

# Individuals in the crowd: The joint roles of agency and structure in sound change

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# Structure & Agency

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- Role of **social structures** and **individual agency** in shaping individual production
- Recurring debate within social sciences more broadly (Marx 1857, Giddens 1984, Bordieu 2000, Archer 2007)
- And at the heart of much sociolinguistic work (Bucholtz & Hall 2005; first-wave vs. third-wave)
- **Macro** vs. **micro** level analysis
- Here: look at the roles of **structure** and **agency** in a single sound change

# Philadelphia English change in /æ/

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- Traditional Philadelphia /æ/ (complex system) changing to supraregional standard Nasal System (Labov et al., 2016; Sneller 2018)
- Fisher et al. 2015, Sneller 2018: cross-generationally, the change goes from **Philly** to **Both** to **Nasal**
- Here we'll simply classify speakers as:
  - (1) **Philly**
  - (2) **Nasal**
  - (3) **Both**
- Data: subset of larger IHELP & IMPC data sets, targeting the transitional generation speakers
  - 60 interviews with non-AAE speaking Philadelphia speakers born after 1983
  - 58 college-aged, 1 in high school, 1 in middle school

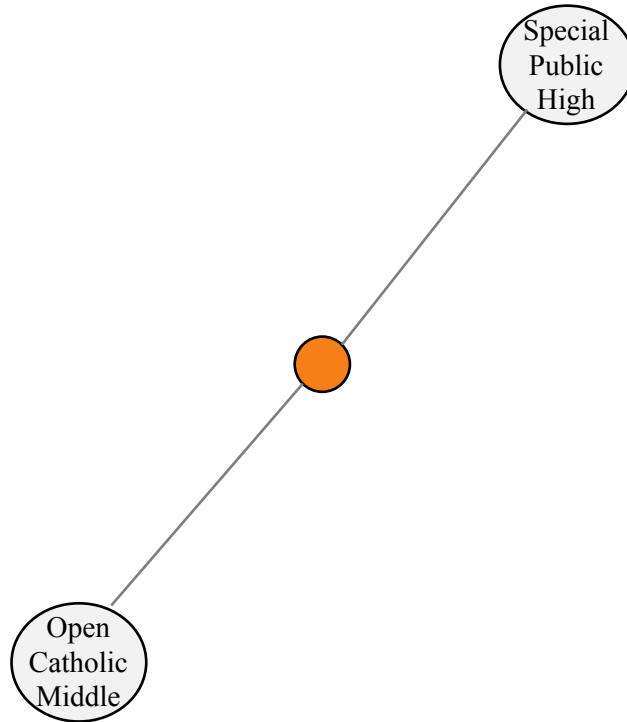
