

# Discourse Studies

<http://dis.sagepub.com/>

---

## **A Note on Laughter in 'Male–Female' Interaction**

Gail Jefferson

*Discourse Studies* 2004 6: 117

DOI: 10.1177/1461445604039445

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://dis.sagepub.com/content/6/1/117>

---

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

**Additional services and information for *Discourse Studies* can be found at:**

**Email Alerts:** <http://dis.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://dis.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

**Reprints:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

**Permissions:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

**Citations:** <http://dis.sagepub.com/content/6/1/117.refs.html>

## *A note on laughter in 'male–female' interaction<sup>1</sup>*



*Discourse Studies*  
 Copyright © 2004  
 SAGE Publications.  
 (London, Thousand Oaks,  
 CA and New Delhi)  
 www.sagepublications.com  
 Vol 6(1): 117–133.  
 1461-4456  
 (200402) 6:1;  
 10.1177/1461445604039445

GAIL JEFFERSON  
 INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR

**ABSTRACT** Working with interactional data, one sometimes observes that a type of behavior seems to be produced a great deal by one category of persons and not all that much by another category. But when put to the test of a straightforward count, the observation does not hold up: Category X does not after all do this thing significantly more often than Category Y does. It may then be that the apparent skewing of the behavior's distribution across categories is the result of selective observation; noticing with greater frequency those cases which conformed to some biased notion held by the observer of how these categories behave. But there seems to be another possibility. It may be that the observation has located, but only roughly and partially described, a complex of behaviors which the observation can then be seen to reflect, refer to, or constitute a 'gloss' for.

**KEY WORDS:** *conversation analysis, distributional versus single-case analysis, gender, laughter*

Some 20 years ago at a conference at Temple University in Philadelphia, a colleague, Don Zimmerman, mentioned in the course of a talk he was delivering, that he'd noticed what seemed to him to be a possible phenomenon: in male–female interaction, if the male laughed, the female would join in laughing; but if the female laughed, the male would not join in laughing.

I'd noticed that too, and was happily nodding in agreement when two of my most respected colleagues, Anita Pomerantz and Manny Schegloff, jumped on Zimmerman, criticizing him (1) for treating 'male'–'female' as analytic categories when they were as yet nothing more than unexamined Members' categories; and (2) for treating that category-set as relevant to the observed activities when there was still some unknown kind and amount of work needed, to discover if those categories could be offered as relevant in the way Zimmerman was proposing. They were right, of course. So there I was, nodding (now rather

unhappily) in agreement with Pomerantz and Schegloff, thinking all the while, 'But it's *true*.'

But then, that it's *true* is not the issue. In one of his early lectures (1992), Harvey Sacks makes a remark roughly to the effect that when sociologists use these sorts of categories, often enough that use conforms to the way the categories are used in the world, but that the point is that it's our business to analyze the workings of those categories, not to merely use them as they are used in the world.

And that is one reason that – in the title and throughout the article – I'm quote-marking the terms 'male' and 'female'. I do that to mark them as unanalyzed-merely-used, where this casual, as-a-member use provided the frame of reference which persistently generated a noticing: that 'male' laughter is joined by 'female' laughter while 'female' laughter is not joined by 'male' laughter, where, then, that persistent noticing generated the bit of analysis I'm offering in this article.

Another reason I'm quote-marking those terms is that I personally don't much believe in them. I tend to think of them as something like careers rather than conditions, i.e. as constructed rather than biologically intrinsic, where a mass of features are worked upon in order to fit them into the two available-and-used categories, 'male' and 'female'.

As a way to illustrate my sense of 'male–female', I tried to come up with simple category-sets that were similar to these, in this sense: that at some point they were used as such, believed in, taken to be fundamental, and then disappeared, replaced by something far more complex.

The only thing I was able to think of is the ancient set of the Four Elements (earth, air, fire, water) which has been replaced by a continually expanding Table of Elements. Perhaps 'male' and 'female' are equivalent to the Four Elements in their inadequacy and drastic over-simplicity.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps also, abandoning them would not mean that we give up the clarity of a few, fixed categories for formlessness, vagueness, and sheer unique individuality. Each of the elements in the Table of Elements is conceived of as a class, a type, with a fixed, replicable set of features. The same might hold for the way the shoal of features we now work so hard to mold into 'male' and 'female' could at some point be conceived of.

Be that as it may, when I was working with interactional materials I kept coming across these things! The unexamined Members' categories 'male–female' conformed like crazy to the goings-on. I was still seeing them as 'male laughs, female joins in laughing; female laughs, male does not join in laughing'. And I was still muttering 'But it's *true*!'

At some point I came across a couple of especially interesting cases. And around that time, Auli Hakulinen sent me a draft of a paper she was writing on 'gender display' (Hakulinen, 1994). There was something in the way she dealt with her materials that gave me the sense that maybe there *was* something analyzable here, so I took a shot at it. The question I was asking was, could that casual, layman's observation about 'male–female' laughter lead to something like an analysis? I proceeded in two distinctive ways: attempting first a quantitative

approach and then a qualitative, case-by-case approach. What follows is a report of my procedures and results.

### *A quantitative approach*

The observation that when a male laughs, a female will join his laughter and when a female laughs, a male will not join her laughter seems to be one of those descriptions which can be formulated as, e.g. [Xs do A, Ys do B]. And that's a distributional statement. So the most reasonable way to check it out would be by looking through masses of conversations and just plain counting.

Of course, any serious research would have to be stringently controlled for (1) the relevance of Identity Categories in the first place (in contrast to, e.g., Activities); and (2) the relevance of 'male-female' as the categories in question (such other possibly relevant Identity-Category sets as Age, Race, Class, Relational Pairs, etc., needing to be shown to be irrelevant for the laugh behaviors). But just to get a possible glimpse of a possible phenomenon, could one just go through a bunch of talk and start counting?

