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Watching sitcoms together: a discursive analysis

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Watching Sitcoms Together:
A Discursive Analysis

By

Scott Varney

A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy

at

Loughborough University

September 2019

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For Sam, Lily, and Flynn

I know you'd rather have a holiday home in Disneyworld, but this will have to do for now!

Love you all to Infinity and Beyond! xxx

Dedicated to Nanny Mary and Grandad Fred

I love and miss you both. I wish you were here to see this! xxx

In Loving Memory of Nanny Jean

I'm sorry that you won't get to see me with that pancake on my head xxx

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Abstract

In this thesis I use conversation analytic (CA) and discursive psychological (DP) principles to examine the ways in which groups of people watch situation comedy shows (sitcoms) together. More specifically, this thesis addresses three aims, the first of which is *to explore how people watch, engage with, and understand sitcoms together in a domestic setting*. My second aim is *to examine the ways in which laughter is utilised by sitcom viewers*. Finally, this thesis also aims *to explore the ways in which people interact with each other whilst watching TV*. To address these aims, almost twelve hours of video and audio recordings were made of groups of people watching sitcoms together in their homes as part of their usual TV watching routines, with 25 participants in total. The only inclusion criteria for this research was that participants would be watching a sitcom with another person as part of their usual TV watching routine. This ensured that recordings could be made of naturally occurring sitcom watching, that is, sitcom watching happening outside the artificial setting of a laboratory or requiring the intervention of a researcher. As such, recordings made via unobtrusive video cameras offer an insight into how individuals 'do' sitcom watching in their own homes.

The main findings from this thesis demonstrate that sitcom watching audiences are not just passive receptors of the show that is playing out on-screen, but that they are engaged in a range of hitherto undiscovered interactional business. This interactional business deals with i) the ways that laughter is deployed by viewers, ii) the ways in which certain types of humorous content is oriented and attended to by viewers, iii) how individuals respond to each other's responses to the sitcom, and how co-viewers work collaboratively to understand on-screen content. More specifically, in Chapter 3 I offer a close inspection of the laughter

produced by the sitcom viewers and demonstrate how multifaceted and diverse the laughs produced by these individuals are. This is discussed in relation to how laughter is transcribed for research and this chapter offers suggestions for how we can better capture the performative qualities of laughter in the transcripts we create for CA/DP research.

Continuing with the topic of laughter, Chapter 4 builds upon the observations of Chapter 3 and outlines how laughter is deployed by individuals in ways that are sensitive to the material to which the laughter is responsive to. I show how laughter can be designed and utilised by speakers to accomplish a range of social actions, such as displaying shock or disgust. Here, the CA/DP concepts of accountability and stance will be discussed and the role in which laughter plays in managing will be examined. In Chapter 5, I explore the ways in which sitcom watching is a collaborative accomplishment and how issues of understanding what is happening on-screen are facilitated through interaction between co-viewers. My specific focus here is on the ways in which viewers 'get' the jokes in sitcoms, the role that laughter plays in this, and how this is tied to issues of accountability management.

Finally, the last chapter of this thesis discusses the implications of my findings in relation to current understanding of laughter, TV audiences, transcription of talk, and humour more generally. I demonstrate how watching sitcoms together is a social activity which individuals work together to accomplish. In addition, more general concerns about naturally occurring data and the adequacy of video recordings to capture this are considered in relation to the sitcom watching dataset. Also, the ways in which this present work contributes to discussions about the taken for granted nature of everyday life and the social organization that underpins it, will also be discussed here.

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Chapter 1

Setting the Scene:

Sitcoms, Humour, Laughter and Audiences

"What made a successful episode was how funny the idea was"

- **Larry David, Creator of *Seinfeld, 2005***

1.0 – Chapter Overview

In this chapter I will position this thesis within the wider context of existing literature on, firstly, the study of the situation comedy, (hereafter sitcom), as a distinct form of television programming and examine the importance of humour in giving this genre of show its life, (section 1.1). This will then be followed in section 1.2 by a discussion of the broad concept of 'humour' and how it has been studied previously. This will then allow us to transition to an examination of the all-encompassing theories of humour that have been developed, in section 1.3 and allow us to engage with the question 'what is humour?' in section 1.4.

