STANDARDIZATION VS. RAPPORT: RESPONDENT LAUGHTER AND INTERVIEWER REACTION DURING TELEPHONE SURVEYS

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Laughter emerges naturally in interaction. In the context of the telephone survey interview, however, laughter threatens standardization. Consequently, some survey research centers prohibit interviewers from laughing during the administration of surveys. The data for this study are recorded telephone interviews from one such survey research center. How interviewers handle the “laughter invitations” of respondents is analyzed. Because these interviewers are not taught what to do when laughter occurs, they rely on their tacit knowledge, either accepting the invitation, declining it, or engaging in “pseudo-laughter”: Interviewers most often decline or use a pseudo-laughing response. Laughter patterns in a survey research center that does not prohibit interviewer laughter are examined for comparison, and generally much more reciprocation and laughter are observed. Respondent laughter exhibits a central tension in the telephone survey interview: How can interviewers maintain both standardization and an appropriately affiliative social relationship with respondents? The differential management of this tension is explored in terms of survey methodology, the sociology of (social) scientific knowledge, and the organization of talk in institutional settings.

Survey researchers seek to measure subjects’ past and intended future behaviors; their attitudes, beliefs, and values; their membership in social categories (Schuman and Kalton 1985:643–52). Furthermore, as Fowler and Mangione (1990) put it, the “key defining part of a measurement process is standardization” (p. 14).1 Of course, both practitioners and critics of survey methods recognize that interviewers and respondents construct answers during interaction and that standardization can be neither uniform nor absolute (Maynard and Schaeffer, forthcoming). Practitioners and critics differ, however, in what the constructed nature of interview data means, with practitioners asserting that validity is not necessarily compromised. When standardization cannot screen out nonsampling error, for instance, researchers are able to investigate and remedy normative “context effects”

1 As Schaeffer (1991) puts it, “The standardized survey interview takes measurements on a large number of persons, for a set of topics selected by a researcher, in such a way that measurements can be aggregated to describe a population” (p. 368).
and other influences on response patterns (Schuman 1982; Schuman and Ludwig 1983). Critics, on the other hand, argue that the survey interview inherently distorts information and that we need alternative forms of interviewing (Cicourel 1982; Mishler 1986; Suchman and Jordan 1990), including those that are more "conversational" in structure (Conrad and Schober 2000; Schober and Conrad 1997).

Although this controversy has an interesting history (Beatty 1995; O'Muircheartaigh 1997), we do not take a position on it. Rather, taking for granted that survey interviewing involves "construction" and some "negotiation" between interviewer and respondent, our question is, in a context where an organization or institute maintains a strong orientation toward standardization, how can workers deal with behaviors not addressed by official procedures? In a general sense, the survey interview, with its emphasis on standardization, is part of a broader movement in Western societies whereby increments of time, space, volume, weight, distance, and value have all become subject to uniform regulation. Connected to these other forms of regularization, survey research, with its procedures for data collection through scripted interviews, is a paradigmatic case of "mechanical objectivity"—Porter's (1995) phrase for all forms of inquiry in which rules for measurement discipline the use and variability of local metrics and interpretations. Porter also observes that the ideal of mechanical objectivity is never fully attainable because of the need for what Polanyi (1958) calls "tacit knowledge" and what ethnomethodologists have long recognized— that any rule-governed attempt at standardization involves craft-like forms of "commonsense" knowledge. Such knowledge, acquired through training, apprenticeship, and practice, is rarely formulated explicitly but is necessary to any regulated work task because rules cannot anticipate, nor can they pre-specify the handling of, unpredictable and contingent elements that invariably arise in the concrete, particular situations that rules are meant to encompass (Garfinkel 1967:20–22). \(^2\) Despite the ad hoc way in which practitioners use commonsense knowledge to attend to the contingencies of work tasks, their use is also a site of orderliness in social interaction.

In the survey interview, laughter by a respondent is one contingent element, and it raises what is perhaps the central dilemma of the survey: How can interviewers maintain both standardization and a proper relationship, or what we call "rapport," with their respondents? While rapport has long been recognized as a concept difficult to define and operationalize (Beatty 1995; Goudy and Potter 1975; Weiss 1970), researchers acknowledge that it is an important component of the interviewer-respondent relationship (Fowler and Mangione 1990:55). More than enabling completion of the interview, Cannell and Axelrod (1956) suggest that "the relationship which the interviewer succeeds in establishing with the respondent to a large extent determines the accuracy of the information the latter will supply" (p. 177), and some evidence supports this assertion. That is, the quality of the relationship—partly effected through what van der Zouwen, Dijkstra, and Smit (1991) refer to as the "style" of an interviewer—may affect both completion rates and the quality of the data collected during the question-answer process.\(^3\)

As one aspect of the interviewer-respondent relationship, we define "rapport" in a limited or restricted way—as the occurrence of reciprocal laughter between the two participants. In her summary of the research, Weiss (1970) observes that researchers have regarded rapport as a more global concept and have not measured it by the analysis of interactive behavior but largely through (1)

\[^2\] For a wide-ranging discussion of the issues here, see Maynard and Schaeffer (2000).

\[^3\] Hyman (1954:138–50) argues that when respondents are task-involved, validity is enhanced, whereas social or interpersonal involvement may create bias. Fowler and Mangione (1990) note that the kind of relationship interviewers can pursue with respondents is constrained by the need to standardize the interview and preserve a business-like, professional relationship that does not create expectations for the respondent to " . . . produce the right answers, or sophisticated answers, rather than responding openly to the question" (p. 64). Indeed "overly friendly" behavior has been found to produce negative effects on data quality (Weiss 1968).
counting such behaviors as eye contact, smiles, nods, gestures, non-task conversation, "no" answers, and reinforcement tokens, or (2) through ex post facto ratings. Weiss observes that studies of rapport are difficult to reconcile because they use different measures. Furthermore, measurement issues aside, findings on the effects of rapport sometimes contradict one another. Consequently, Weiss (1970) suggests that "... we abandon the concept of rapport at this point and concentrate on the specific attitudes and behaviors of which—in some formulation or other—it is constituted" (p. 19). We follow this suggestion and concentrate on specific behaviors: When we use the term rapport and discuss reciprocated laughter, we mean that an interviewer responds positively to the laughter initiated by a respondent during the course of a telephone survey interview.

Note, however, that we are interested not just in survey methodology and the effect of this kind of rapport on data quality. In any setting where standardization or mechanical objectivity is operative, participants employ tacit practices to handle unforeseen and unpredictable developments not covered by formal rules of procedure. By analyzing the tacit, orderly social practices associated with laughter in the survey interview, we contribute to a sociology of social scientific knowledge. As Maynard and Schaeffer (2000) argue, survey research, when performed through computer-aided telephone interviewing, is a "laboratory-based" system of inquiry occurring in what Latour (1987:232) calls "centers of calculation." That is, through the use of measuring instruments employed in particular locales to collect, stabilize, and combine discrete observations, survey research shares with natural science the work of generating abstract knowledge about worldly entities. Such work, in laboratories and involving natural sciences such as biology, astronomy, chemistry, physics, or involving the human sciences such as psychology, political science, and sociology, to understand human behavior, is always concrete and particularistic. In the constructivist and ethnomethodological sociology of (natural) scientific knowledge (SSK), investigators have increased our understanding of how the concreteness and particularity of scientific work are socially organized (Lynch 1993). However, a concomitant appreciation of social scientists at work—a constructivist/ethnomethodological sociology of social scientific knowledge (SSSK)—is not as well developed (Maynard and Schaeffer 2000). Survey research, as a preeminent form of social science (Converse 1987; Platt 1996; Wilner 1985), offers a setting ripe for study along these lines.

