recognized emblem. The use of a nickname as opposed to one's "official" name might be understood through first-order deference indexicality (Silverstein 2003), where nickname use can be an index of nondeference. In addition, the use of a nickname in the US and other parts of the world has been widely enregistered as an index of informality (e.g. Collier & Bricker 1970; Kennedy & Zamuner 2006). Such stable values for nicknaming—as nondeferential and informal—may be indexically presupposed in ideological frameworks that entail a wide range of disparate effects. For example, presupposing nondeference and informality might enable a strategic ambiguity between intimacy and condescension when nicknames are used toward those who are the object of one's affection or about those who are loathed or feared. The main creative effects that I explore in this article are group distinction and adequation (Bucholtz & Hall 2004), which are processes through which a sufficient amount of socially recognized difference (distinction) or sameness (adequation) becomes established. I seek to unpack how these opposed effects are achieved through nicknaming practices among the same group of individuals.

Conceptualizing nickname use as emblematic—not just indexical—of an informal persona or of group distinction or adequation underscores the iconic function of nicknaming practices. That is, nicknaming as an emblem of informality not only ideologically constitutes a resemblance between informal language and informal speakers, but also recursively extends this iconic association to other social dimensions, creating informal relations and informal settings (Gal & Irvine 1995). Thus, in educational sites, nickname use may render informal the modes of address as well as the roles and relationships between teachers and students, signaling a break from the conventions of a formal learning environment and from the authority and power relations that are associated with it. Yet, as discussed above, informality can also be

drawn into ideological frameworks that produce different kinds of interactional effects, such as social division and group cohesion.

AN ASIAN AMERICAN SUPPLEMENTARY SCHOOL

The data in this article is taken from a yearlong ethnographic and discourse analytic study at "Apex,"[1] an Asian American supplementary school or "cram school" in New York City in 2006–2007. Apex is located in a middle-class Queens neighborhood of which Asian Americans—primarily Korean Americans and Chinese Americans—comprise about a quarter of the population. The discourse excerpts below are of video-recorded classroom interaction among Korean American fifth graders and European American teachers in an English language arts class that met on Fridays after school.

Often established by Asian immigrants in urban ethnic enclaves in the US, Asian American supplementary schools are private educational institutions offering additional academic instruction during nonschool hours. As opposed to Kaplan, Sylvan Learning, and other test-prep or remedial programs in the US, Asian American supplementary schools are primarily modeled along those in Asia, where children continuously attend one or more supplementary schools from elementary school to high school (Roesgaard 2006). Yet unlike Asian supplementary schools, which usually focus exclusively on instructional content, Asian American supplementary schools can also serve as sites of ethnic community formation and urban immigrant support, particularly for parents who reportedly express concerns about navigating American educational institutions and raising children in the US (Zhou 2009).

In interviews with administrators and teachers at Apex as well as other Asian American supplementary schools throughout New York City, I was told that Asian immigrant parents typically prefer the following school structure (see Table 1): the director is an Asian immigrant like themselves, the teachers are "American" (which usually means native English-speaking European American), and the students are children of Asian immigrants. Immigrant parents reportedly desire to have their children taught by those who seem to be the most intimate with the American educational system. Over the course of my fieldwork, Apex followed this crossracial institutional structure, with the exception of one native

TABLE 1. *Desired school structure from the perspective of Asian immigrant parents.*

Participant	Race/Ethnicity	Description
Director	"Asian"	First-generation Asian immigrant
Teacher	"American"	Native English-speaking European American
Student	"Asian American"	1.5- or second-generation child of Asian immigrants

Spanish-speaking teacher and one American-born Korean American teacher, out of the approximately dozen teachers employed.

Asian American supplementary schools, thus, are highly racialized spaces in their institutional design. Such ideologically constituted crossracial sites provide a fertile ground for exploring circulating ideas about race, ethnicity, and nation, and the construction of racial and ethnic boundaries (Reyes 2011). It is in this context that the study of nicknaming occurs.

NICKNAMING IN AN ASIAN AMERICAN SUPPLEMENTARY SCHOOL

On January 12, 2007, the spring semester began at Apex. Consisting of eleven students (three girls and eight boys), all of whom were 1.5 or second generation Korean American,[2] the fifth grade class I had been following since September was assigned to a new classroom and a new teacher. As the European American teacher, Mrs. Turner, called attendance, she realized that there were two "Sams" in the class: Samuel Jung and Sam Park. Samuel Jung offered a solution, asking to be called by his initials "S. J." Mrs. Turner sternly replied, "I don't do nicknames." Already on the first day of class, tension over who is authorized to establish legitimate naming practices in the classroom was present. Having two students with the same first name did indeed pose problems for Mrs. Turner. During an interview toward the end of the semester, she said: "One of the Sams, I don't remember which one. I forget which one. I just don't remember the last names. I get them confused."