It turns out I don't have masses of 'male-female' interaction, but going through a corpus of one woman's telephone conversations with a range of male friends, relatives, and neighbors, I came up with some 63 instances in which laughter was initiated by her or her coparticipant, and one or the other did or did not join in. I took that as my data-base and started counting.

The results were not encouraging. First of all, of the 63 instances, there were only 20 cases in which laughter initiated by either participant was joined. In 13 cases the 'male'-initiated laughter (+) was joined by 'the female' (+), and in only 7 cases was 'female'-initiated laughter (+) joined by 'the male' (+). In percentage terms: 65 percent M(+)/F(+) versus only 35 percent F(+)/M(+). I suppose if that 65-35 percent difference were to hold up across a massive number of cases, it could support a weak version of Zimmerman's and my noticing, e.g. 'females often join male laughter'.

However, in the remaining 43 cases the category-count broke down virtually even: in 23 cases 'the female' initiated laughter (+) and 'the male' did not join (-), and in 20 cases 'the male' initiated laughter (+) and 'the female' did not join (-). In percentage terms: 53 percent F(+)/M(-) and 47 percent M(+)/F(-). Such a breakdown might win you an election, but provides no basis whatsoever for Zimmerman's and my noticing that 'males' do not join 'female'-initiated laughter. Apparently they do, just about as often as they don't.

### *A case-by-case approach*

The results of the 'quantitative' approach were, to say the least, problematic for the observation that 'females' join 'male'-initiated laughter and 'males' do not join 'female'-initiated laughter.

Yet, having gone through the corpus, copying out one case after another of

laughter initiated and then joined or not joined, I was still muttering 'But it's *true*.' Something about the cases, something in them, something sensed as I worked through them, somehow seemed to indicate the validity of the observation.

So I went back to the data. Going again through that 63-case corpus of 'male-female' interaction, I found what seemed to me to be some regularities, a few of which I'll now offer, working through extracts of conversation in which the various orderlinesses can be found.

And just to keep reminding us of the inadequacy of the data-base and the untrustworthiness of any 'results' it might yield, I'll take a terminological step back and refer to the actor-categories, not as 'male' and 'female', but as the comic book favorites, Tarzan and Jane. I'll start off with two regularities, instances of which could serve as the 'that's what I mean' for the initial paired observation about who does and who does not join the other's laughter. Call them 'index' cases:

1. *A Jane will join a Tarzan's laughter although she herself didn't see anything to laugh about.*  
(That he is laughing is reason enough.)

(1) [Holt:X(C):1:1:3:4-5]

((re. Philip's daughter's holiday plans))

- |   |         |  |
|---|---------|--|
| 1 | Philip: | She's having three weeks 'n staying here <u>one</u> ↓ week |
| 2 |         | I [think (is it) ]=  |
| 3 | Leslie: | → [ Y e: s ]   |
| 4 | Leslie: | → =[Y e s  |
| 5 | Philip: | (+) [eh-h <sub>ə</sub> h-h <sub>ə</sub> ]h                 |
| 6 | Leslie: | (+) [h <sub>ə</sub> -huh h <sub>ə</sub> -huh.              |

Notice that Leslie initially produces *speech* in response to what Philip has said (lines 3 and 4). It is following a few particles of laughter by Philip that Leslie laughs (lines 5 and 6), i.e. she joins his laughter rather than independently laughing.

With his 'I think' and maybe '(is it)' (line 2), Philip seems to be treating his own daughter's plans as confirmable by Leslie, which is possible since she has a son the same age, a friend of Philip's daughter, and thus might know, or might even know better, what Philip's daughter's plans are. Leslie's initial 'Yes' (line 3) occurs at a point where only the statement of plans has been produced, and it is not clear whether her second 'Yes' (line 4) shows that she has heard the overlapping material and is now producing a confirmation, or whether she is simply repeating her overlapped response to the statement itself. In either event, she has not found Philip's *utterance* cause for laughter; it is only upon his starting to laugh that she laughs.

2. *If he himself didn't see anything to laugh about, a Tarzan will not join a Jane's laughter.*  
(That she is laughing is no reason for him to laugh.)

(2) [Holt:88U:2:2:1-2]

- 1 Kevin: Been doing a lot?  
 2 Leslie: ·hhhh Well we've been to (vote)=  
 3 Kevin: → =[(Good)!  
 4 Leslie: (+) [hh heh heh[heh °hn° ·hhhh ]=  
 5 Kevin: (-) [——(silence)——]  
 6 Leslie: =Took a lot out'v us=  
 7 Leslie: (+) =heh heh[heh ë-hë ·hhh·hhh]  
 8 Kevin: (-) [——(silence)——]  
 9 Leslie: Uh:m g We went to Kent f'the weeke:nd,