As a contribution to the sociology of social science, our study aims to understand the manifestation of affect in the generation of knowledge about aggregate social distributions and attitudes. Although feminist sociologists of science (Keller 1985; Traweek 1988) point out the emotional and affectual bases to the objectifications of science, little empirical work has been devoted to such analyses. We demonstrate the variable ways that respondents, when asked to submit to the uniformities of social measurement, sometimes find and show a humorous response to the impersonal, anonymous, and formatted questioning and answering procedures through which measurement is conducted. Indeed, when respondents laugh, interviewers are momentarily confronted with the task of keeping the exchange on the track of detachment and disinterest considered central to the mechanics of survey measurement, even though (as our data show) that track may be the very feature of interviewing that respondents find humorous or laughable. How interviewers interact with respondents to keep things on track, while attending to relational ramifications of the respondent's laughter, reveals aspects of situated interactional order in the disciplined collection of social data.

Our concern with the organization of interviewer-respondent interaction also adds to the growing literature on "talk in institutional settings" (Boden and Zimmerman 1991; Drew and Heritage 1992), which documents various dimensions to such talk that help distinguish it from that which occurs in more ordinary or mundane settings. Heretofore, as Drew and Heritage (1992:28–53) discuss, investigations of institutional talk have attended mostly to such dimensions as lexical choice, the ways that turns are designed, the organization of sequences (restrictions on turn-taking, for example), the overall structure of interaction, as in 911
emergency phone calls (Whalen, Zimmerman, and Whalen 1988; Zimmerman 1992), and “social relations and epistemology.”

Our research, in analyzing the specificity of laughter as a problem in survey interviews as compared with laughter’s relatively free-flowing status in ordinary conversation, fits with the dimension of social relations and epistemology. Other than Heath’s (1988) study of “embarrassment,” Whalen and Zimmerman’s (1998) examination of “hysteria” in 911 emergency calls, and investigations of laughter in the doctor-patient interview (Haakana 1999; West 1984), research on talk in institutional settings has neglected the management of emotional displays (Peråkylä 2000). The consequence has been that analysis has overemphasized the rational cast to such talk. Finally, previous research on talk in institutional settings has not much compared different settings of the same type. By documenting variation in the distribution of orderly social practices across worksites, we show that while practices of talk and interaction are generic and therefore transportable from setting to setting, there is more to the story. We can also appreciate local cultures and “communities of practice” (Lave and Wenger 1991) in their handling the unpredictable and contingent elements endemic to those settings. These cultures and communities appear to provide differing normative environments that condition the use of practices. Accordingly, research on talk in institutional settings will benefit from increased comparative inquiry.

“RAPPORT” AND LAUGHER-IN-INTERACTION

Early works suggest that laughter helps generate a common “definition of the situation” for participants (Coser 1959). More recently, investigators suggest that laughter helps coordinate talk in conversation, as a turn-taking cue signaling that the current speaker has finished (Gavioli 1995; Jefferson 1979, 1984, 1985; O’Donnell-Trujillo and Adams 1983; Poyatos 1993). Laughter can also function as a signal whereby participants in conversation show “troubles resistance” (Jefferson 1984:351) and that some problem being experienced is not getting the better of them. As stated, we are interested in reciprocal laughter and how it ties participants in a conversation to one another (Glenn 1989, 1991–1992, 1995; Norrick 1993). This bonding or affiliation may occur in the accomplishment of intimacy (Jefferson, Sacks, and Schegloff 1987; McAdams, Jackson, and Kirshnit 1984) or in achieving an alliance, as when some parties concertedly “laugh at” something or someone (Glenn 1991–1992; O’Donnell-Trujillo and Adams, 1983). In circumstances, such as the survey interview, in which participants are previously unacquainted, laughter may not indicate intimacy or any kind of strong alliance as such, but it can show affiliation or momentary rapport between the individuals (Glenn 1995). All of these positive functions of social laughter suggest the converse point: Non-reciprocal laughter can create relational distance, negate the formation of an alliance between parties, and undermine rapport.

For analysis, we draw on the work of Jefferson (1979), who details a sequence in ordinary conversation for inviting laughter. The laughter-invitation sequence has two parts (see excerpt 1). First, a current speaker or initiator of the laughter episode signals the other conversant indicating that laughter is appropriate in the interaction. That is, a speaker laughs, and may solicit reciprocal laughter as a possible, and perhaps desired, response (Glenn 1989; Jefferson 1979). Second, in a next-turn “response slot,” the recipient may accept the invitation by providing laughter. For example (see Appendix A for transcription conventions), in excerpt 1, at the end of her turn of talk (arrow 1), Ellen appends several laughter tokens, which constitute the invitation to laugh. Bill begins to laugh (arrow 2), and thereby accepts Ellen’s invitation, before she has finished her laughter. The participants thereby end up “laughing together.” Laughter invitations are distinguished from “candidate laughables,” such as jokes, puns, and other items that are not themselves embedded in or with laughter but that make a recipient’s laughter rel-

Ellen: He s'd well he said I am cheap he said, 'hh about the
1→ big things he says but not the liddle things, hhhHA
→ HA [HA HA HA
Bill: 2→ [heh heh heh

Excerpt 2. Jefferson (1979:80, modified)

Dan: I thought that wz pretty outta sight didju hear me
gay you a junkie
s→ (0.5)
Dan: 1→ hheh heh=
Dolly: 2→ =hhheh-heh-heh

Serious pursuit of topic diverts the focus from the laughter episode. Notice in excerpt 3 that Patty’s declaration (arrow 2) appears to intersect Gene’s turn-ending pursuit of laughter, which follows within-utterance laugh particles that Patty has also bypassed as laughter invitations. Furthermore, after Patty’s serious pursuit of topic, Gene follows with more topical talk (Jefferson 1979:87). However, a recipient’s declination itself may be countered if a speaker continues to laugh (i.e., speaker and recipient may compete with regard to the serious or laughing implicativeness of the interaction).

In other research on laughter-in-interaction in institutional settings, West (1984) and Haakana (1999) study the doctor-patient relationship. Both investigators find that patients laugh more during medical interviews than physicians do. Like patients, respondents in the survey interview initiate much more laughter than do the professionals with whom they interact. This may reflect the fact that respondents, like patients, are the ones who are asked to introduce “personal” materials, whereas interviewers, like doctors, are the ones simply asking questions (Haakana 1999:132–34). Moreover, the nature of the interview is more anonymous and abstract than the doctor-patient encounter. Questions often appear “laughable” to respondents, as do their answering and their answers; a respondent’s laughter often has to do with the constrained nature of the interaction which is partly designed to preserve that anonymity and abstractness.
DATA AND METHODS

The first and principal data set for this paper includes audiotapes, videotapes, and transcripts of interactions between survey interviewers and respondents recorded at the Central State University Survey Research Center (SRC) during March of 1997. The resulting collection is neither systematic nor random, but represents an effort to gather as much recorded interactional data as possible during a concentrated period of time. In all, 13 complete interviews were taped and transcribed. These interviews involved two different surveys conducted by seven interviewers: One survey involved television viewing habits; the other sought respondents' opinions about their neighborhoods. We focused on the substantive portion of the interview—not on the "front end" (the request to participate and selection of household member for an interview), which is allowed to be more "conversational" than the interview itself. We collected all instances of respondent-initiated laughter that occurred in the 13 completed interviews. The total number of laughter instances in our collection is 35, an average of almost 3 per inter-

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6 We use pseudonyms for our two research sites: “Central State University” and “University of Midstate.” This is to protect not only the identification of survey centers but also the identity of interviewers in our data extracts.

7 In the Central State University data, we found only one instance of interviewer-initiated laughter, when an interviewer laughingly apologized for not hearing a respondent’s answer. For another example of interviewer-initiated laughter, see excerpt 15 in Houtkoop-Steenstra (1996:220-221). After a respondent answers “I think it was four or six times” to a question about how often her elementary school class has been to a museum, the interviewer says “I’ll just pu(1) si(h)x time(h)s,” laughing in the midst of her utterance. The respondent also laughs in return.

view. At the Central State University SRC, interviewers are proscribed, both formally and informally, from engaging in any emotional displays, including laughter. If respondents deviate from the task at hand (e.g., by joking or other humorous asides) interviewers are to “remind them of the current question” (per an instruction on a computer screen for training). The overall rule is to “maintain seriousness.”