Despite overtly claiming avoidance of nickname use on the first day of class, Mrs. Turner proceeded to assign several nicknames over the unfolding months, which coincided with how her teaching style and the classroom atmosphere gradually transformed from strict and conventional to more relaxed and informal. She devised, for example, "Freckles" (for a boy who had freckles), "Billy Goat" (for a boy named Bill), and "Patricia" (for a boy named Pat after he said he was a girl in response to Mrs. Turner saying that the girls' essays were better). Students also created Anglo puns of Korean names (for example, Joo-Eun was nicknamed "Juice" because a student claimed he lacked a "Korean accent" for pronouncing her name) and Korean puns of Anglo names (for example, Pat was also nicknamed "Pabo," which roughly translates as 'fool' in Korean).

During our interviews, Mrs. Turner revealed her understanding of nicknaming practices as informal, vitalizing, and comical. For example, she told me that the way nicknames were used in her classroom would not happen in a regular school, but since Apex was after school hours, nicknames "liven things up a little bit." Moreover, when I asked about the use of nicknames in her classroom, Mrs. Turner replied: "It just evolved that way. I'm like a comedian with an audience." As these quotes reveal, Mrs. Turner not only confirmed that nicknaming can be an emblem of informality, but also explained how this informality can indexically entail new meanings such as excitement and humor.

SAMSUNG, LG, AND SAM'S CLUB: NICKNAMES FOR SAMUEL JUNG AND SAM PARK

Although the nickname S. J. was offered by Samuel Jung as a solution for differentiating between the two Sams in the class, it did not stick; Samsung, however, did. Samuel Jung was nicknamed "Samsung," a Korean electronics corporation, and Sam Park was nicknamed "LG," also a Korean electronics corporation, as well as "Sam's Club," an American wholesale corporation.[3] The nickname Samsung was the first to emerge, prompted by at least two circumstances: (i) the need for a mode of differentiation between two students with the same first name (Dorian 1970), and (ii) a student name having a similar graphic and phonetic structure as a corporate name ("Sam Jung" and "Samsung" are differentiated by the substitution of a single grapheme [the letter <s> for <j>] and phoneme [the sound /s/ for /ʤ/]).

Samuel Jung and Sam Park were not simply passive receptacles for nicknames. How they were understood in the classroom also influenced the viability and durability of their corporate nicknames. Although both students could be quite mischievous, Samuel Jung and Sam Park acquired different types of identities over the course of the semester. Samuel Jung was more outspoken, often bragged about his achievements, and was repeatedly labeled "smart" and "genius" by his classmates. Sam Park had a lower profile and, though not timid, was more deferential to the teacher and was not explicitly framed in terms of his intelligence. Although they expressed different views about their nicknames on different occasions, during one interview, Samuel Jung had this to say about being called Samsung: "I don't really care. People used to call me Samsung a lot. People used to call me that in school sometimes, so I'm not that unused to it or anything." I asked him if people used the nickname "in a mean way." Samuel replied: "No, in a funny way, fun."

Yet what began as a type of playful homophony evolved into a nicknaming practice that profoundly shaped individual identities and group relations in the classroom. This was partly due to how the names Samsung, LG, and Sam's Club invoked certain entities and qualities. That is, not only did the nicknames simultaneously refer to two entities (a corporation and a person), but they were also read with relatively stable qualities that have been associated with the corporations through longer timescale processes. For example, Samsung and LG are comparable corporate brands, both Korean electronics corporations, associated with advanced levels of knowledge, state of the art technology, sleek design, and upscale markets. Sam's Club, by contrast, is an American wholesale corporation, associated with bulk products, overconsumption, discount items, and bargain hunters. In the following sections, I argue that brand personification occurs through an iconic mapping of these qualities from one entity to the next—from corporations to persons—which helps guide the emblematic scales of nicknaming practices.

NICKNAMING AS STABLE EMBLEM OF AN INFORMAL PERSONA: NICKNAME BAPTISMAL EVENTS

I begin the analysis of discourse data by tracing the introduction of corporate names for student nicknames in the classroom. Putnam (1975) has used the concept of "baptismal event" to refer to the origin of a proper name where the relationship between a name and its referent is fixed. In many societies it is not uncommon, if not the norm, for individuals to accrue, through serial baptismal events, multiple names and nicknames for use across and within various contexts. But just as an individual can have several nicknames, a nickname can have several meanings. Baptismal events are not effective in fixing a meaning to a name; instead, it is through the histories and contexts of use that meanings solidify, change, accumulate, or alternate (Rymes 1996). I illustrate here how, within the context of a single classroom and across only a few short months, nicknaming practices get read through several competing emblematic scales.

As with other names, the nickname Samsung is traceable to a particular baptismal event, which marks the start of a trajectory, not a definitive moment in which meaning is fixed. In the following excerpt, nearly a month into the semester, Mrs. Turner is handing out copies of the homework assignment. On each sheet of paper, an office administrator had written the name of a student. As Mrs. Turner is calling student names, she pauses, looks at the paper in her hand, then asks, "Samuel, what is your last name?"