I'm using a notation here that I don't ordinarily use, giving Kevin a line and noting on that line that he is silent (lines 5 and 8). I felt the need to do so to show his not-joining-in-laughing, since Leslie achieves unbroken speakership: '·hhhh Well we've been to (vote) hh heh heh heh °hn° ·hhhhn Took a lot out'v us heh heh ë-hë ·hhh·hhh Uh:m g We went to Kent . . .'.  
 A possibility here is that Leslie is dealing with Kevin's silences. Following each burst of her laughter there is a place where no talk is occurring, where Kevin might yet place his laugh-responsive laughter, i.e. Leslie's two inbreaths, which I'll now show in brackets: 'hh heh heh heh °hn° [·hhhh]' and 'heh heh heh heh ë-hë [·hhh·hhh]'.  
 Each of these places is accounted for as, say, a 'post-laughter/pre-speech inbreath'. Leslie can be seen to be catching her breath after a burst of laughter, preparatory to uttering her next bit of talk, rather than, say, waiting for Kevin to laugh. To put it a bit more technically, these places do not constitute 'gaps' in which Kevin's laughter might be observably 'absent'. They might be called 'response-opportunity places'.  
 These two regularities give us 'index' cases for the initial paired observation that (1) when a 'male' laughs, a 'female' will join in laughing; whereas (2) when a 'female' laughs, a 'male' will not join in laughing.  
 There are, however, *exceptions* to these two regularities. There are *specifiable environments* in which 'females' do *not* join 'male' laughter (call them E.1.), and those in which 'males' *do* join 'female' laughter (call them E.2.). The following are what I take to be instances of E.1. and E.2., respectively:  
 E.1. *A Jane will not join a Tarzan's laughter if he is being difficult.*  
 As, for example, in the following fragment where Tarzan is disagreeing with something she's said.  
 (3) [Holt:SO88:1:8:6]  
 ((Leslie is congratulating Norm on his persistence in going after some crucial information.))  
 1 Leslie: I mean you could've sat back 'n: just said oh dear 'n: let it ↑go  
 2 couldn't ↓yo[u].

- 3 Norm: [Ye:h.  
 4 (0.2)  
 5 Norm: Oh yeh.  
 6 Leslie: And you would never've kno↓:w[n.  
 7 Norm: [Well I mighta known by  
 8 (+) Christmas but heh, heh he:h hē-[-ë  
 9 Leslie: (-) [Yes but you would've had to of  
 10 ·hhhh ↑i- (0.2) uh- queried ↓i:t to've known anythi:ng

What I want to point out here is that at line 6, Leslie proposes that Norm would 'never have known' something important to him. Whereas he has agreed with her prior proposal (see lines 1–3), he now disagrees (line 7). The laugh with which he follows this disagreement (line 8) is not joined by Leslie, who then produces an utterance which quarrels with his counter-proposal (lines 9–10).

Or, for example, as in the following extract where Tarzan is showing a certain lack of cooperation:

**(4)** [Holt:X(C)1:1:3:8]

((Leslie has phoned Philip to offer condolences on the death of his mother the day before. Talk then turns to other things (including his daughter's vacation plans from which fragment (1) was extracted).

At some point Leslie asks Philip to check to see if two plants she'd ordered from a local garden center as a gift for him and his wife have arrived, as there has been some sort of a mixup. But he's just had a big order delivered from the same garden center and the weather has been foul so he had to get the delicate stuff dealt with immediately.

He's not sure what was or was not delivered.))

- 1 Leslie: A ↑viburnum 'n a spireaa a[ny↓wa:]y[:  
 2 Philip: [spiraea:] [Yeah.  
 3 Leslie: Yes  
 4 (0.5)  
 5 Philip: Uh:=  
 6 Leslie: =[°Al↑ri↓:ght.° ]  
 7 Philip: [I just tryin' t]ryin' to think of what I sa:w.  
 8 Philip: (+) hhe:h hhē: h[n ·hhh  
 9 Leslie: (-) [Ye:s.  
 10 Philip: I don't (0.3) °ë-ë° it doesn't uh (0.3) ring a ↓bell but . . .

In this case, Philip's 'I'm just trying to think of what I saw' (line 7) may be a plea to move to other matters since he's not getting any results with his memory search. The laughter with which he follows his utterance (line 8) is not joined by Leslie, whose 'Ye:s.' (line 9) may be in pursuit of further memory search, i.e., may be saying 'Yes do by all means try to think of what you saw'.<sup>3</sup>

It seems to me that there is a relationship between 'index'-extract (1) and the 'regularity' proposed in extracts (3) and (4), which could be stated as: When there is nothing in particular at stake (as in extract 1), a Jane will join a Tarzan's laughter even though she didn't see anything laughable, but when there is something at stake, she will refrain from joining that laughter (as in extracts 3 and 4).

And it seems to me that, likewise, the following two extracts bear a specifiable relationship to 'index'-extract (2):

E.2. *A Tarzan will join a Jane's laughter if he is being, e.g., gallant.*

(5) [Holt:SO88(II):1:3:6]

((Leslie recently met a distant relative who had a non-Caucasian mother, and looks fully non-Caucasian. Hal remarks that he didn't know she 'had' that sort 'of blood', and goes on to say . . .))

- 1 Hal: That makes you more int'resting th'n [ever actually ]=  
 2 Leslie: (+) [ehh heh ha ha]  
 3 Leslie: =Oh[thank you] H a [ l.  
 4 Hal: (+) [h e h h a] (ha) [Y a [ h.  
 5 Leslie: (+) [he:h hu[h ü·uh-ü  
 6 Hal: (+) [aah ah! ·hhh

In the first round of laughter it is not clear whether Hal is best characterized as having made a laughable comment (line 1) and going on to laugh at it (line 4) after a momentary pause, in which Leslie's 'Oh' (line 3) happens to occur, where his activity could then be shown as:

Hal: That makes you more int'resting th'n ever actually (·) heh ha ha (ha)

or, hearing Leslie laughing across the last part of his utterance (lines 1–2), moving to join her laughter (line 4) after that momentary pause in which her 'Oh' (line 3) happens to occur, which could be shown as:<sup>4</sup>

Hal: That makes you more int'resting th'n [ever actually ]  
 Leslie: [ehh heh ha ha]  
 (·)  
 Hal: heh ha (ha)

But the second round (lines 4–6) is clearly a matter of Hal shifting into speech with 'Yah', Leslie laughing again, and Hal joining her laughter:<sup>5</sup>

Hal: Ya[h.  
 Leslie: [he:h hu[h  
 Hal: [aah ah!