A second set of data are audiotapes and transcripts from the University of Midstate survey center, which, unlike Central State, does not prohibit laughter on the part of in-

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8 The CASES (Computer-Assisted Survey Execution System) training program, used at many survey research centers, including our two sites, instructs interviewers to avoid laughing or otherwise discussing issues unrelated to the survey. Our main survey site (Central State) combined the CASES program, including module tests, with a Microsoft PowerPoint computer program that displayed and explained the information necessary to complete the CASES module tests. One screen of the training module in the PowerPoint instructional program, under the “Professionalism” category, instructs, “Be serious during the interview. Don’t laugh or discuss issues not related to the study.”

9 Both authors participated in interviewer training at Central State’s Survey Research Center (pseudonym) where the present research was conducted. This involved the CASES program (see note 7), instruction from supervisors, and simulation of interviews using Center staff in the role of respondent. Here we draw on field notes from these training experiences. For example, the first author’s notes document a supervisor addressing the problem of laughter by saying that interviewers “really” were not supposed to laugh, even though sometimes it seems “natural” to do so. She said to be “pleasant” when someone makes a joke, but to abstain from laughing. Additionally, after the first author laughed at a respondent’s joke during a monitored call, the supervisor reminded her that she “shouldn’t laugh” in such circumstances.
Laughing in survey interviews

Interviewers. To match our Central State collection, we selected 13 interviews from the Midstate data, again from two surveys. In the Midstate data, five interviewers conducted the surveys. Both Midstate surveys measured public opinions about the government, politics, and public health issues. The interviews had been recorded in the early 1990's and were comparable in length to the Central State surveys. We collected all instances of respondent-initiated laughter that occurred during the substantive portion of the interview in the 13 Midstate cases and found 103 instances, or an average of about 8 per interview. That there were only 35 respondent-initiations of laughter in the Central State collection compared with 103 in the University of Midstate collection is a disparity we discuss later.

The number of questions in the Central State University television study, taken from a representative recorded interview, is 131. For the neighborhood opinion study at Central State, a representative interview is 96 questions. In the University of Midstate interviews, the first public opinion study on local and national politics includes 114 questions, and the second government/political survey has 90 questions. (Note: The actual number of questions in any interview varies depending on how respondents answer the first question in a given series. The interviews chosen as "representative" had a median number of questions asked).

We did not examine the effects of gender, class, race, or other background variables on the occurrence of laughter in either set of interview data. The study was constructed methodologically as a kind of "grounded" or bottom-up approach, not in the first instance being motivated by concerns about the effects of demographic or other categories on interaction, and instead identifying patterns, by direct inspection, that presented themselves in the data. (For discussions of conversation analytic methodology, see Psathas 1995; ten Have 1999. In particular, ten Have [1999:chap. 3] includes an extensive discussion regarding the inductive logic of conversation analytic inquiry.) Once we came upon occurrences of laughter in the data, our procedure was to identify generic practices for initiating the laughter and responding to it. Whether the use of these practices varies according to demographic features of participants and the configurations of their relationships is a matter for further research that builds on our basic approach and institutes a proper design for examining distributions.

In the Central State data, after transcribing instances of respondent-initiated laughter (instances where the respondent produces laughter), we analyzed the data using conversation analytic procedures. These involve comprehensively examining all instances in the collection. The practices we identify for dealing with respondent laughter are generic devices (see note 13) and can be presumed to inhabit other survey research centers, although the distribution of such devices from center to center may vary. Schaeffer (1991) anticipates a study on laughter when she writes that "the work laughter does for either participant in an interview has not yet been explored" (p. 384). Our research extends that of Cannell et al. (1968:19–20), which coded interviews for interviewer and respondent laughter, finding that on average, interviewers initiated laughter .81 times during an interview, whereas respondents initiated laughter an average of 7.26 times. Their research, however, does not provide information on the contexts in which participants were laughing (or what they were laughing at) or exactly how, in real time, the receiving party (the interviewer) reacted to the initiations of laughter. Also, unlike our study, Cannell et al. (1968) do not compare participants' laughter across work settings.

There are three parts to our analysis. First, we analyze the sequential positioning of respondents' laughter invitations and hence what these invitations are related to. Second, we examine the tools interviewers use to handle respondent-initiated laughter. Third, we compare the practices of interviewers in our two survey centers.

Analysis

The Sequential Context of Respondents' Laughter Invitations

Before examining interviewers' responses to laughter, we examine and identify when and how, in the course of the interview, laughter emerges. Respondents initiate laughter during the survey interview in a number of different sequential positions. The laughter can be in response to or a comment on (1) a question respondents have been asked, (2) their answer, or (3) some aspect of a com-
completed question-answer-acknowledgment "interviewing" sequence.  

**QUESTION-Oriented RESPONDENT LAUGHTER.** When respondents initiate laughter, they often do so after an interview question. Excerpt 4 above contains one question in a sequence of questions regarding the role of television in the respondent's relationship with her husband. A response of "ten" indicates complete agreement with the statement, whereas a "zero" indicates no agreement at all. The question is in lines 1–2 (interviewers and respondents are designated as male or female—e.g., MI is a male interviewer; FR is a female respondent).

Directly following the interviewer's question, and prior to providing an answer, the respondent initiates laughter. We regard such laughter as a humorous comment on the question, since the laughter is produced just after the question and prior to the respondent's answer.

Because of coding concerns and survey design, respondents are not always given the option to answer the question as they would like. For example, questions that require "yes" or "no" answers can be problematic and occasion laughter from the respondent. In excerpt 5, trouble in answering the question (lines 1–2) is initially evident at line 3 in a 1.9 second pause, after which the respondent utters "uhh," and then pauses again for 2 seconds. Instead of providing a yes or no answer, the respondent answers "sometimes" in line 6. The interviewer probes the respondent's answer to get a properly formatted answer (line 7). After another pause (line 8), the respondent, in line 9, laughs ("Heh heh!") and then emphasizes that she "can't" use these categories (line 9). After MI's acknowledgment (line 10), FR offers a reason for her inability (line 11).

**ANSWER-Oriented RESPONDENT LAUGHTER.** At times, when respondents initiate laughter in the interview, it is displayed as a reaction to their own answers or the situations depicted by their answers.

The interviewer in excerpt 6 produces the question in lines 1–3, and after a 2.3 second silence (line 4), the respondent answers (line 5; boldface indicates when the interviewer's typing is audible). Embedded within the answer are laughter tokens. It can be observed that the question presumes choice on the respondent's part as to the "place" he "currently" lives, whereas his answer claims there was no choice. The laugh tokens, placed mid-turn, may suggest the laughability of the lack of choice and the way this lack counters the question's presumption; in line 7 MR goes on to suggest that the place "was open," and in the context of the previous utterance this may mean it was the "only" place open. Other instances of answer-oriented laughter can be characterized as self-depreciating (Glenn 1991–1992).  

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12 Numbers identify the tape and transcript pages for each data extract.

13 On the interviewing sequence, see Maynard and Schaeffer (forthcoming). Some laughter-initiations appear not to be invitational, or are not placed in one of the three positions we have characterized. For example, respondents sometimes offer *apologetic* laughter that is not invitational and is more like laughter that shows "troubles-resistance" (Jefferson 1984).