(1) Samsung baptismal event (February 9, 2007, 4:04 pm)[4]

Mrs. Turner:	Samuel, what is your last name?
Jeff:	Jung
Samuel Jung:	J, U, N, G.
Mrs. Turner:	I asked him
Samuel Jung:	J, U, N, G.
Mrs. Turner:	okay they wrote down Sam Sung
	[Pat, Chul, Bill laugh; Samuel Jung shrugs then smiles]
Chul:	ha ha ha Samsung
Samuel Jung:	yeah, people used to call me that in my old- in my real school
Chul:	Samsung
Samuel Jung:	Samsung
Bill:	Samsung? uh Samsung, oh it's supposed to be a "j"
Samuel Jung:	yeah
Bill:	Sam Jung
Samuel Jung:	it's just one letter difference

Once Mrs. Turner informs the class that the name on the paper is "Sam Sung," several students laugh, enthusiastically repeat "Samsung," and discuss the single graphic difference between the student name and the corporate name. Samuel Jung states that Samsung was his nickname at his "real school," thus differentiating his "real" public school from this possibly "pretend" school.

About a month later, the nickname LG has its baptismal event. In the following excerpt, students are discussing their next essay topic, which is about an "evil twin." Sam Park tells the class that his evil twin is Samsung Electronics (Samsung Electronics and LG Electronics are the full names of the corporations). This is followed by a classmate assigning the nickname LG to Sam Park, which is quickly ratified by Mrs. Turner and another classmate.

(2) LG baptismal event (March 16, 2007, 4:22 pm)

Sam Park:	my evil twin is um Samsung Electronics
Bill:	why are you pointing to me
	[Jeff, Chul laugh]
Mrs. Turner:	okay he's not-
Mark:	Samsung's evil twin is LG
Mrs. Turner:	yes LG Electronics
Jeff:	L- LG is Sam [pointing to Sam Park]

Yet less than an hour later, Sam Park acquires a second nickname: Sam's Club. In the following excerpt, Mrs. Turner is calling on one of the Sams to read. One strategy Mrs. Turner had been using to differentiate between the two Sams was to call Samuel Jung "Samuel" and Sam Park "Sam." Here, she first says "Sam," then after a pause adds "-uel" to the end, which causes some confusion.

(3) Sam's Club baptismal event (March 16, 2007, 5:14 pm)

Mrs. Turner:	who would like to begin reading? okay Sam. -uel
Sam Park:	okay
Samuel Jung:	[looks up] huh? Samuel's me
Mrs. Turner:	I don't know, you're Samsung, that's Sam something.
Sam Park:	Sam
Mrs. Turner:	Sam's Club. Samsung, Sam's Club. go ahead

When the use of "Sam. -uel" does not successfully disambiguate the two Sams in the class, Mrs. Turner proceeds to clarify that Samuel Jung is Samsung. She then assigns the nickname Sam's Club to Sam Park.

The meanings of these nicknames are rather indeterminate at this point, given that only three short timescale events, which mark the genesis of corporate nicknaming trajectories, have been considered. But the following can be noted. Samsung emerges in response to a typographical error, which produces "Sam Sung" instead of "Sam Jung." Samuel Jung quickly offers his history with the nickname at his "real school," thereby characterizing his public school as the site of genuine "formal" education and, by comparison, Apex as a context of fake "informal" learning. LG emerges in response to the need of a "twin" corporate nickname, thus Samsung and LG are oriented to as similar types of corporations. Sam's Club emerges in response to a crisis of differentiation between the two Sams. The metrical patterning of "Samsung" and "Sam something" creates a slot ("something")

that is filled with "Club" to complete another corporate nickname. In all three cases, the introduction of corporate names as student nicknames is not initially objected to by any party and, in fact, injects some amusement into the classroom. Although the meanings of the nicknames themselves are still tenuous at this point, the use of nicknames is presupposed as an emblem of an informal persona as a casual classroom atmosphere is being established.

NICKNAMING AS FLEETING EMBLEM OF GROUP DISTINCTION: TEACHER OPPOSITION TO NICKNAMES

Although Mrs. Turner triggers the nickname Samsung, she is not quick to continue its use. It is only through the insistence of Samuel Jung and his classmates that she eventually starts using Samsung without having to be prompted. Starting about twenty minutes after its baptismal event, Samsung is gradually accepted as a nickname across a ten-minute trajectory of direct address uses. This trajectory demonstrates the interactional work necessary to establish the nickname Samsung as a presupposable sign, and to establish an informal classroom atmosphere in which students are able to weaken teacher resistance toward nickname use.

In the following excerpt, Mrs. Turner calls "Samuel" while she is handing out papers. Samuel Jung then indicates that it is not clear to whom she is referring.