# Structure: social network

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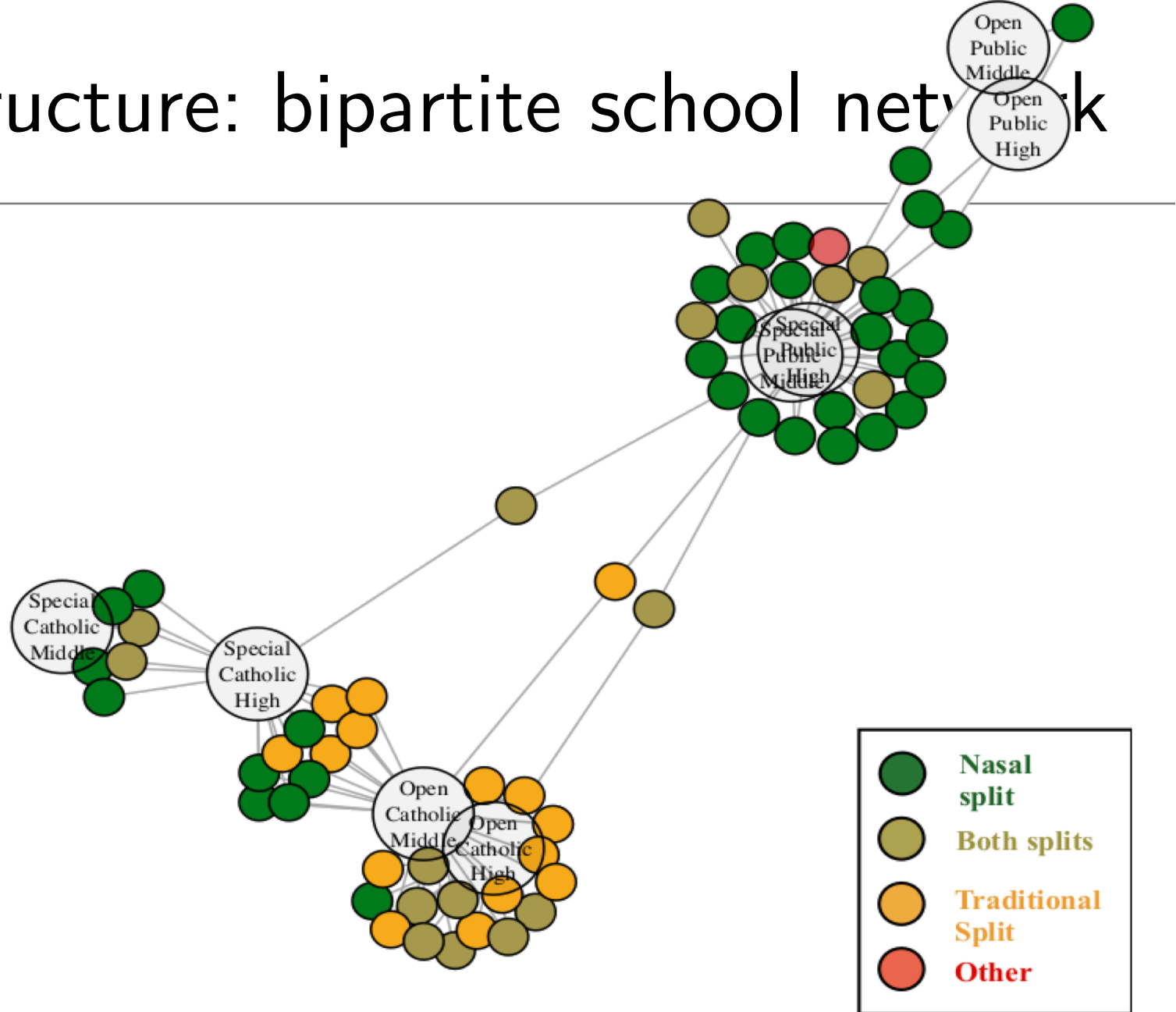
- Social networks are an important structural influence (Labov 1973; Milroy 1987; Sharma 2017)
- **School networks** impose structural effects independent of the “will and actions of individuals” (Archer 2007)
  - Found in Labov et al. (2016) and Sneller (2018) to play a major role in the change from **Philly** /æ/ to **Nasal** /æ/
  - **Catholic** vs. **Not-Catholic** - **Special Admissions** vs. **Open**
- Dodsworth (2014), Dodsworth & Benton (2017): **Bipartite Social networks**
  - Connect each individual to the *schools* they participated in
  - Allows us to capture the fact that while two speakers may not directly interact, they are likely to have “encountered many of the same linguistic and cultural norms” (Dodsworth 2019: 11)

# Structure: bipartite school network

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# Structure: bipartite school network



# Agency

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- Agency = conscious and unconscious acts (Eckert 2019)
- Here: change in Philadelphia English from **local** form (Philly /æ/) to **non-local** form (Nasal /æ/)
- **Local orientation** matters
  - is specific to the time and place (Labov 1963; Giddens 1984; Stanford 2009; Reed 2014)
- Johnstone (2010): *Place* = space + ideology
- Orientation to the **ideology of Philadelphia**