14 The initiator of self-depreciating laughter pokes fun at her/himself in a teasing way that proposes the initiator or speaker as "but" of the joke or object of laughter (Glenn 1991-1992). Also see excerpt 6 and discussion.
LAUGHTER IN SURVEY INTERVIEWS


1 MI: ▲Okay, (0.8) # "thank you". (0.2) ▲h-hh-hh (.) Does yer
2 husband (.) still wa:­tch this sho-w.
3     (1.9)
4 FR: Uh,=
5     (2.0)
6 FR: =Sometimes.
7 MI: ▲May >so would ▲you say yes or no.<
8     (0.3)
9 FR: Heh heh! I can't say yes or no, (.) actually.
10 MI: ▲Mkay h. ((smile voice))
11 FR: I mean (.) sometimes he will sometimes he won't=


1 FI: ▲h-hh Please tell me (0.2) the main reason (0.3) you
2 decided (0.1) to move (0.2) to the place (0.3) WHERE (0.1)
3 you are currently living.
4     (2.3)
5 MR: Only place they had heh heh heh at the time
6     ((FI continues typing, 2.6 seconds))
7 MR: ["it was open"]
8     [  #    #    ]
9     ((typing, 6.0))
10 FI: [okay]

which respondents somehow poke fun at themselves or the situations they experience.

Post-sequence laughter. Respondents’ laughter also can follow the completion of a question-answer-acknowledgment sequence. Laughter that occurs in this position is less common than laughter in the other two positions and may serve to refine a respondent’s answer.

In excerpt 7, FR’s answering the question spans several turns. The first answer that the respondent produces (line 4) is not properly formatted for the survey instrument. The interviewer, in lines 5–6, explains to the respondent that she requires an answer that is framed in “number of years.” The respondent then produces a numerical answer in line 8, which FI accepts with an acknowledgment (line 10).15 However, the respondent re-opens the exchange in line 12, self-correcting the accepted answer, while the interviewer types in the answer code. The correction offers a more precise answer and appears as a way of proposing that the correction is not serious. With “Okay” and continuation in line 13, FI both accepts the correction and indicates that it is not consequential enough to inhibit progression to the next question.

Overall, the interview resembles any other social situation, in that it may furnish occasions that are ripe for laughter. Here, as we have observed, the questions as read by the

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15 Interviewers are instructed to provide “short feedback” after every closed, short answer ques-
interviewer can do just that, as respondents do laugh in response to the questions. Or respondents themselves may say something that they construct as laughable. Their answers may contradict a presumption in the question or otherwise comment, sometimes in a self-deprecating way, on their performance in relation to the requirements of the interview. Or, after completing a question-answer-feedback sequence, respondents may re-open the sequence and do so with laughter. All of these occasions can invite the interviewer to reciprocate with laughter. We now look at how interviewers respond to these invitations to laugh.

**Reciprocation: Accepting the Invitation to Laugh**

In our main data set, we have only one instance of an interviewer accepting a respondent's laughter invitation. Reciprocation of laughter, or the acceptance of the respondent's invitation to laugh, aligns the interviewer with a momentary move away from the interviewing task at hand. As mentioned, previous research has suggested that "laughing together" or reciprocally is an achievement and signifies at least a momentary display of rapport between the involved parties.

In lines 1 and 2 of excerpt 8, FI reads FR the question. Not getting an answer (line 3), FI instructs FR (lines 4 and 6) to use the same options as she had for the previous set of questions, which include: very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, very dissatisfied. However, FI does not repeat the response options themselves, perhaps because FR acknowledges the instructions by saying "okay" in overlap (line 7). The respondent then answers the question with "fairly satisfied" (line 9)—an answer that also does not fall into the proper answer categories. FI asks for a repeat of the FR's answer in line 11, which is a way of asking for a correction (Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1977). In her next turn (line 13), FR does not correct and merely repeats her original answer, then pauses, and in a manner suggestive of "thinking out loud," quietly asserts that her answer is the same as what she "said for the first one (line 13)." After this, she pauses, starts up ("is-"), stops again and changes her answer to "somewhat satisfied" (line 14), a self-correction that now fits into the response categories provided by the interviewer at the beginning of the question set.

In line 15, FI provides two acknowledgment tokens; in overlap (line 16) FR reaffirms her just previously articulated answer. Continuing in lines 16–17, FR produces laughter tokens in the midst of her talk and appendes more tokens at utterance end. FR's laughter is characteristically self-deprecating. Notice the word "du(h)h" whereby the respondent can be commenting on her mistake as a "dumb" one or as having
missed the obvious. This is because slightly earlier, the interviewer had read the response options ("very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied") that would be used for the question sequence. Besides this, at other times in the interview, FI had interrupted the reading of responses and explained to the respondent that she is required to read all of the options before the respondent may select one. Accordingly, the respondent’s laughter at lines 16–17 may be laughing at not only the present forgetting of correctly formatted response options, but at her overall performance as a respondent during the interview. The interviewer accepts the invitation to laugh in line 18 with the two quiet laugh tokens ("hah heh"). After the laughter reciprocation, the respondent offers an apology (line 19). In overlap with this, FI produces an upwardly intoned “All right!” (line 20), accepting the respondent’s answer, and then continues with the scripted questions.

If the laughter in excerpt 8 is what Glenn (1991–1992) terms self-deprecating, or even apologetic, it may be difficult for the interviewer to avoid accepting this particular invitation to laugh. Reciprocation can align with the respondent and allow the interviewer to avoid portraying herself as rude and unresponsive, whereas not laughing could be interpreted by the respondent as a reprimand for her prior performance as a respondent during the interview. Hence, the one instance in our Central State data of reciprocal laughter on the part of an interviewer—a deviation from survey center policy—may occur for good interactional reasons.

**Non-Reciprocation**

At Central State, interviewers decline respondents’ invitations to laugh more often than they accept them (see Table 1, p. 469). Interviewers can decline a respondent’s invitation to laugh by responding with speech rather than laughter (Jefferson 1979). In the next three excerpts, besides using talk, the interviewers rely on the properties of the

1 FI: *hnn Over the past ye:ar (0.2) *how of:ten, if at all;
   did you attend religious services
3 FR: Every Sunday.
4       (0.8)
5 FI: O:tk:ay. (0.2) Um I'll go ahead and read [these. ]
6 FR: [Fifty two] weeks.
7 IF: [Ehhhhhhhhuh
8 FR: [Weekly eh heh heh heh
9 FI: Okay would you say-
11 FR: Uh heh I [du(h)(h)nn(h)o
12 FI: [hhhhhhhh 'hnn several times a week, once a week,
13 nearly every week, two to three times a month, about once a
14 month, sev[eral ]
15 FR: [ (Once)] a week.

survey interview to address the respondent's laughter. The structure of the survey interview, that is, allows the interviewer to follow the respondent’s utterances with long pauses, audible key clicks, as well as the initiation of a new question-answer sequence, without disrupting the interaction.

In excerpt 9, after FI asks a question (lines 1–2), FR provides an answer (line 3) that does not fit into the instrument's answer categories. FI offers to "go ahead and read" the acceptable responses (line 5), but in overlap with FI's utterance, FR at lines 6–7 acknowledges the problem and self-corrects by providing an answer ("fifty two weeks") different from her first one ("Every Sunday"). This second answer still does not fall into the correct response categories. FI emits a long outbreath in line 8 while FR provides a third answer by saying "weekly" in line 9. In a self-deprecating way (i.e., we assume that the

laughter is treating the series of revised answers humorously), she appends laughter to this utterance, inviting the interviewer to laugh with her. However, FI starts to probe the respondent (line 10), and when she momentarily stops, FR produces more laughter in a disclaiming utterance (she says "I dunno" with laughter tokens interspersed, line 11). In overlap (line 12), FI emits an outbreath and an inbreath, and when FR stops her talk, FI presses on with a non-laughing reading of the response options (lines 12–14). The serious pursuit of talk on FI's part is finally taken by FR as a declination. FR produces no more laughter, allows FI to repeat the response categories (lines 12–14) and provides an answer at line 15. Here, not only does the interviewer overlap the respondent's laughter with a breathy prelude to serious talk, but also her talk is "on task." Rather than pursuing a joint laughter interlude, FI


1 MI: Do you wish your husband waited less teevee?
2         (0.4)
3 FR: Huh heh heh hah hah hah hah hah hah hah hah (0.3) ye:sg.
4         (0.4)
5 MI: Okay. ##
6         (0.8)
7 MI: Have you talked with your husband about this.
proposes to realign FR to the job at hand. This realignment is achieved when FR provides her correctly formatted answer.