(4) Sam Jung, not Samsung (February 9, 2007, 4:28 pm)

Mrs. Turner:	Samuel
Samuel Jung:	me?
Chul:	Samsung [laughs]
Bill:	Samsung
Samuel Jung:	Samsung- [smiles, waves hands in air]
Mark:	Samsung
Mrs. Turner:	Sam Jung, not Samsung
Samuel Jung:	but I prefer Samsung
Mrs. Turner:	well
Mark:	Samsung
Samuel Jung:	I used to let people in my school call me that
Bill:	Samsung?
Samuel Jung:	yeah Samsung

Several students, including Samuel Jung, urge Mrs. Turner to use the nickname Samsung for Samuel Jung. As on the first day of class, Mrs. Turner and Samuel Jung struggle to establish authority over legitimate naming practices in the classroom: Mrs. Turner displays resistance by first stating "Sam Jung, not Samsung," and Samuel Jung retorts, "but I prefer Samsung." Mrs. Turner responds not with an agreement, but with an ambivalent "well," after which Samuel Jung claims, "I used to let people in my school call me that."

About five minutes later, Mrs. Turner is handing out a different set of papers. She initially calls "Samuel" but abruptly stops and uses "Samsung" instead. This is followed by laughter and repetitions of the nickname by students, as well as verbal and physical displays of triumph by Samuel Jung.

(5) Samuel- Samsung (February 9, 2007, 4:33 pm)

Mrs. Turner:	Samuel- Samsung
Chul:	Samsung [laughs]
Samuel Jung:	whoo [smiles, raises arms sharply into a V-shape]
Bill:	Samsung

A few minutes later, Mrs. Turner asks a question to the class then calls on Samuel Jung. In the previous excerpts when she calls on Samuel Jung, she initially uses "Samuel." Here, she initially uses "Samsung," which is followed by student laughter.

(6) Samsung [laughter] (February 9, 2007, 4:35 pm)

Samuel Jung:	oh, I know I know [hand raised]
Mrs. Turner:	okay Samsung
	[Chul, Bill, Pat laugh]
Samuel Jung:	a sentence is made up of at least one noun

Only a minute later, Mrs. Turner asks another question to the class and calls on Samuel Jung. Again she uses "Samsung." Yet what differentiates the following excerpt from the previous ones is that there is no laughter, echoes, or other cues to indicate that the use of Samsung is marked in any way.

(7) Samsung (February 9, 2007, 4:36 pm)

Samuel Jung:	[hand raised]
Mrs. Turner:	okay Samsung
Samuel Jung:	um, I think this is right- I don't know

This minutes-long timescale demonstrates the interactional work required to establish Samsung as a presupposable sign. These four excerpts form a trajectory that traces a shift in sign-object relationship through the use of a new sign, Samsung, for the person, Samuel Jung. Initially, the sign Sam(uel) is ambiguous; it fails to set defaults for subsequent construals of persons because it indexes two individuals. The use of the sign Samsung is then successful in establishing a new system for disambiguation: Samsung for Samuel Jung, and Sam for Sam Park. By the last excerpt, Samsung is a presupposable sign that finally enjoys normative status as it no longer causes commentary.

Outside of being a presupposable sign for Samuel Jung, there is no evidence yet to suggest that the nickname Samsung itself has taken on any other types of social significance. The nickname is not being read as emblematic of widely recognized qualities, and there is no overt meaning assigned to the corporation Samsung, to

being named after a corporation, or to being named after the corporation Samsung in particular.

Although the emblematic value of the nickname Samsung itself is still indeterminate, the emblematic value of the use of the nickname Samsung continues to solidify. Along this trajectory of short timescale events, nickname use is presupposed as an emblem of an informal persona as evidenced by student laughter and the playful banter between the teacher and students. Nicknaming thus functions to loosen the formality of the classroom context that was established in the first few weeks of the semester. Nickname use is further functioning here as an emblem of group distinction by presupposing the established framework of informality to entail—perhaps even cushion the blow for—a framework of conflict, which creates opposing groups along axes of role and race: Asian American students in opposition to the European American teacher, who is resisting the use of Samsung. As explained earlier, this division is part of the purposefully designed institutional structure of Apex, and thus reconstituted in this classroom interactional practice. Yet as was shown in the excerpts, gradually the teacher surrenders, leaving nothing left to oppose, but also opening up a space for a competing emblematic value to take hold, which is where the analysis leads next.

NICKNAMING AS STABLE EMBLEM OF GROUP ADEQUATION: COLLABORATIVE USE OF NICKNAMES

What began as reluctance turns into enthusiasm, as Mrs. Turner starts having fun with the nickname, particularly across a trajectory of third-person reference. The previous set of excerpts occurred across a minutes-long timescale, but this next set is traced across a months-long timescale. The following trajectory thus reveals how Samsung as a nickname with an established referent is presupposed across events over several months, illustrating its shared recognition in the classroom.

In each of the following interactions, Samuel Jung is absent from the classroom, signaling a "participation framework" (Goffman 1981) that is distinct from the previous excerpts. That is, Samsung is used not to directly address Samuel Jung, but to talk about him when he is absent. This trajectory demonstrates how language play with the word Samsung—as both student nickname and corporate name—further contributes to the establishment of an informal classroom atmosphere.

In the following excerpt, Mrs. Turner states that two students are absent. She proceeds to provide an explanation for Samuel Jung's absence.