This same interaction produces another instance of gallantry (see line 6, below):<sup>6</sup>

(6) [Holt:SO88(II):1:3:16–17]

((The scouts are having a dance, and Hal is selling tickets. Leslie hadn't heard about it, and will have to talk it over with her husband when he gets home.))

- 1 Hal: If you want to come ↓come but [don't  
 2 Leslie: [↑WELL I'LL ↑have to ↓come  
 3 I've bought myself a new skirt in Newcastle.  
 4 Hal: [Oh you-  
 5 (·)  
 6 Hal: ih That would be ↓love!y.

- 7 Leslie: (+) [Yë-ehh hah[ hah hah a a h ]=  
 8 Hal: (+) [eh-heh hah hah]  
 9 Hal: =ha[:h hu[h heh  
 10 Leslie: [·ü [·hhhh

Maybe the whole 'index-exception' business so far could be summed up this way: Janes, even though they don't themselves see anything laughable, will join Tarzans' laughter if there's nothing particularly antagonistic going on. Tarzans, if they don't themselves see anything laughable won't join Janes' laughter unless there is something particularly amicable going on.

I've noticed one other environment in which the 'index' regularity of laughter seems to be reversed, and that environment is 'troubles talk'. The following are two extracts: the first, a troubles-talk exception to the 'index' regularity about Janes, the second, a troubles-talk exception to the 'index' regularity about Tarzans:

E.1.(T) *A Jane will not join a Tarzan's laughter if it's in the course of his talking about a trouble he's had.*

(7) [Holt:2:7:2]

((Mr Court, the local woodseller, had to spend some time in the hospital after 'a bad fall'))

- 1 Court: I specialize in climbing wo:rk 'n[: [·hh  
 2 Leslie: [Ye[:s.  
 3 Court: This is one of these where uh (·) the mighty was fallen I'm  
 4 (+) afr(h)ai(h)[d ·hhhh  
 5 Leslie: (-) [Oh:::.

E.2.(T) *A Tarzan will join a Jane's laughter if it's in the course of her talking about a trouble she's had.*

(8) [Holt:X(C)1:1:3:1]

((Leslie's phone service had been stopped due to an unpaid bill.))

- 1 Philip: ((smile voice)) They didn't cut if o:ff °did they?°  
 2 Leslie: Ye::s they were a bit quick off the ma:rk=  
 3 Leslie: (+) =uhh h[eh huh hu[h  
 4 Philip: (+) [aahh hü [That'll teach you won't it.

In extract (7), Leslie responds to Mr Court's laughing utterance with a drawn-out 'Oh:::.' (lines 4–5), and in extract (8), Philip responds to Leslie's laughter with an emphatic laugh of his own, 'aahh' (lines 3–4).

In a paper on the organization of laughter in troubles-talk published almost 20 years ago (Jefferson, 1984a), I touched on a notion of 'troubles-resistance' versus 'troubles-receptiveness':

It appears that in troubles-talk, a laughing troubles-teller is doing a recognizable sort of job. He is exhibiting that, although there is this trouble, it is not getting the better of him; he is managing; he is in good spirits and in a position to take the trouble lightly. He is exhibiting what we might call 'troubles-resistance'. But this does not

mean that . . . a recipient is invited to join in the merriment . . . In troubles-talk, it appears to be a recipient's job to be taking the trouble seriously; to exhibit what we might call 'troubles-receptiveness'.

So a laughing troubles-teller is exhibiting 'troubles-resistance' and a non-laughing troubles-recipient is exhibiting 'troubles-receptiveness'.

Although that paper's main focus is on the 'troubles-resistant teller' and the 'troubles-receptive recipient', there is a single-case analysis of a 'troubles-receptive teller' and a 'troubles-resistant recipient'. Which is to say that 'resistance' and 'receptiveness' can be found in the activities of both tellers and recipients.

Now the 'resistance-receptiveness' feature might hold across a range of activities. It might even be applicable to laughter itself. That is, someone joining another's laughter might be characterized as 'laugh-receptive'. Refraining from joining, they might be characterized as 'laugh-resistant'.

Reviewing the prior 'index' and 'exception' cases, now in terms of receptiveness/resistance, we could propose as another order of regularity that Janes exhibit 'laugh-receptiveness' and Tarzans exhibit 'laugh-resistance'. And we can find that the troubles-talk cases provide an exception to that regularity. That is, in troubles-talk, although there is no particular antagonism, Janes will not join Tarzans' laughter; and although there is nothing particularly amicable going on, Tarzans will join Janes' laughter. Which is to say that in troubles-talk, Janes exhibit 'laugh-resistance' and Tarzans exhibit 'laugh-receptiveness'.

It might then be said that Tarzans interacting with Janes exhibit 'laugh-resistance' except when that would constitute a display of 'troubles-receptiveness', in which case Tarzans exhibit 'laugh-receptiveness' and thereby exhibit 'troubles-resistance'. Likewise, Janes interacting with Tarzans might be said to exhibit 'laugh-receptiveness' except when that would constitute a display of 'troubles-resistance', in which case Janes exhibit 'laugh-resistance' and thereby exhibit 'troubles-receptiveness'.

What we may be seeing here is a *hierarchical ordering of activity types*. And in this hierarchy, laughter is somewhere lower in the ranks than is troubles-telling. Where, then, in order to achieve an appropriate display by reference to the higher-ordered (and more general) activity-type, the lower (and relatively discrete) activity-type will be 'sacrificed'.

Therefore, a summary of the 'index' regularities and exceptions, and the discussion so far, gives us one general pair of regularities: Janes interacting with Tarzans, if there is nothing particularly antagonistic going on, will exhibit receptiveness (e.g. by joining Tarzans' laughter, except when refraining will exhibit receptiveness of a higher, more general order, e.g. troubles-receptiveness). Tarzans interacting with Janes, unless there is something particularly amicable going on, will exhibit resistance (e.g. by refraining from joining Janes' laughter, except when joining will exhibit resistance of a higher, more general order, e.g. troubles-resistance).