In the survey interview, silence or pausing after a laughter invitation can signal a declination. Unconstrained conversation, where a silence allows the initiator of laughter to reinvite the laughter (see excerpt 2 and discussion), can be contrasted with the survey interview where such a silence or pause more regularly signals the pursuit of the interviewing task at hand, as in excerpt 10.

In line 1, the male interviewer (MI) provides a question about the husband’s television habits. After pausing (line 2), and before granting an answer to the question, FR in line 3 produces extended laughter, which displays the question as laughable. If this invites the interviewer to laugh, then the in-breath (‘hhhhhh’) after the laughter may cover lack of interviewer uptake or acceptance. Lack of uptake may also indicate that the interviewer is waiting for an answer, which FR produces at the end of line 3. The “yes” is a correctly formatted answer to the interviewer’s question, but the utterance in which the “yes” occurs is an “oh-prefaced” response treating the question that MI poses as “self-evident” or overly obvious (Heritage 1998:31). Thus, by suggesting that the question is “inapposite” the response can extend the invitation for the interviewer to laugh. However, after a pause (line 4), the interviewer provides an acknowledgment (line 5) and enters the respondent’s answer into the computer, as evidenced by the audible key strokes (also line 5). By refraining from laughter, MI seeks a serious pursuit of the topic at hand both during and directly following the respondent’s laughter. When he finishes typing, and after another pause, he resumes by asking a new question (line 7).

Excerpt 11 has more extended typing by MI (bold type) because he is dealing with the answer to an open-ended question. He asks the question at lines 1–3, waits (line 4) and reports to FR that it is “open ended” (line 5). After repeating the question (lines 6, 8), FR produces an answer (lines 10–12). The interviewer begins typing the answer at lines 11–12.

As FR continues to talk (lines 14–16, 18–19), MI stops typing, but at a possible completion point, asks FR to let him “type all that” (lines 21, 23). After this, FR initiates laughter (line 24). The laughter, which may occur in response to MI’s “all that” gloss of FR’s long answer, occurs initially as breathy within-speech laughter and later extends beyond the utterance as post-utterance completion laughter; thus, the entire turn can be considered a laughter invitation. Directly following FR’s laughter, however, there is a 1.2 second pause (line 25), during which there is no audible typing, when MI may be reviewing (on screen) what he has typed so far. During the silences, MI does not respond to the previous laughter, nor does FR attempt to re-initiate any laughter. Audible typing recommences (line 26) for 11.7 seconds. In line 27, then, after the typing stops, MI reads the respondent’s answer back to the respondent to verify that he has the correct answer typed into the computer.

The interviewer in this case announces that he has to type (before the laughter invitation) and, through audible keystroking, displays that he is doing so. Through displays of orientation to task, an interviewer declines laughter invitations from respondents.

From these excerpts, it is apparent that part of interviewers’ tacit knowledge includes conversational competence—knowing how to decline respondent’s laughter invitations by pursuing serious, on-task talk. The interviewer proposes to complete a question-answer sequence already underway or to initiate a new one. In addition, using a device that is literally at hand, the interviewer can announce, or audibly engage in, the task of typing. In short, these devices—talking, attending to survey questions, and typing—represent an interviewer’s repertoire for declining laughter invitations in the survey interview.\(^{16}\)

\(^{16}\)We are agnostic about how conscious the use of this repertoire may be. That is, in attending to the computer, recording answers, asking questions, and so on, interviewers may sometimes not “hear” a respondent’s laughter. Other times, they may be more strategic and purposeful in their manipulation of talking and typing to override laughter invitations. Either way, the practices they engage operate to accountably refrain from laughing. By this we mean that the respondent can hear the interviewer as reasonably refrain an invitation to laugh rather than just ignoring that invitation.

1 MI: ‘hhh Please tell me why? (0.3) you describe the role (0.2) teevee has played in your relationship (0.4) as small a-and neutral

(0.8)

5 MI: >This is open ended °so-<

6 FR: Okay u:::m

(1.9)

8 FR: Why do I- why do I describe it as neutral (1.1)

10 FR: Becuz I- I mean it’s really not a b- (0.2) I mean it’s not a big deal ta watch teevee I mean we can (0.2)=

12 we’re going a lot

((typing for 0.5 seconds))

14 FR: So if we sidown and I don’t wanna watch something I kin (0.2) you know leave the room or he kin leave the room:

16 (0.7)

18 FR: an’ go to another room an’ (0.4) we don’t have a problem with that:

20 (0.4)

21 MI: ‘kay let me [type all- ]

22 FR: [does that ] make sense

23 MI: yeah let me type all that ↑↓↓

24 FR: h(h)h o(h)ka(h)y heh heh

25 (1.2)

26 ((typing resumes for 11.7 seconds))

27 MI: ‘hhh hh Okay s- I have (0.4) it is not a big deal to watch teevee (. ) we can do other wor::k or go to another room and watch< teevee or do something ‘hhh ‘zat sound ri:ght?

Pseudo-Laughing Responses: Smile Voices and Quasi-Laughs

So far, we have observed that interviewers can either accept or decline a respondent’s invitation to laugh. Accepting the invitation is affiliative, but at our primary research site acceptance violates rules of standardization; with only one exception interviewers decline the invitation to laugh. However, they do not do this by overt statement (e.g., “that’s not funny”) or explicit rejection but through a repertoire of tacit practices notifying the respondent that the survey, rather than respondent’s momentary effort at humor, is the interviewer’s primary focus. Respondents largely appear to acquiesce to this orientation, which suggests that even though interviewers may refuse to laugh, they manage to keep the working relationship intact. Therefore, achieving standardization and maintaining rapport do not seem to be mutually exclusive. Interviewers faced with potentially disruptive laughter appear to be skilled at keeping as fully on task as possible without jeopardizing their relationship with the respondent. But can interviewers do more than this? Can they adhere to standardization protocols while not just maintaining their relationship with the respondent but also showing affiliation? That is, is it possible to attend to standardization and, in the context of respondent-initiated laughter, achieve rapport at the same time?

Interviewers rely on the use of a “smile voice” or “quasi-laugh” to respond to, and

1  FI: What is the name of the other religious group that contacted you.
2          (2.0)
3        ((click))
4          (0.6)
5    FR: Just a second.
6          (13.6) ((speaking in background))
7    FR: I believe it’s the Congregational Church.
8          (0.6)
9  FI: Okay.
10          (2.0) ((audible typing))
11    FR: I have no idea really of the name.
12          (h)(h)me.
13    FI: Oka:
14          (1.8)
15    FI: Now I have some questions about your neighborhood and how it fits into the community of Indianapolis.

yet avoid complete reciprocation of, respondent-initiated laughter. That is, while it can be interpreted as responding positively to respondent-initiated laughter, smile voice does not violate SRC interviewing procedures and therefore does not invite admonishment from supervisors who may be listening to the call.17

In lines 1–2 of excerpt 12, FI asks FR a scripted question. Then, after pausing and hesitating (lines 3–5), FR asks for a “second” (line 6), and can be heard talking to someone in the background (line 7). After almost 14 seconds, FR returns to the phone and provides an answer (line 8) to the question. FI provides an acknowledgement (line 10), and proceeds to enter the respondent’s answer into the computer during this acknowledgement and after. The typing continues during the 2-second pause in line 11. Next, FR comments on her answer and inserts laughter tokens at the end of the utterance. Then, the interviewer provides another acknowledgement: an elongated “okay” in a smile voice (line 13). On the videotape, the shape of the interviewer’s mouth indicates a purposeful smile. This viewing of course is unavailable to the respondent, but there is a sound quality—a “cheery” resonance in her voice—that indicates this smiling.18 Smile voice thus allows the interviewer to acknowledge the respondent’s laughter and still avoid any overt engagement in laughter. That is, because smile voice occurs simultaneously with the speech stream, it does not require divergence from the interview script and in this way helps promote standardization.