(8) Samsung went to Sony (March 16, 2007, 4:18 pm)

Mrs. Turner:	all right. we're still missing two people, we're missing Samsung and Mi-
Sam Park:	Electronics
Mrs. Turner:	yes and Mike. Samsung probably went to Sony, that's why he's not here today
Mark:	Sony's there to complain

In the above excerpt, Mrs. Turner imbues the use of Samsung with aspects of both the absent person Samuel Jung and the electronics corporation. After Sam Park interjects "Electronics" (the second half of the full corporate name), Mrs. Turner suggests that Samuel Jung went to Sony, followed by another student contributing to the joke. This use of Samsung produces a homonymic pun, where the two meanings of Samsung—as indexical of both the corporation and the student—are in simultaneous operation to humorous effect.

About a month later, Samuel Jung is absent again.

(9) Samsung went bankrupt (April 20, 2007, 4:22 pm)

Jeff:	where's Sam Jung
Mark:	Samsung went out of business
Mrs. Turner:	[laughs] he went bankrupt

As in excerpt (8), Samuel Jung is being discussed as a corporate entity. But in this excerpt, the interactional roles for constructing the pun are reversed: a student initiates, then Mrs. Turner contributes.

About a month later, Samuel Jung is absent yet again.

(10) Samsung went to Hitachi (May 18, 2007, 4:07 pm)

Mark:	what happened to Samsung
Min:	yeah he never comes anymore
Mrs. Turner:	he- he is- he went abroad to Hitachi [laughs]
Chul:	Hitachi
	[Mrs. Turner laughs]
Chul:	Hitachi yeah

In this last excerpt, Mrs. Turner initiates the pun, while a different student ratifies her contribution through repetitions and an affirmative "yeah." In all three excerpts, the humorous effect of the homonymic pun is collaboratively achieved by both the teacher and students.

Across this trajectory of third-person reference, the nickname Samsung itself is now gaining more significance. Earlier I noted how Samsung emerged across a minutes-long timescale as a presupposable sign with an established referent (a student). Now its dual function as a sign for the more widely recognized referent (a corporation), upon which the nickname is based, is explicitly brought to bear across this trajectory. Accessing long timescale processes through which stable qualities of the corporation Samsung have been produced, the teacher and students iconically map qualities from one established referent to the next, from the corporation Samsung to the student Samuel Jung. Brand personification results. Samuel Jung is framed either as a businessperson traveling to his competitors, or as a corporation with high financial stakes. Thus Samsung, as a corporate name as well as a student nickname, is being indexically linked to importance, intelligence, and

industriousness, which are qualities that coincide with how Samuel Jung is read in the classroom.

In addition, the use of the nickname Samsung across this trajectory produces another emblematic value, one that effectively replaces the fleeting framework of group distinction discussed earlier. As the teacher and students collaboratively create fictitious reasons for Samuel Jung's absences based on his corporate nickname, the use of Samsung contributes to a classroom atmosphere of solidarity and alignment between the teacher and students as they co-tell jokes and delight in their shared amusement. Mrs. Turner, especially, displays an investment in presenting a clever and playful persona along this trajectory. Unlike the minutes-long trajectory of group distinction, where Asian American students were momentarily positioned against the European American teacher until her resistance gradually weakened, this months-long trajectory aligns the teacher and co-present students, reconfiguring group relations that traverse classroom roles and racial boundaries: the European American teacher and Asian American students are now unified. Thus, nicknaming as an established emblem of an informal persona is drawn into an ideological framework that creates a competing emblematic value of group adequation, one that is more robust than group distinction since it is sustained across months of time.

NICKNAMING AS STABLE EMBLEM OF GROUP DISTINCTION: STUDENT OPPOSITION TO NICKNAMES

Yet within this same months-long timescale across which nicknaming becomes an emblem of group adequation, still another competing emblematic value of group distinction emerges. This emblem is characterized not by teacher opposition to nickname use, as discussed earlier, but by student opposition. Running parallel to the months-long trajectory of nicknaming as an emblem of group adequation, this months-long trajectory traces how the nicknames Samsung and Sam's Club are rejected by students, which restores nicknaming as an emblem of group distinction with more stability.

In the following excerpt, Mrs. Turner is asking students for examples of sentences. Samuel Jung interrupts the task by suggesting the use of different nicknames for him and Sam Park.

(11) From now on I'm Sam (March 9, 2007, 4:33 pm)

Mrs. Turner:	yes?
Samuel Jung:	from now on I'm Sam, he's Sam P.
Mrs. Turner:	you're Samsung.
Sam Park:	Electronics
Mrs. Turner:	Samsung
Sam Park:	Electronics

Mrs. Turner:	in your case it [Samuel Jung's sentence] might be "help me Sam my circuit breakers are going"
Sam Park:	Electronics
	[Sam Park, Chul laugh]

Samuel Jung introduces an alternative system for differentiating between the two Sams: "Sam" for Samuel Jung, and "Sam P." for Sam Park. These nicknames are rejected by Mrs. Turner, who continues to call him Samsung with the support of Sam Park's interjections of "Electronics" after each of her turns. Mrs. Turner also produces a pun similar to the ones that were performed when Samuel Jung was absent. She offers a sample sentence for Samuel Jung that positions him as an entity that relies on electrical circuits. As in excerpts (8)–(10), nicknaming as an emblem of group adequation is strengthened by the teacher and students (except Samuel Jung) through collaborative reinforcement of the nickname Samsung with laughter and "Electronics" interjections.