# Agency: Philadelphia ideology

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- Settled by Quakers: suspicious of / oppositional to human authority → rude (Baltzell 2017)
  - Abigail Adams 1789: “These Philadelphians are a strange set of people [...] they have the least feeling of genuine politeness of any people with whom I am acquainted”
  - “In Latin, ‘Philadelphia’ means ‘City of Brotherly Love’; but in American, it means ‘City Where They Chuck D Batteries at Ballplayers’” (The Philter, 2015)



# Agency: Philadelphia ideology

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- Settled by Quakers: suspicious of / oppositional to human authority → rude (Baltzell 2017)
- Neither New York nor DC → underdog mentality



# Agency: Philadelphia ideology

- Settled by Quakers: suspicious of / oppositional to human authority → rude (Baltzell 2017)
- Neither New York nor DC → underdog mentality
- Embodied in the character of and reaction to Gritty



# Measuring *orientation to Philly ideology*

- Quantitatively:

## 1. Identity

We'd like to use this form to give us an idea of who you are and how you see yourself. Would you fill in the blanks with the descriptions that seem right to you and then add a number for how important this part of your identity is to you: 10 for most important, 0 for not important at all.

The country I grew up in	<u>United States</u>	<u>7</u>
The neighborhood I grew up in	<u>Wynnewood</u>	<u>0</u>
The city I grew up in	<u>Philadelphia (Suburbs, though)</u>	<u>8</u>
My gender	<u>Male</u>	<u>3</u>
My occupation	<u>Student</u>	<u><del>10</del> 10</u>
My ethnicity	<u>White, European</u>	<u>2</u>
My religion	<u>Catholic</u>	<u>7</u>
My role in the family	<u>Son, brother</u>	<u>6</u>

# Measuring *orientation to Philly ideology*

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- Qualitatively:
  - College choice

ANITA F:

I did not want to go to college in Philly. [actively didn't want to?] Yes. I actually cried when I got accepted to Penn. [aw baby!] Actually not out of happiness.

HANNAH G:

I think I applied to like seven – LaSalle – like you know, just like Philly schools.

# Measuring *orientation to Philly ideology*

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- Qualitatively:
  - College choice
  - Orientation to **authority** (incl. swearing, drugs, sex, etc.)

KATRINA C:

So I went there and I'm like oh, thinking, like, okay this will be a better like Philly high school, like even though it's a public school because it's an all girls like it'll be a similar like, I'll feel like how it was when we were at Little Flower. Was I like – I was completely wrong. Like the way they talked to their teachers, like. **So disrespectful!**

SILVA G:

On the test I would like – If I didn't know something or if I like stopped, like, understanding what the questions were asking me, I would start to draw pictures. And once on one of his um quizzes I drew a pic- I drew a picture of him and he on the back he wrote "A for art, F for math" **{LG}**

# Measuring *orientation to Philly ideology*

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- Qualitatively:
  - College choice
  - Orientation to **authority** (incl. swearing, drugs, sex, etc.)
  - Reaction to stigmatized Philadelphia English

SHANE C:

My personality about Philly is like, I always think it's like being put down, so yeah I always think it's like in a negative way, when I say something like that. Or it makes me like, sound dumb, cause like obviously when I see other people from here like that, they sound dumb to me.

DAVID C:

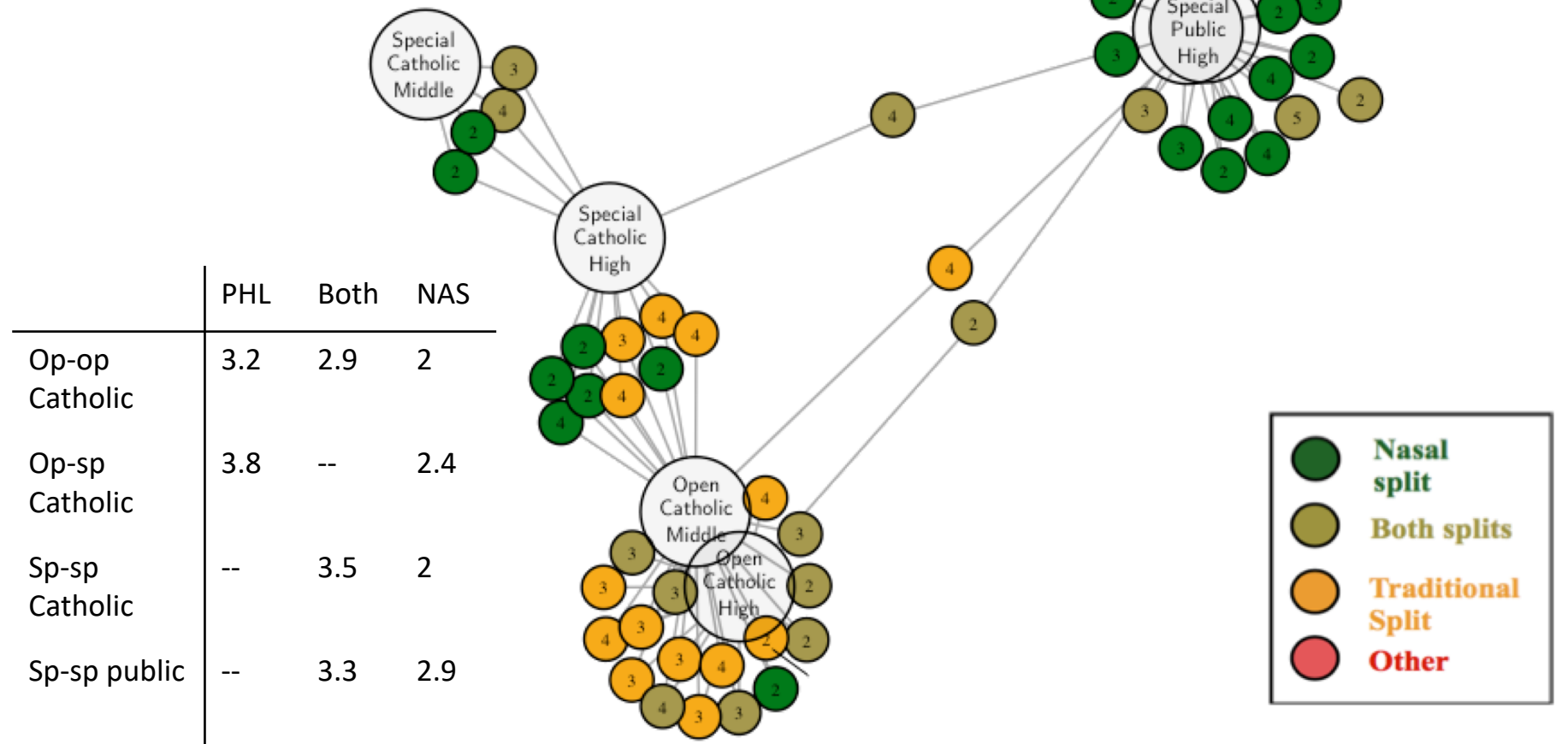
I hope your ears aren't bleeding. [...] One girl in the recitation was like "I'm from Philly and I've like – whenever I come up here I just don't pronounce any words the way that he just did" and I was like "Wow." She purposely taught herself not to say words like *wooder*. She says like *w[a]ter* because like, and I'm just like why would you ever do that? Don't change for the foreigners!