Which is then to say that for the domain of 'resistance-receptiveness', a Jane,

by not joining a Tarzan's laughter in one environment, may be doing the same work as when she is joining his laughter in another environment; and a Tarzan, by joining a Jane's laughter in one environment, may be doing the same work as when he is not joining her laughter in another environment.

Therefore, laughing or refraining from laughter by reference to a consistent sort of work in terms of receptiveness–resistance can result in cases that are inconsistent for the proposed 'index' regularity regarding laughter itself, i.e. we find Janes not joining Tarzans' laughter, and Tarzans joining Janes' laughter.

Perhaps Zimmerman's and my coming up with a phenomenon that disappeared when I actually started counting cases was the result of a sort of unconscious 'cherry picking'; of our not even noticing the non-'index' cases. And of course when I counted instances of laughter I didn't take into account anything like a hierarchical organization of laughter.

### *A few dramatic cases*

For the purposes of this discussion I've used instances from a single corpus of conversations. As it happens, none of them is in itself a particularly striking case. But over the years I've come across a range of thoroughly interesting cases, and what I'll do now is present a few of those – the materials in which, many years ago, I first noticed the phenomenon, and the more recent materials that jogged me into attempting an analysis.

Extracts (9a), (9b) and (9c) are taken from a recording made in 1973 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, of a young married couple, graduate students at the university there. In 1975 at the University of California, Santa Barbara, working with a *transcript* made by the University of Michigan people, I and others found the talk distressingly hostile. When we'd gotten hold of the *tape*, it turned out that the hostile talk was produced 'laughingly'. And that – at least for the experiencing, if not the analyzing – made an enormous difference:

**(9a)** [Friedell:A:20]

((Hank might be teaching an extension course in Pop Culture, at his and Sally's off-campus apartment.))

- 1 Sally: We c'n serve th'm beer even though they're undera:ge,  
2 (2.6)  
3 Hank: (+) Beer isn't really a part'v p(h)op c(h)ul[t(h)ure ·ehh  
4 Sally: (+) [mfff

Here, although she's being disagreed with, Sally seems unable to resist Hank's in-speech laughter (line 3), and produces a tiny laugh, 'mfff' (line 4). Hank, on the other hand, has no problem resisting Sally's laughter when she disagrees with him:

**(9b)** [Friedell:A:42]

((Re. finding comic books for the Pop Culture class. Sally has suggested that they might be hard to find.))

- 1 Sally: You know=  
 2 Hank: =[You'd] wa:nt]  
 3 Sally: [ =[y o u ] j'st a]ren't g(h)onna be able to go t' the, (·)  
 4 (+) [ rese:rv desk i(h)n the library 'n (h)have th'm place their-  
 5 [ ·hh back c(h)opies 'v (h) th' Lone Ra(h)nger o(h)n rese:rv  
 6 for your section, ·hh  
 7 (0.4)  
 8 Hank: (-) Well you'd wa:nt Spider Ma:n. Really.

Whereas Sally comes out with a little 'mfff' after Hank's second in-speech laugh particle; specifically, after 'c(h)ul . . .' of the word 'culture' (extract 9a, lines 3–4), Hank maintains silence across a whole gang of Sally's laugh particles (extract 9b, lines 3–5). He shows a similar resistance in the following extract:

**(9c)** [Friedell:A:44]

((Thinking up a list of Underground groups to talk about in the Pop Culture class.))

- 1 Hank: Obviously like the Fu:gs 'n the Mothers 'n,  
 2 (2.2)  
 3 Sally: Pearls B'fore Swi:ne.=  
 4 Hank: =Pearls Before Swi:ne.=Maybe throw in Janice Ian there,  
 5 Sally: She's not Underground thou:gh,  
 6 Hank: N[o o:]:: ]she']s::  
 7 Sally: [She's not real]l y,  
 8 (1.2)  
 9 Sally: (+) You aren't Undergrou:nd i(hh)f, ·hh you kn(h)ow, (0.2)  
 10 you've bec(h)ome a, (0.6) Top T(h)e:n Seller ·hh  
 11 (0.6)  
 12 Hank: (-) nYea:h, b't- We:ll . . .

Similarly to extract (9b), Hank remains silent across a series of Sally's in-speech laugh tokens (lines 9–10).

Those are the sort of materials that had me nodding vigorously when Zimmerman remarked that he'd noticed that a female would join a male's laughter, and that a male would not join a female's laughter.

Extracts (10), (11a) and (11b) are taken from recordings made 20 years later, in the spring of 1993, at a clinic in Philadelphia. The recordings are of senior physicians, interns, and patients. Extract (10) involves a young female intern who in various ways comes off as rather tough. At one point while I was transcribing that tape, I found myself cheering her on as she resisted a male senior physician's pursuit of laughter, and feeling disappointed as she caved in on his third attempt:

**(10)** [HospSite:2–26–93:70–71]

((Maury is senior physician, Fran an intern. They have both talked to the patient and are now, in the patient's absence, discussing possible treatment.))

- 1 Maury: . . . and if we knew she ha:d (·) αalpha one anatr<sup>h</sup>ypsin deficiency  
 2 (·)  
 3 Maury: what could we do differently,  
 4 (0.2)  
 5 Maury: (+) you might ask, hhh[heh-heh-heh]=  
 6 Fran: [ °R i g h t ° ]  
 7 Fran: (-) =[ Ex a c t l y ] ((smile voice))  
 8 Maury: (+) [heh-heh-heh-heh]·h[hhh  
 9 Fran: [·hhhhh  
 10 Fran: (-) [What would [ w e d o for her ]=  
 11 Maury: (+) [ m e h h h [heh-heh-heh-heh]  
 12 Fran: (+) =ehhhheh[eh  
 13 Maury: [·h[hhh  
 14 Fran: [·hh[h  
 15 Maury: [I think we could- (0.3) t-k- we could ↑tell her:  
 16 that the combination of the alpha one deficiency and her smoking  
 17 is a lethal combination . . .