At the same time, a trajectory of group distinction is emerging through Samuel Jung's overt rejection of the nickname Samsung. Unlike the framework of teacher opposition to nickname use presented earlier, this framework centers on student opposition. This new opposition, I argue, is emerging in response to the established framework of teacher-student solidarity that defies boundaries of role and race within the crossracial institutional structure of Apex. That is, Samuel Jung is not so much resisting the nickname itself, but resisting the trajectory that produces nicknaming as an emblem of group adequation where the European American teacher and Asian American students collaboratively position him as the object of jokes. Thus nicknaming as an emblem of group adequation is presupposed in an emergent ideological framework that creates an emblem of group distinction characterized by student opposition.

In the following excerpt, occurring a month later, Sam Park and two other students challenge Mrs. Turner's use of Sam's Club as a nickname for Sam Park.

(12) Why do you call him Sam's Club? (April 13, 2007, 4:54 pm)

Mrs. Turner:	okay Sam's Club is back
Mark:	what?
Pat:	why do you call him Sam's Club
Mrs. Turner:	well the other one is Samsung, so this is Sam's Club
Sam Park:	no I'm LG

Whereas Mrs. Turner was supported by students in her insistence on the use of Samsung in excerpt (11), here she is challenged by Sam Park and other students for her use of Sam's Club. When Mrs. Turner refers to Sam Park as Sam's Club, students immediately question her use of this nickname, and Sam Park finally outright rejects it by saying that his nickname is LG.

About a month later, Mrs. Turner directly asks Sam Park if he likes the nickname Sam's Club, followed by input from several students in the classroom.

(13) There's no point of saying Sam's Club (May 18, 2007, 4:24 pm)

Mrs. Turner:	you like being called- um- Sam's Club?
Pat:	no
Sam Park:	I like it a little but then-
	[Min laughs]
Jane:	who cares if you like it or not
Samuel Jung:	he likes Amy [Sam Park's other nickname]
Sam Park:	there's no point- there's no point of saying Sam's Club
Mrs. Turner:	why not
Sam Park:	I don't have a club
Mrs. Turner:	there is a store called Sam's Club
Jane:	what about LG, what about LG
Sam Park:	yeah but then it's- it's a poor club then, a poor club
Min:	what?
Mrs. Turner:	it's not poor. people go there to buy wholesale goods

Here, corporate nicknames are gaining further emblematic value with regard to class and status. Drawing on long timescale processes through which stable attributes of the corporation Sam's Club have been established, Sam Park calls into question the quality of the corporation, its goods, or perhaps its clientele by stating "it's a poor club." Thus, low socioeconomic status is brought to bear in Sam Park's overt refusal of the nickname Sam's Club. By rejecting the nickname, Sam Park is also rejecting brand personification. That is, Sam Park is refusing to personify a low status brand like Sam's Club. Meanwhile, LG gains emblematic value as a higher status corporation simply by being positioned as preferable to Sam's Club (excerpt (12)) and comparable to Samsung (excerpt (2)). As a result, from the student perspective, Korean electronics corporations like Samsung and LG emerge with higher status over American wholesale corporations like Sam's Club.

Like Samuel Jung's rejection of Samsung, Sam Park's rejection of Sam's Club is also about resisting nicknaming as an emblem of group adequation, and further developing nicknaming as an emblem of group distinction. Across excerpts (11)–(13), the established framework of group adequation is presupposed by Mrs. Turner's attempts to keep students on board with her system of nicknaming. At the same time, this emblem of group adequation is drawn into an ideological framework that produces a stable trajectory of group distinction characterized by student opposition. This differs from the minutes-long timescale that produced a fleeting framework of group distinction characterized by teacher opposition (excerpts (4)–(5)). Now, actively rejecting the use of specific nicknames used by the teacher, the students are able to establish a more stable months-long configuration of group distinction to replace the minutes-long one that failed.

The creation of a stable emblem of group distinction reinstates the boundaries of role and race introduced by the fleeting emblem of group distinction. That is, both emblems of group distinction—whether characterized by teacher or student

opposition or by momentary or enduring existence—operate similarly as they rely on the interactional reproduction of institutionally devised group divisions along racial lines and classroom roles: Asian American students in opposition to the European American teacher. Moreover, how race is iconically mapped from corporations to persons also plays a role in this new framework of opposition. Since the European American teacher consistently favors the American corporate nickname Sam's Club while the Korean American students consistently favor the Korean corporate nickname LG, corporations map onto their proponents, so much as circulating ideologies about nation and race read the Korean American children of immigrants as "Korean" and Mrs. Turner as "American." Thus, race-based and role-based divisions in nickname preferences and emblems of group distinction heighten the boundaries between the teacher and students that have already been established in the institutional design of Apex.