# Measuring *orientation to Philly ideology*

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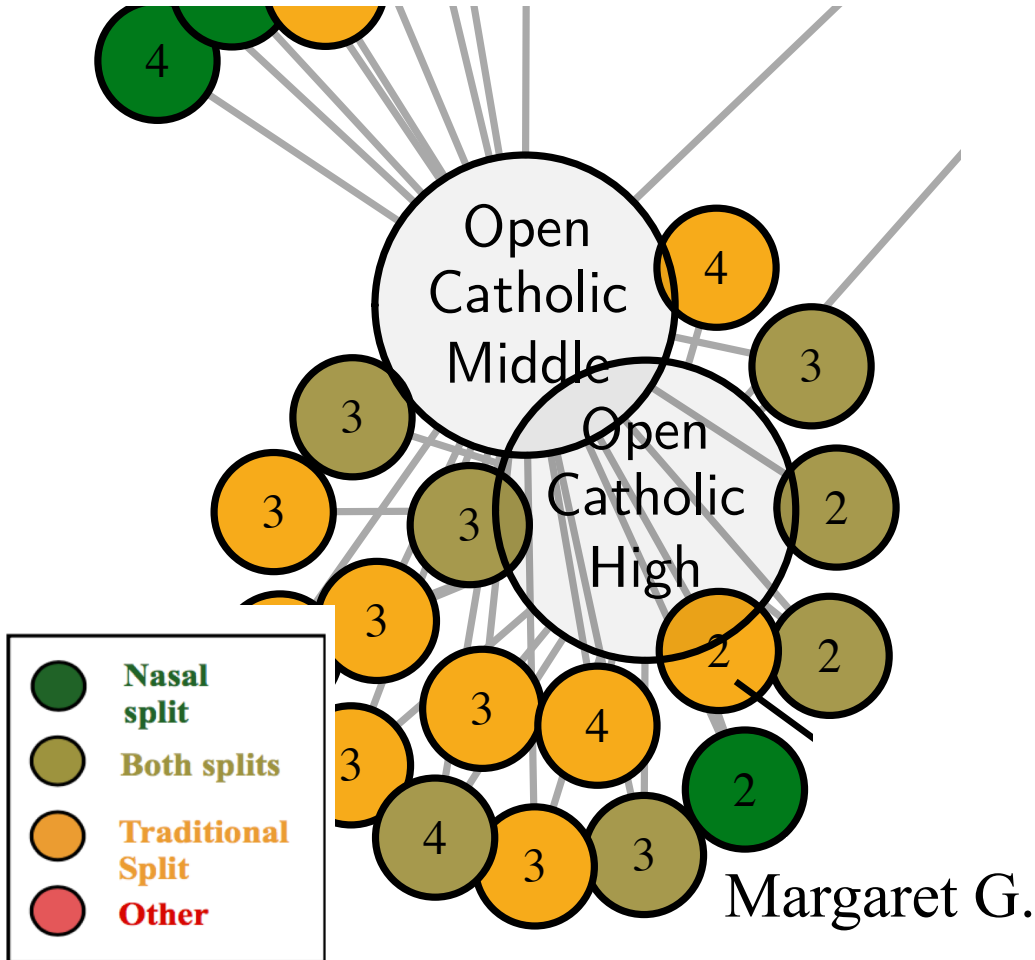
- Qualitatively:
  - College choice
  - Orientation to **authority** (incl. swearing, drugs, sex, etc.)
  - Reaction to stigmatized Philadelphia English
- Classify alignment on a 1-5 scale (very not aligned to very aligned)