I'll briefly track the three rounds of laughter.

*Round 1* (lines 5–7): Simultaneously with Maury's laugh (line 5), Fran has produced a quiet acknowledgement token, "°Right°" (line 6), and immediately thereafter, in 'smile voice', 'Exactly' (line 7). That she produces this smilingly may be a sort of acknowledgement of Maury's laughter, but it is specifically not a joining in.

*Round 2* (lines 8–10): Maury pursues laughter across Fran's smiling 'Exactly' (line 8). Again she does not join in; this time producing an utterance, 'What would we do for her', with no laugh particles, nor in 'smile voice' (line 10). Eschewing both, she may be indicating a readiness to return to serious talk.

*Round 3* (lines 10–12): Maury pursues laughter across Fran's utterance, his laughter, perhaps not coincidentally, coterminating with that utterance (line 11 vis-à-vis line 10). Fran, immediately upon completion of her utterance breaks and laughs (lines 10/12), and since Maury is no longer laughing, she is laughing alone.

Let me just note that in some materials, once a coparticipant has joined in the laughter, the laugh-initiator reciprocates, and a 'laughing together' is produced. In other materials, as here, that does not happen. Here, as soon as Fran is committed to laughter (i.e., after laugh-onset 'ehhhh' plus one solid laugh particle 'h<sup>h</sup>'), Maury produces a pre-speech inbreath (line 13 vis-à-vis line 12) and thereafter returns to serious talk (lines 15ff). Transcribing this segment, it seemed to me almost as if he'd 'scored' off her; that she'd been 'had'.

Extracts (11a) and (11b) involve a dramatically laugh-receptive female senior physician, interacting with a male patient and a male intern, respectively:

**(11a)** [HospSite:5-14-93(1):45]

((Jill, the senior physician, is explaining to the patient, Ted, why she does not recommend a typhoid shot preparatory to a trip he's taking. Not only are they ineffective, but . . .))

- 1 Jill: You don't feel good after a typhoid (0.4) SHOT.=  
 2 Ted: =·mpt Oh really?=  
 3 Jill: =Yes:[So: uhm  
 4 Ted: [Little taste of what you would ha:ve?  
 5 (·)  
 6 Jill: Well, exa[ctly ub eh ↑shorter but [anyway,  
 7 Ted: (+) [whh:hhh [khh h̄j̄n[h, hnh-hnh  
 8 Jill: (+) [hhh ·hhhhh  
 9 (·)  
 10 Jill: So: aa-↑I've done a lot of foreign travel and I don't  
 11 (+) t(h)ake t(hhh)yph(hhhh)oi(h)oi:d=  
 12 Ted: (-) [-(silence)-]  
 13 Jill: (+) =[eh hg:h heh] hesh:: he-eh! ah!  
 14 Ted: (-) [-(silence)-]  
 15 Jill: ·hhh So: uh but all the rest looked very reasonable . . .

We can note that although Jill does not respond to Ted's possible laugh/possible just-an-outbreath 'whh:hhh' (line 7), when he produces an unequivocal laugh token, the 'h̄j̄n' of 'khh h̄j̄n' (also line 8), she responds with a breathy noise, 'hhh' (line 8), which can be doing lovely work. Given that Ted is now unequivocally laughing, her breathy noise can be heard as a reciprocal laugh, and by being so hearable, the fact that she is using the same sort of noise as he initially produced can retroactively show understanding of (and perhaps cumulatively reciprocate) his own prior breathy noise as also a laugh.

On the other hand, Ted maintains silence in response to Jill's laugh-loaded talk (line 12 vis-à-vis line 11), and in response to, and across, her post-utterance laughter (line 14 vis-à-vis line 13). (In its distribution of laugh-receptiveness/laugh-resistance, this interchange is reminiscent of extract (9a) vis-à-vis extracts (9b) and (9c), i.e. Sally's little 'mfff' and Hank's silences.)

And finally, one of life's embarrassing moments, a recipient being laugh-receptive to something other than a laugh, e.g. a cough, or as in this case, throat-clearing:

**(11b)** [HospSite:5-14-93(1):32]

((Tom, the intern, is describing to Jill, the senior physician, a problem the patient, Ted, had reported during Tom's examination of him.))

- 1 Tom: . . . whatever he was doing baseline ·hhh[h h-  
 2 Jill: [Is there a relationship  
 3 to mea;ls?  
 4 Tom: (+) ·tch·hh He sa:ys th(ghh)at ughh:m ·t·hhuhhh he- ukhh hu:m.  
 5 ·pth·t·k He always eats:: befo:hhre. training·hhhhh[hhhh  
 6 Jill: (+) [°hheehh°=  
 7 Jill: =[°Yhheh,°  
 8 Tom: (+) [uk-ekhhegh HUH::[

- 
- 9 Jill: (+) [°h!°  
 10 Tom: [There's a frog in my throat? ·h h h h h  
 11 Jill: (+) °h(h)[o::°  
 12 Tom: (-) [He always eats before train ↓ing.

As he answers Jill's (line 3) question, Tom starts producing a range of noises, e.g. the guttural 'th(ghh)at ughh:m' and fricative 'ukhh' (line 4), and the breathiness in 'befo:hhre' (line 5). Jill's response to this noise-enriched answer to her question is a quiet, breathy laugh, '°hhehh°' (line 6) and a quiet, breathy acknowledgement token, '°Yhheh°' (line 7).