EMBLEMATIC SCALES OF NICKNAMES

The analysis traces how two referents (a corporation and a person) emerge for each name (Samsung, LG, and Sam's Club) and how meanings for each referent are achieved through stereotypic and text-level indexicality. Since Samsung, LG, and Sam's Club—as names for corporations—broadly circulate across long timescale processes, many individuals are able to draw on stereotypic indexicality to assign widely recognized qualities to each corporation: Samsung and LG as cutting-edge Korean electronics companies and Sam's Club as a budget-conscious American discount warehouse. Emerging through text-level indexicality across shorter timescale events, names of corporations become nicknames for persons, namely Samuel Jung and Sam Park. While corporate names as indexical of corporations are widely recognized, corporate names as indexical of these two students most likely do not circulate much farther than Apex.

The two referents assigned to each name become laminated onto one another through emblematic scales of brand personification. That is, corporate nicknames gain emblematic value as they formulate an iconic mapping of corporate qualities onto person qualities along identifiable trajectories of participation and scales of time. The two referents for each name do not operate separately, but simultaneously, when the meaning of corporate nicknames is infused with aspects of both corporations and persons. For example, as the corporations are read through long timescale processes, Samsung and LG become indexical of being Korean and high status, which is mapped onto Samuel Jung and Sam Park, while Sam's Club becomes indexical of being American and low status, which is mapped onto Sam Park. These laminations inform how students respond to these nicknames in the institutionalized crossracial context of Apex. In the framework of student opposition to nicknames, for example, Sam Park resists being read with the relatively lower status that is associated with wholesale corporations. I argue, however, that oftentimes student opposition to a nickname is less about the nickname itself and more about the

alignments the teacher achieves by using that nickname, be it tease (excerpts (8)–(11)) or control (excerpts (12)–(13)).

EMBLEMATIC SCALES OF NICKNAME USE

Not only do nicknames themselves acquire meanings that shape individual identities and group relations in the classroom, but the use of nicknames gains multiple levels of significance that influence these processes as well. At baptismal events and across minutes-long and months-long timescales, the use of nicknames becomes an emblem of an informal persona, of group distinction, and of group adequation, across distinct emblematic scales.

The analysis reveals how emblems are both heterogeneous and interrelated. Widely circulating ideologies and long timescale processes produce the culturally stable reading of nickname use as indexical of nondeference and informality in the US. The use of nicknames in this classroom presupposes these qualities in the creation of a casual atmosphere. Building upon this established framework of informality, nicknaming as emblematic of group distinction becomes possible, as students are able to contextualize their opposition against the teacher in a less serious or threatening manner. Whereas students rely on this collection of indexical readings to transform the classroom atmosphere from formal to informal, from mundane to amusing, and from orderly to antagonistic, the teacher relinquishes her opposition and replaces it with her own brand of socially meaningful work: the creation of teacher-student solidarity, largely at the expense of Samuel Jung. This new emblematic value of group adequation motivates a competing emblematic value: a different form of group distinction that is characterized by student opposition.

As the analysis shows, several emblematic readings for nickname use can be layered and accessed across a configuration of interconnected timescales. For example, the stable emblems of group adequation and group distinction occur across the same months-long timescale. And while these two emblems are in competition with one another, they both presuppose longer timescale formations that produce stable readings for nicknaming practices as nondeferential and informal. Thus, multiple meanings of nicknaming practices—as nondeferential and informal, as creating group distinction and adequation—can be accessible to participants in this classroom dependent upon the scales at which they are sustained: across longer timescales such as lifetimes, to intermediate timescales such as months. The task, then, becomes to determine the emblematic scales that are activated in a given interactional event and how that event operates within a trajectory of nickname use across a particular timescale configuration.

The analysis also reveals how emblematic values can be ephemeral, durable, and cyclical. Emblems that are built across minutes-long trajectories can fade and be replaced, as is shown with group distinction characterized by teacher opposition. Emblems that are sustained across months-long trajectories are more stable, as is shown with group adequation and group distinction characterized by student

opposition. And emblems that are formulated across lifetimes are even more culturally enduring, as is shown with nondeference and informality. Even though the emblem of group distinction characterized by teacher opposition is fleeting, it may be more accurately understood as cyclical. The rebirth of group distinction—this time characterized by student opposition—reveals how nicknaming as emblematic of group distinction does not vanish completely, but gets reconfigured with a more enduring impact.