Along similar lines, a “quasi-laugh” provides interviewers with yet another way to appreciate laughter without fully engaging in it. The “quasi-laugh” is a breathy within-word laugh particle that may have purposeful ambivalence: Respondents can interpret it as reciprocating their laughter, while supervisors hear it as a breathy talk that merely

17 Recall that supervisors at our main research site (Central State) monitored each interviewer at least once per night.

18 Shor (1978) and Tartter (1980) provide technical specification of a smile voice: The unintended effect of smiling is an audible alteration of the vocal tract. Individuals involved in speaking usually place their mouths in a neutral position. When the vocal tract is moved from this position, as in the case of smiling, the “mouth orifice widens, shortening the vocal tract, and it’s opening enlarges,” thereby altering voice quality (Shor 1978: 82). The frequency and the pitch of the speech are also noticeably heightened or increased when individuals smile.

1 FI: Over the past very often did you talk on the
telephone with any of your neighbors. Would you say (0.2)
amost every day, at least once a week, at least once a
month, less than once a month, or not at all.

5 FR: Not at all.

6 FI: Uh huh huh huh huh huh huh huh huh huh huh

9 FR: We see each other over the fence eh huh hu

10 [huh huh huh heh heh heh]

11 FI: O:tk:hhh:ay 'hhh How ((smile voice)) well: do you

12 think the people in your neighborhood know each hh other?

13 Would you say very well, fairly well, not very well or not

14 at all well:
elongates an acknowledgement token. In excerpt 13 FR's laughter invitation occurs after a completed question-answer sequence. FI poses the question at lines 1–4; FR almost immediately provides an answer (line 5), and FI acknowledges (line 6) and types in the respondent's answer (audible key clicks in line 7).

In line 9, after a brief pause, the respondent re-opens the exchange with a joke. She displays her laughter as laughable by engaging in extended laughter directly after the completion of the utterance. In response to and overlapping with the respondent's laughter, the interviewer engages in an instance of "quasi-laughter" in line 11, embedding breathy sounds ("hhh") that are not quite laughter particles (see Appendix A, item 13) within the "$0:tk:hhh:ay," which is thereby elongated, has a rise in tone, and is followed by an in-breath. Occurring in overlap with FR's laughter, this semi-serious utterance also signals pursuit of the interviewing task. And, at the precise moment that FR stops laughing, FI initiates the next question. As noted at line 11, she does this with a smile voice. Thus, this interviewer uses two devices—the quasi-laugh and the smile-voice—to show appreciation of, without fully accepting, the respondent's laughter invitation.

In contrast to the overlapping quasi-laughing response used in excerpt 13, an instance of such a response (excerpt 14 below) occurs in the clear and is also more defined than the one in excerpt 13.


1 MI: About how many hours of teevee'hhh do you watch on a
typical weekday

3 (0.6)

4 FR: 'hhhhhh hhhhhhhhh I would say'n-

5 (1.4)

6 FR: Two hours

7 (0.2)

8 MI: Two hours? #

9 FR: Say yea::h [but] just be honest hi hi hi

10 [#]

11 MI: 'k(h) (h) # 'hhhh ab(h) out how many hours of teevee (0.3)
do you watch on Sa::tubdays
After the question-answer sequence is completed in lines 1–6, and after a short pause (line 7) the interviewer, with a questioning repeat, asks to verify the respondent’s answer in line 8. FR confirms (line 9), and then she makes a remark about being “honest” to which she appends laughter tokens. Again, this may be a self-deprecating laugh that is responsive to MI’s questioning repeat, interpreting it as indicating surprise at the amount of television she watches. In any case, the appended laughter in line 9 elicits quasi-laughter on the part of the interviewer in line 11. That is, the interviewer, at line 11, places breathy particles within his “okay” token and the succeeding “ab(h)out” that initiates the next question sequence. After this, MI’s utterance is free of any breathiness or quasi-laughter, once again suggesting serious pursuit of the interview.

As interactional practices, the smile-voice and the quasi-laugh can be construed as minimal reciprocation of respondent-initiated laughter and are achieved as ambiguous (Jefferson 1978). Both are inserted into the speech stream, thus requiring minimal divergence from the interview script and the instrumental task that it embodies. These practices do not officially or formally accept a laughter invitation, although they exhibit, without violating procedures, some appreciation and awareness of the respondent’s laughter. Accordingly, smile voice and quasi-laughter indicate momentary affiliation or rapport between the interviewer and respondent.

### HOW INTERVIEWERS RESPOND TO LAUGHTER AT TWO SURVEY CENTERS

Survey centers employ highly specialized rules to ensure standardized interviewing conduct. However, all centers are not uniform; many rules and guidelines for interviewing are site-specific (Viterna and Maynard, forthcoming). Our main site at Central State prohibits interviewer laughter, but the survey center at the University of Midstate does not. At the latter site, interviewers are instructed to be “natural” and to speak in a conversational manner at a normal pace. Given that there are no restrictions placed on interviewer laughter at the University of Midstate survey center, we would expect that interviewer practices for tacitly declining respondent-initiated laughter would be less prevalent and that reciprocation would be more frequent. Our counting of acceptances, declinations, and pseudo-laughing techniques in the two data sets confirmed these expectations. Table 1 provides the results from the comparison of the two survey centers.

The percentage of acceptance (reciprocation) is much higher at the University of Midstate center than at Central State. In half of the instances in which laughter was initiated by the respondent, the University of Midstate center interviewers accepted the invitation to laugh, compared with 3 percent (one instance) at Central State. In contrast, the percentage of declination or nonreciprocation is much higher at Central State (71 percent compared with 40 percent at Midstate). Interviewers at Midstate have less need to actively avoid reciprocation because their training instructs them to be conversational. Nonetheless, they sometimes decline invitations to laugh. Finally, use of pseudo-

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**Table 1. Frequency Distribution Showing Interviewer Response to Respondent-Initiated Laughter at Two Survey Centers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Center</th>
<th>Number of Initiations</th>
<th>Reciprocation N</th>
<th>Reciprocation %</th>
<th>Pseudo-laughter N</th>
<th>Pseudo-laughter %</th>
<th>Non-reciprocation N</th>
<th>Non-reciprocation %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Midstate</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central State University</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Thirteen interviews were analyzed for each survey center.*

19 Recall that the number of questions asked varies depending on the respondent’s answers to specific questions. The interviews chosen as representative had a median number of questions asked.
laughing responses is more frequent at Central State (26 percent) compared with Midstate (9 percent), suggesting that Central State interviewers more frequently work to straddle the fence between achieving rapport and maintaining standardization.

Another striking difference between the two survey centers is in the total number of laughter invitations. At Central State there are only 35 instances of respondent-initiated laughter, whereas at Midstate there are 103 such instances. It is possible that respondents involved in the surveys conducted at the University of Midstate react to the openness of the survey environment to laughter and the reciprocal nature of that laughter by offering laughter more freely. It may be, in fact, how interviewers handle the first laughter invitation teaches respondents in the course of interaction whether laughing at questions, answers, or other matters is acceptable.