Simultaneously with her acknowledgement token, Tom produces another series of noises, 'uk-ekhegh HUH::' (line 8), whereupon Jill produces a quiet little laugh, '°h!°' (line 9), and simultaneously with that little laugh, Tom explains that he's got a frog in his throat (line 10). Of all the materials I've transcribed in which people make a range of noises that one would call 'having a frog in their throat' or 'clearing their throats', this is the only one in which the sufferer explicates the noises he's making. It's possible that Tom has understood Jill's '°hhehh Yhheh°' (lines 6–7) as a reciprocal response to the noises he's made (lines 4–5); noises that she's mis-heard as some sort of laughter by him.

A final round occurs when Jill does a 'news-receipt' and inserts a laugh-particle, '°h(h)o::°' (line 11), and immediately upon the occurrence of the laugh particle, '(h)', Tom starts to talk, recycling the utterance that preceded and perhaps elicited Jill's laughter, now with no extraneous, possibly laughter-relevant noises (line 12 vis-à-vis line 11).

It seems to me that Jill, by producing a 'news-receipt' in the first place, is acknowledging that she had misunderstood the noises in Tom's prior utterance (otherwise her response might have been something like 'That's alright', or 'Take your time', etc.). And the inserted laugh-particle might work both retroactively and projectively; retroactively, by referring to the sort of misunderstanding she made; projectively, by inviting Tom to treat the misunderstanding as she's treating it, i.e. with a bit of laughter. And this he does not do.

### *Discussion: in defense of stereotypes*

The foregoing may turn out to be an object lesson in the persistence of stereotypes even when confronted by cold, hard, neutral facts. As happens again and again, the facts (in this case the results of counting the assembled instances of 'male–female' laughter) are disputed with anecdotes (here, with a few cases that serve the stereotypes, while those that don't are treated as 'exceptions').

The results of the count show some differences as between 'males' and 'females', but not of the magnitude we might expect would be required to generate my and Zimmerman's noticings. It could well be that these noticings were selective; that we only noticed an occurrence when it conformed to our already-held 'they do X' stereotypes, and disregarded other, perfectly relevant

occurrences. And now, forced by my own investigation to notice those occurrences, I'm trying to argue them away.

This begins to look like something akin to Harvey Sacks' observations on 'category-bound activities' with their associated 'knowledge protected against induction' (1992: 295). As Sacks remarks:

It's not the case that exceptions involve any change in what you know about [a] category's members. For all the categories that have . . . a bunch of activities bound to them, exceptions don't matter. It's built in that there are exceptions, and they do not involve you in modifying what you know.

And that very nearly describes the way I'm dealing with contradictory cases, i.e., as 'exceptions'. But there is an important difference, which is, that when subjected to case-by-case analysis, these 'exceptions' turn out to support rather than undercut the stereotypes. That is, it's not that those cases 'don't matter' to what we 'know about [a] category's members', but that they turn out to conform to that knowledge. They are not, after all, contradictory cases, but cases produced by reference to a more general principle than that stated in the stereotypic description of those members' behavior – in this case, the general business of 'receptivity/resistance', which may be hierarchically superordinate to the more local business of 'laugh-resistance/laugh-receptiveness', across the actor-categories 'male' and 'female'. It appears, then, that the case-by-case analysis, rather than arguing the exceptions away, has argued them in.

Now, there is no question that the stereotypes do not come near to capturing the details of actual occurrences. But if anything like what I've proposed here actually holds up, then it may be that these stereotypes are crude expressions, and products, of a sort of tacit, working sense of a whole complex of regularities, which incorporates such occurrences as laughter by gallant males and non-laughter by thwarted females, or laughter by male recipients/non-laughter by female recipients of troubles-talk. These stereotypes might then be seen to be reflecting, referring to, constituting a 'gloss' for that complex of regularities. Whereas, it may be that assembling all instances of 'male-female' laughter, regardless of their particulars, and then counting them up, is altogether too simplistic.

And if that's the case, then it could be that there are other complexes, similarly glossed by stereotypes. That is, there may be a range of impressionistic noticings, stereotyped characterizations, etc., which may turn out to be invoking something essentially true. Whereas a range of statistical findings which undercut this or that stereotype could turn out to be, say, essentially false although perfectly correct – which may at least partially account for the mutterings of 'But it's *true*' upon the announcement of this or that statistical disproof of yet another stereotype.<sup>7</sup>

It may be that in general, the persistence of stereotypes resides in people's sense that the knowledge so simply *expressed* is rather less simplistic than the simple terms in which it is set forth – and perhaps also, a sense that the counterposed statistical information may be rather less sophisticated than the format in which it is presented.