The emblematic scales of nicknaming are also greatly influenced by social factors, such as race, nation, class, status, and role. The analysis highlights how both emblems of group distinction rely on divisions based on role and race: Asian American students against the European American teacher, an interactional structure that mirrors the institutional structure of Apex. The emblem of group adequation, however, reformulates an alignment among individuals that traverses these social boundaries: Asian American students aligned with the European American teacher. Acceptance of a particular nickname, too, is guided by how corporations are linked to social traits. For example, Samsung and LG are read as high status Korean electronics companies, and Sam's Club is read as a low status American discount warehouse. This may influence how Sam Park and the other students consistently favor the nickname LG while Mrs. Turner consistently favors the nickname Sam's Club. And this creates another meaningful division of identity along racial lines according to nickname preference: the Korean Americans preferring the Korean corporate nickname, and the European American preferring the American corporate nickname.

Given that my data collection ended after a year, it is difficult to project the continued cycles of the emblems of group distinction and group adequation in this setting. Because the meanings of these corporate nicknames do not likely circulate beyond this immediate community, I can only speak to their relative stability across months-long timescales at Apex. I did learn, however, that the emblem of group distinction characterized by student opposition did not signal a sustained resistance against the use of Samsung. In October 2007 (four months after I ended data collection in the classroom), the director of Apex told me that the nickname Samsung was still heard in the halls of the school, and that Samuel Jung enjoyed it, reportedly exclaiming: "I'm a big electronics company!" Based on my analysis here, I suspect that student delight in the nickname Samsung continued to produce some form of oppositional framework between students and teachers. Moreover, Samuel Jung's support of the nickname Samsung likely continued through processes of brand personification, where his taking up the nickname coincided with his status and intelligence being associated with the brand.

CONCLUSION

Within the crossracial institutional structure of an Asian American supplementary school, this article illustrates how Asian American youth get recruited as

embodiments of brands, which are linked to particular social types with corresponding human characteristics. Looking at the interplay between nickname-as-emblem and nickname-use-as-emblem, I expose a type of brand "vulnerability" (Moore 2003) or "defeasibility" (Nakassis 2012) in which many conflicting meanings for brands emerge along competing scales of time and trajectories of use, hence brand personification across emblematic scales. Corporate nicknaming is guided not only by how brands themselves become emblematic of personae to which participants may be aligned, but also by how the use of corporate nicknames and what its use achieves motivate participants to identify with—or rather AS—brands.

This article also illustrates how meaning is more than just "multiple." Since baptismal events and other isolated moments are incapable of fixing meaning at one point in time, closely tracing emblematic scales is necessary for determining "when" meaning occurs. For example, it becomes impossible to discern the meaning of nicknaming by only considering a moment in which a teacher opposes a nickname or a student opposes a nickname. In fact, as the analysis reveals, opposing a nickname is often less about the nickname itself and more about opposing the emblematic effects of group distinction or adequation that the use of nicknames inspires. This article thus illustrates how such moments of opposition operate along different trajectories and timescale configurations in the formation of competing emblematic values for nicknaming.

Indeed, heterogeneous and interrelated emblems emerge as corporate nicknames are traced along trajectories of use and across interconnected timescale processes. Formulated through stereotypic indexicality at longer timescales and by text-level indexicality at shorter timescales, several meanings for nicknames themselves and for the use of nicknames arise. These meanings are not just heterogeneous and interrelated, but simultaneous, ephemeral, durable, and cyclical, depending on the processes through which meanings emerge over time and across events. Issues of race, nation, class, status, and role also become central as rejecting or accepting nicknames relies on processes of brand personification: how aspects of corporations are not only understood but also iconically mapped onto persons. Since competing meanings can emerge not only at different timescales (minutes versus months) but also within the same timescale though across different trajectories (months-long group adequation versus months-long group distinction), it is important for researchers to uncover the emblematic scales through which the social value of multivalent interactional practices can be read. Thus, the interpretation of meaning must move beyond the analysis of isolated interactions at single points in time to a consideration of the emblematic scales that produce meanings across interconnected timescales and trajectories of use.

Finally, the analysis suggests that a close attention to time in discourse may also help researchers understand processes of social change. The various discursive channels through which nicknames travel reveal the work required to maintain or transform the social formation of the classroom. Change is rarely achieved in a single moment. Once a change in social structure is introduced, it requires

continuous interactional work to be repeatedly read the same way and presupposed in subsequent events. Also, change is not unidirectional. Competing changes in social structure can be both simultaneous (when emblems of group distinction and group adequation occur over the same time period) as well as cyclical (when emblems of group distinction recur). Attending to temporal dimensions enables an understanding of how small-scale activities are located within trajectories of use that may assemble into wider scale structural change and produce long-term effects on roles and relationships among individuals and groups.

APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

.	falling intonation
?	rising intonation
,	falling-rising intonation
-	abrupt break or stop
[ ]	transcriber comments

NOTES

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[1]All names are pseudonyms.

[2]1.5 generation Korean Americans were born in Korea and immigrated to the United States as children. Second generation Korean Americans were born in the United States to Korean-born parents.

[3]The graphic and phonetic relationship between the corporate names (Samsung and Sam's Club) and the student pseudonyms (Samuel Jung and Sam Park) resembles that between the corporate names and the actual student names.

[4]Transcription conventions can be found in the appendix.

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