# Results: overall network with val



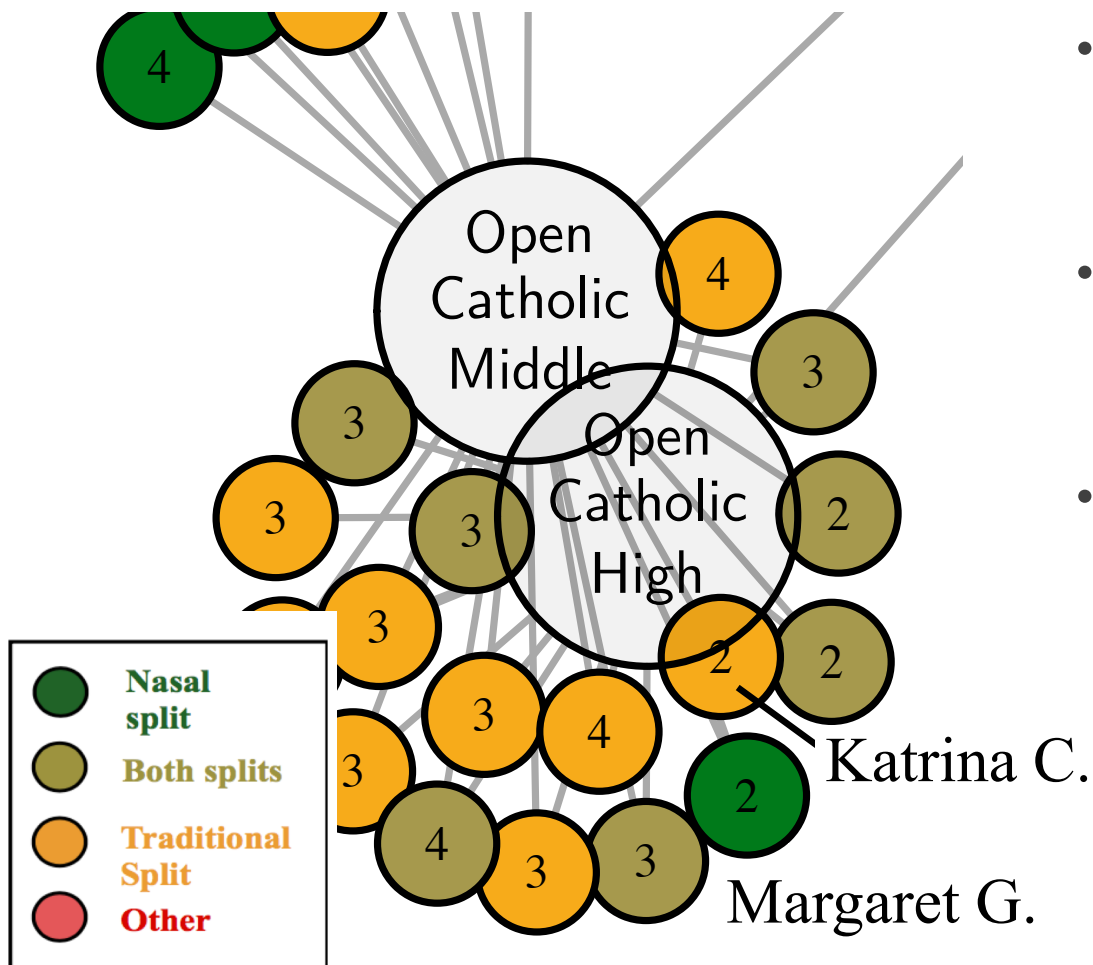


# Results: overall network with values



- Negative orientation to *Philly*
- Fisher et al. (2015) & Sneller (2018) find: speakers only take *one step* along this change away from parents
- Most Catholic school parents: **Philly system**
- Margaret's mom from suburbs in NJ
  - Suburbs about a generation ahead
  - Likely that mom has both systems, giving Margaret **structural access** to **NAS**
- Demonstrates the multidimensionality of social structures!

# Results: overall network with values



- Positive orientation to authority (so disrespectful!), moved away from Philly
- BUT strong oppositional reaction to stigmatizing of Philly English
- Demonstrates the complexity of *local orientation*!

KATRINA C:

To be honest, I think the Philadelphia accent is seen as like something that's not eloquent and not – I don't know. It's viewed as like a negative. I love my accent! I think it's a plus.

# Conclusions

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- **Structure** and **Agency** both play an important role in the adoption of the change from **Philly** /æ/ to **Nasal** /æ/
- **Structure** is not monolithic
  - School
  - Family input
  - Etc. etc. etc.
- **Agency** is not monolithic
  - Certain aspects of e.g., *local orientation* may matter more for certain speakers

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# Thank you!



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