## NOTES

1. Hanneke Houtkoop-Steenstra invited me to present something at the Second Utrecht Conference on Interaction-analytic Research, held on 10 May 1994 at the University of Utrecht, which she was co-organizing. I responded with a lecture called 'Notes on a candidate laughter-related phenomenon in 'male-female' interaction'. Over the years, I have presented versions of this stuff, and it seemed to me that it was more appropriate to leave it as a lecture than to submit it as a journal article – it was just too wild and wooly for the latter. But it now seems fitting to place it in this issue in honor of Hanneke, and to dedicate it to her – wild and wooly as it is.
2. I did, however, stumble across a pair of categories in *Roget's Thesaurus* that I never would have come up with, and that struck me as simply nutty: Revelation/Pseudo-Revelation. Under the heading Revelation are listed such things as the Old Testament, Pentateuch, New Testament and Talmud. Under the heading Pseudo-Revelation are the Koran and Vedas (and under a sub-heading, False Prophets and Religious Leaders, are such fakes as Buddha, Confucius and Mohammed). And this is not something from the Middle Ages; it's from the 1972 edition of *The Everyday Roget's Thesaurus of Synonyms and Antonyms*, Galley Press, London, p. 224, entries 985–6. It appears that more recently, sanity has prevailed: In my 1994 edition of *The Concise Roget's International Thesaurus* (HarperCollins, New York), the Koran and Vedas have taken their place with the Old Testament et al., under the heading Scripture (p. 494, entry 683), and Buddha, Confucius and Mohammed now join a long list under the heading Prophets, Religious Founders (p. 495, entry 684). Not long ago I came across another Thesaurus shift. In the 1972 volume, under the heading Imperfection, are the items 'half-blood' and 'touch of the tar brush' (p. 136, entry 651). These are not to be found in the 1994 volume's offerings of imperfect things. There might come a time when someone thumbing through a now current thesaurus will stumble upon the categories 'male' and 'female' and think 'What a nutty way to partition a population!'
3. The problematic plant discussion continues for quite a while thereafter, going on more than twice as long as the condolences. In the course of it there is yet another round of Philip initiating laughter and Leslie not joining:
 

[Holt:X(C)1:1:3:11]

1 Philip: We'll let you know:: eh h<sub>h</sub> if they d<sub>o</sub>(h)n't arri(h)ve [y<sub>ou</sub> kno]w  
 2 Leslie: [ Y e s ]↓fine.

The call closes almost immediately thereafter, with no re-reference to the condolences which were announced as the reason for the call, which may leave the problematic plants as the conversation's business.
4. A hint of support for the possibility that Hal is joining in Leslie's laughter rather than independently laughing post his own laughter, can be found in the fittedness of his laugh-particles to hers; specifically the 'heh'- to – 'ha' shift, Leslie's 'heh ha ha' (line 2), followed by Hal's 'heh ha (ha)' (line 3). For some discussion of fitted laugh-particles, see Jefferson et al. (1987: 187–8).
5. What we may be seeing here is an interesting non-fittedness of a recipient's laugh-particles to those of the laugh-initiator. What fittedness there is, seems to be that between the laugh-recipient's particles and his own prior utterance, i.e., Hal's 'aah ah!' (line 6) vis-à-vis his prior 'Yah' (line 4). It appears that the 'Yah' was produced as a precursor to topic shift (see Jefferson, 1983, 1984b), with the laugh-particles interjected into the 'Yah'→ Shift trajectory in response to Leslie's laughter (line 5). As the interchange continues beyond the extract we've been looking at, Hal returns to talk about his vacation trip, in the course of which the matter of Leslie's non-Caucasian relative had arisen:

[Holt:SO88(II):1:3:6b]

4 Hal: Ya[h.

5 Leslie: [he:h hu[h:u-uh-ü [·hhhhh

6 Hal: [aah ah!·hhh[That-that- No we really did enjoy it we went to. . .

In interaction where participants are co-present, one sometimes sees the following sort of thing. One of them is gesturing while talking; now another begins to talk. The gesturing speaker then holds his hand in a fixed position while the other is talking, starting to move again as he retakes the floor. Hal's holding his mouth in, as it were, a fixed position, may be analogous.

6. Again, note the fitted laughter; Leslie's 'ehh hah hah hah. . .' (line 7), joined after the first two particles by Hal's 'eh-heh hah hah. . .' (line 8).
7. I had that reaction, for example, to an article which appeared in the *Leeuwarder Courant*, 25 January 1997, entitled (and I roughly translate from the Dutch) 'In every automobile driver lurks a ghost rider' (ghost riders being people who find themselves driving the wrong way on a freeway). According to Rob van Rees, spokesman for the National Corps of Police Services (again, roughly translated), 'It is often claimed that this is something typical of old people, but that is not really supported by statistics.' I have a feeling that if the incidents were examined on a case-by-case basis, a good number of those involving younger drivers would be seen by the general public as not the sort of cases that should count; for example, such an incident occurring in dense fog. We would want, that is, to be looking at clear-weather ghost riders. And perhaps, sober ghost riders.

#### REFERENCES

- Hakulinen, A. (1984) 'Analyzing Gender Display', unpublished MS.
- Jefferson, G. (1983) 'Caveat Speaker: Preliminary Notes on Recipient Topic-shift Implicature', *Tilburg Papers in Language and Literature* 28: 1-7.
- Jefferson, G. (1984a) 'On the Organization of Laughter in Talk about Troubles', in J.M. Atkinson and J. Heritage (eds) *Structures of Social Action*, p. 351 (see also pp. 358-67). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jefferson, G. (1984b) 'Notes on a Systematic Deployment of the Acknowledgement Tokens "Yeah" and "Mm hm"', *Papers in Linguistics*, 17(2): 198-200.
- Jefferson, G., Sacks, H. and Schegloff, E.A. (1987) 'Notes on Laughter in the Pursuit of Intimacy', in G. Button and J.R.E. Lee (eds) *Talk and Social Organization*, pp. 187-8. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Sacks, H. (1992) *Lectures on Conversation*, Vol. I. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

GAIL JEFFERSON is one of the early practitioners and teachers of Conversation Analysis; a student and then colleague of the field's founder, the late Harvey Sacks, whose tape-recorded lectures she transcribed for his use as post facto lecture notes, and after his death edited for publication. She developed the transcription system widely used in the field, and in a range of articles has explored various aspects of the organization of interaction, focusing on the orderliness of such phenomena as overlapping talk, laughter, silence, 'poetics' in ordinary talk, troubles-telling, reported 'first thoughts', error-and-correction, storytelling, list-construction, etc. ADDRESS: Juckemaweg 29, 9105 KA Rinsumageest, Friesland, The Netherlands. [email: g.jefferson@hetnet.nl]