In any case, the environment for laughter at Midstate does appear more permissive in a variety of ways than at Central State. For comparing the two sites, we provide an example in excerpt 15 from the Midstate data. Recall that laughter reciprocation occurs only once in the Central State data. The laughter in excerpt 15 is much more elaborate and spans a greater portion of the exchange between respondent and interviewer. In answering the question posed by FI (lines 1–4), FR produces an answer (lines 6–7) that does not fit the units of the one to ten scale that she is given by the interviewer. After providing the answer, she designates her utterance as humorous/joking by engaging in laughter (line 7). In overlap with FR’s laughter, FI reciprocates the laughter (line 8) and repeats the joke back to FR (lines 8–9) showing affiliation and appreciation of the humorous comment. Instead of re-reading the response options, FI furthers the humor, using “smile voice” to ask FR if she should “round up and put in a nine” (lines 11–12), and then engages in laughter herself. Note that this is a directive probe (Fowler and Mangione 1990:37–45) that leads the respondent to her answer. FR reciprocates the

1 FI: Okay ## 'hh an: how would you rate the job the military is doing
2 (2.8)
3 FR: Oh I think the military is doing very well hh probably:
4 (. ) well let's go with an eight
5 FI: Oka:y=
6 FR: =There's always room for improvement right?
7 FI: Yeah ehh heh [heh 'hh hh YEAH heh 'hh 0:kay 'hh]=
8 FR: [heh heh ehh heh heh heh 'hh]
9 FI: =generally speaking do you usually think of yourself as:
10 a republican? a democrat an independent or: what.

Interviewer's laughter in (line 13) as she assents to the proposed rounding up to “nine.” The laughter sequence that emerges here is extensive; the interviewer does not act to cut the laughter short but instead engages in her own laughter invitation, which occasions even further laughter from FR. Finally, FI offers another rerun of the punch line using smile voice (line 16). In contrast to excerpt 1 from Central State, in which the interviewer, responding to invitations, produces two small quiet laughter tokens, the laughter in this example is fully reciprocal, overt, and extensive. Many such examples exist in the Midstate data. The interviewer's and respondent's actions in this excerpt exemplify an open laughter environment.

Another pattern supports the interpretation of the openness of the laughter environment at Midstate. Although our focus in this paper is on respondent-initiated laughter, we also observed instances of interviewer-initiated laughter at both sites. Central State interviewers initiated laughter twice. In both instances, the laughter appeared to be what is vernacularly called “nervous” laughter because it occurred when each interviewer was having difficulty with an interview. For example, when an interviewer is having problems with their computer, trouble entering in a respondent's answer, or difficulties getting the respondent to fit their answer into one of the response options (or any combination of these problems) they may produce laughter in what Jefferson (1984) has described as displaying “troubles resistance.” As we noted earlier, such laughter generally does not invite reciprocation.

In contrast, at the University of Midstate center, interviewers initiated laughter 36 times in a number of different situations, most of which were a form of humorous commentary, joke, or as in excerpt 15, a reaction to respondents' comments and inviting collaborative laughter. In excerpt 16, the respondent provides a relatively innocuous answer to a question about the military. She then produces an aphorism (line 7), asking for agreement (“right?”), and in response FI agrees and offers laughter (line 8).

This laughter as well as her agreement with the respondent's assessment (line 8) operate to invite the respondent to laugh with her. The respondent accepts (line 9) and hence engages in laughter in overlap with the interviewer's laughter. This is a case in which the respondent's original comment, although not necessarily designated as humorous or inviting of laughter in itself, functions to generate an offer of laughter from FI. Frequently in the Midstate interviews, interviewers initiate laughter in response to a respondent's comment or answer. Further, the laughter is generally affiliative (as above), as opposed to the interviewer “laughing at” a respondent.

Accordingly, standardization protocols appear to shape more than specific interviewer actions. In prohibiting or affirming interviewer laughter, for instance, protocols can affect the entire context of the interview. The interviewers at Central State are in general less “mirthful” and those at Midstate are more “mirthful,” suggesting that there are different local cultures and communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) across sur-
vrey centers (Viterna and Maynard, forthcoming). A more mirthful environment may affect quality of data adversely, as in excerpt 15 where the interviewer uses a directive probe along with laughter to propose a joke and elicit further laughter from the respondent. It is at least possible that the mirthful community of practice at Midstate entails other undesired effects, such as respondents’ sense that the interviewer approves of their answers or attitudes or that “agreement” is a goal of the interaction (Schaeffer 1991). On the other hand, a mirthful environment might increase respondents’ motivation to complete the interview or improve their cooperation in answering difficult or sensitive questions (van der Zouwen et al. 1991). What “house” effects (Hill 1991; Smith 1982; Turner 1984) there may be from differing mirthful environments awaits further investigation.

DISCUSSION

Respondent-initiated laughter is a contingent development in the survey interview that interviewers handle in various ways. At Central State, our main research site, interviewers are constrained from laughing because it is perceived to threaten standardization and thus bias the data. And although the survey center’s protocols prohibit laughter on the part of interviewers, they do not specify how interviewers should handle respondent laughter, including laughter that is invitational. In only one instance at Central State did we find an interviewer accept a respondent’s invitation to laugh by reciprocating, and this instance was rather minimal in that the interviewer produced two very quiet tokens.

Most often, interviewers deal with respondent laughter by adhering to the structure of the survey interview. That is, they decline invitations to laugh through a repertoire of practices that involve the deployment of both conversational and workplace competencies—they talk seriously, pursue interview-based question-answer sequences, and type responses into the computer in an audible fashion. Accordingly, interviewers are able to decline invitations to laugh without necessarily being seen as crassly ignoring the respondent; they are attending to the business of the interview.

At times, however, interviewers reciprocate respondent laughter by using smile voice or quasi-laughter. These pseudo-laughing responses to laughter invitations potentially communicate different messages depending on the listener. A supervisor in the Central State survey center is unable to discern any direct or literal violation of the protocol for standardized survey interviewing, whereas respondents can construe reciprocation to their offer of laughter. In all, interviewers appear to maintain both standardization and a good working relationship with their respondents through momentary episodes of rapport. Interviewers achieve this mixture of goals according to how participants in many work settings enact rules and procedures: They invoke a variety of underground or tacit methods and practices whereby a sense of rule adherence is achieved.

CONCLUSION

If the survey interview is a paradigmatic case of “mechanical objectivity,” then, as Porter (1995) argues, participants in the interview will necessarily use their tacit knowledge to make its procedures for standardization work. Indeed, respondents answer questions in a variety of nonconforming ways, including with laughter, and interviewers react to breaches of survey order and maintain the orderly progression of the interview. Interviewers’ responses to the situated contingencies that arise during the interview are dealt with in the interview through skills that standardized protocols do not formally specify.

The practices for handling laughter in the survey interview, and their variable frequencies at the two centers we studied, raise two sets of issues—one methodological and the
LAUGHTER IN SURVEY INTERVIEWS

Our second set of issues relates to theoretical matters and their investigation. Porter (1995) has considered the importance and relevance of tacit knowledge in the achievement of "mechanical objectivity" in varied settings—academic, government, business, and others—in which participants seek to promote unity and consensus, while meeting the scrutiny and suspicions of regulators and other outsiders. However, little has been done to demonstrate the use of such knowledge empirically. In the standardized survey interview, interviewer competence in handling a multiplicity of situated problems and contingencies (laughter being just one) involves considerable taken-for-granted conversational and work-related skills that are coming under increased investigation (Maynard et al. forthcoming). We will benefit from research on other forms of tacit knowledge that lend to the various forms of workplace objectivity (Button 1993; Engström and Middleton 1996; Greif 1988; Lave and Wenger 1991). Such research, as an enterprise in its own right, contributes to an understanding of the social organization of interaction in work settings. For example, it augments the constructivist and ethnomethodological sociology of science by treating survey centers like natural scientific laboratories, as sites where practitioners, through their practices, generate knowledge of disciplinary phenomena and subject matter.

Additionally, by investigating laughter in particular, it brings under the empirical umbrella of SSSK the role of one kind of affect in survey-based social science. During administration of the survey, a respondent's laughter copes with the constrained nature of the interview. Respondents appear to laugh at the formal questions, the categorical ways they are required to answer, and the process itself. The conundrum this presents is that interviewers using strictly standardized protocols are prevented from acknowledging displays of affect on the part of respondents that are related to the stringency of the task.

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22 It is our impression that permitting interviewer laughter lengthens the interview because it also promotes more casual talk between interviewer and respondent. This impression is consistent with Belli, Lepkowski, and Kabeto's (forthcoming) factor analytic finding that laughter seems to cluster with other kinds of "digression behavior" in interviews. In our two data sets, the attempt to measure overall lengths of interviews and a time-per-question rate was confounded by normative differences in pacing, types of questions (closed versus open) and probing practices at the two centers.

23 As a preliminary effort, we counted question completions in the surveys at our two research sites and coded completions in two different ways. We did not find any significant differences; completions at both sites were close to 100 percent.

24 For a pertinent and recent study, see Belli et al. (forthcoming), who report "rather surprising" results regarding rapport and response accuracy. As they remark, the expectation among survey methodologists is that certain verbal behaviors, including laughter, would bias survey data. In their study, which compares responses to a health and health care utilization instrument (administered face-to-face) with data from a Health Maintenance Organization, they found that verbal expressions in the (audio-recorded) interviews were not associated with response accuracy. Such verbal expressions included laughter by both interviewers and respondents, plus inappropriate interviewer feedback, directive probing, and digressions. (The authors did find, however, that expressions of cognitive difficulty were negatively associated with response accuracy.)
they face. Interviewers who are allowed to reciprocate face a different puzzle: how to maintain professional distance from their respondents. Whichever strategy is allowed, survey centers settle by fiat what feminist scholars have proposed as a central theme for the sociology of scientific knowledge. This theme is what the proper relationship should be between subjectivity and objectivity, between feeling and thinking, between being personal and apersonal (e.g., Keller 1985). The interview provides a rich site for studying in detail the de facto resolution of such issues. However, humor and laughter involve only one kind of display of emotion. Given the array of topics with which surveys are occupied—from states of health, to employment, to marital status, to income level—interview questions can no doubt evoke a variety of emotional responses and displays. Investigations of these displays and their socially organized management in the survey interview will increase our understanding of how this form of social science constructs its knowledge base.25

Similarly, our study contributes to conversation analytic research on talk in institutional settings, which has neglected the display and management of affect. Talk in institutional settings is more than a rational enterprise; it may involve an array of emotion-displays that are consequential for the talk's organization and substance. In one setting—the survey interview—we have examined only one type of display—laughter—

25 For suggestive research on how interviewers engage in face-saving practices on behalf of respondents asked about "delicate issues" in their lives, see Houtkoop-Steenstra (1997).

and how interviewers attempt to regulate it, even as the laughter is occasioned by other regulative procedures peculiar to the standardized interview. How talk in diverse institutional settings manifests emotion and how talk is organized around those emotions is an area of inquiry in its infancy. Finally, we have seen how there is variation in the management of interview laughter according to local cultures, communities of work practice, and the notions of standardization they uphold. Conversation analytic emphasis on the generic character of interactional practices can be complemented by investigation of the differential distribution of these practices across both time (Clayman and Heritage, 2000) and space.

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Appendix A. Transcribing Conventions Used in This Article

The following conventions are used in the excerpts we present in this article. They are adapted from Jefferson (1979, 1985).

1. Silences
   A: I'm not use ta that. (1.4)
   B: Yeah me neither.
   Numbers in parentheses indicate elapsed time in tenths of seconds.

2. Overlapping speech
   A: Oh you do? R[really ]
   B: [Um hmmm]
   Left brackets mark the beginning of overlapping talk; right brackets indicate where overlapping talk ends.

3. Latching
   A: I am absolutely sure.

(Continued on next page)
4. CREATIVE SPELLING AND CONTRACTIONS

A: Please ↓don’t cuz it’ll
PA:SS: °‘hhhhhh° If not ah’b
jis gunnuh move down ah’ll
haftih go get my clothes’n jis
k-I’M uss gunnuh STAY PUT. (.)
En gedda jo:b down yere y(u)(p)
maybe I’M get o:n et (0.3) g-
Bay. I don’ know,
Creative spelling and contractions attempt to capture exactly how the words were pronounced. Abbreviations are spelled (e.g., “tee vee” instead of “TV”).

5. SOUND STRETCHING

B: I did oka:y.
Colon(s) indicate the prior sound is prolonged. More colons indicate more stretching.

6. SOUND CUT OFF

A: This– this is true
Hyphens indicate an abrupt cutoff of sound.

7. SPEECH PACING

A: What is it?
B: >I ain’t tellin< you
Part of an utterance delivered at a pace faster than surrounding talk is enclosed between “greater than” and “less than” signs. Talk at a slower pace is enclosed between “less than” and “greater than” signs.

8. EMPHASIS

A: I do not want it.
Underline indicates increased “emphasis.” Emphasis is done with some combination of a change in pitch, rise in volume, stretch of a sound, or stress on a vowel.

9. INTONATION (OR PITCH CONTOUR)

A: It was unbelievable. I ↑had a
three point six? I ↓think.
B: You did.

At the end of a phrase, a period indicates fall in tone, a comma indicates continuing intonation, a question mark indicates increased tone. Up arrows (↑) or down arrows (↓) indicate marked rising and falling shifts in intonation immediately prior to the rise or fall. An exclamation point can also be used for “animated” tone.

10. HIGHER VOLUME

A: That’s where I REALLY want to
go.
Capital letters indicate increased volume.

11. LOWER VOLUME

A: °Yes.° That’s true.
Material between degree signs is spoken more quietly than surrounding talk.

12. BREATHING

A: You didn’t have to worry about
having the ’hh hhh curtains
closed.
The “h” indicates audible breathing. The more “h’s” the longer the breath (a single “h” approximately equals 0.1 second). A “raised period” placed before an “h” indicates inbreath; no period indicates outbreath.

13. BREATHINESS AND LAUGH TOKENS

A: Ok(h)ay. (0.3) "huh" huh hih
The “h” within a word or sound indicates explosive aspirations (e.g., breathiness, laughter, etc.). “Huh,” “heh,” “hih,” “hah” indicate laughter particles or tokens separate from words.

14. CREAKY VOICE

A: ~Oh th—at’s w’t I’d l-i:ke
↑t-uh h-ave -is -a↓ fra:sh
↓-one.
Creak is indicated by a tilda, “~”, before the creaky part of the word. Creak sometimes occurs at the end of phrases, often occurs in very low voices, and sounds like the voice of a stereotypical “dying person.”

15. CLICKS

A1: ’t’·hhh We’ll I think it’s sad
thet they...
A2: ’tch uh:·m (0.5) condoning
hhhhh ’hhhh...
Speakers often make audible clicks with the lips and/or tongue and roof of the mouth. Such clicks are often made inadvertently when the speaker

(Continued on next page)
opens his or her mouth to take an inbreath. In these a “t” is used. When the click is longer, louder, and sounds more “intentional,” a “tch” is used.

16. MISSING SPEECH
A: Are they?
B: Yes because ...
Ellipses indicate where part of an utterance is left out of the transcript.

17. CANDIDATE HEARING
B: (Is that right?) ( )
Materials in single parentheses indicate that transcribers were not sure about spoken words. If no words are in parentheses, the talk was indiscernible.

18. EXPLANATORY MATERIAL
A: Well ((cough)) I don’t know
Materials in double parentheses indicate audible phenomena other than actual verbalization.

19. AUDIBLE COMPUTER KEY CLICKS
FI: uh support?
[#]
FI: ... l’me go ahead and uh: (0.5)
# (1.0)
Audible computer key clicks are indicated by a “#.”

20. AUDIBLE COMPUTER KEY CLICKS DURING SPEECH
FR: I’m really not sure so::: I don’ know if I could gi’ve a good ans’er
If typing overlaps with speech it is indicated with bold type.

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