Following on from this in section 1.5, the way in which humour is approached by conversation analysis (CA) and discursive psychology (DP) and will demonstrate the problems with studying 'humour' from these perspectives. Further to this, the relationship between humour and laughter will be scrutinised in section 1.6, demonstrating how the two components are not as closely related as is often assumed. This will be followed in section 1.7 with a close look at how, using CA methodology, we can begin to see how 'funny' is accomplished in sitcom dialogue.

In section 1.8, the attention is placed firmly on the TV watching audience and the previous attempts to study and make sense of the everyday practice of co-viewing. This will lead onto a discussion which focuses in on sitcom audiences specifically in section 1.9. Here we will examine how the production team behind sitcoms employ a recorded laugh track which accompanies their

shows and how this demonstrates certain assumptions about the people watching the show at home. Bringing everything together, section 1.10 will unpack the aims of this present thesis and finally, section 1.11 will map out how the thesis is organised.

To begin with, let us consider the type of TV programming that underpins this entire thesis; the TV situation comedy show.

1.1 – Situating Comedy on TV

Tracking the history of the term 'situation comedy', Marc (2005) has demonstrated that it was first used in a 1953 edition of TV Guide magazine in reference to the comedy show *I Love Lucy*. The abbreviated term 'sitcom', which is more commonly used to describe this genre of TV, followed in a 1964 article written in Life magazine in a discussion of *The Bing Crosby Show*. This abbreviation has endured and has become a familiar term in both common parlance of the mainstream media but also in academic work of the genre (e.g Mills, 2005, 2009; Cook, 1982, Morreale, 2002; von Hodenberg, 2017; Austerlitz, 2014; Dalton & Linder, 2005; Sedita, 2006).

Sitcom is a genre of TV programming that is, as the name suggests, built on comedy and as such, draws together "a wide range of comic genres – from clowning to conventional joke-telling to sophisticated forms of dramatic comedy" (Curtis, 1982, p.5). However, identifying exactly what makes a show a sitcom, and what qualities it must possess in order to differentiate it from other forms of TV programming is a much more problematic endeavour. Indeed, in discussions of TV genres, it is often acknowledged how difficult it is to establish how sitcoms actually work (e.g. Bignell, 2013). The problems associated with defining the sitcom have been discussed at length by Mills in his books dedicated to the genre (2005, 2009). Ultimately, Mills argues that a sitcom can be "most usefully defined as *a form of programming which foregrounds its comic intent*" (Mills, 2009, p.49, italics in original). For Mills it is this 'comic intent' that separates the sitcom from other forms of TV programming that don't have the primary aim of making viewers laugh. As Bignell (2013) puts it, the

"primary characteristic of television sitcom is that it is funny" (p.132). In other words, the 'comic intent', as Mills refers to it, is what "drives and defines" sitcoms (p.5). Indeed, the quote at the beginning of this chapter from Larry David, co-creator of the hit sitcom *Seinfeld*, also furthers this line of argument, placing importance of an episode being 'funny' as a determinant of its success.

However, whilst humour is undoubtedly the key ingredient for sitcoms, there are other features which make sitcoms stand out from other forms of comedy programming. These recognisable features, or "signs" as Bignell (2013) refers to them, inform the viewer that what they are watching has been created to be a sitcom and, as we shall discuss later in this chapter, has been constructed by the production team with certain assumptions or expectations about exactly how viewing audiences at home will be responding to the humour contained in the show.

Mintz (1985) offers the following definition of this genre of programming, identifying some of the features that differentiate it from other types of comedy programming:

> "Situation comedies are weekly half-hour plays involving a recurring cast of familiar characters who face new adventures initiated and resolved in each episode. The program opens with characters in a state of normality, that is going about their business in their usual place, manners, and roles…The "situation" of the sitcom is the interruption of this normality" (p.42)

Mintz's definition points to a number of features which, *typically*, can be found in sitcoms and not other genres of comedy TV shows. For example, a sketch show does not contain a recurring cast facing new adventures each week, instead the comedy is much more quick-fire, with the actors performing a number of different short sketches, skits, or monologues for the duration of the show. Yet, whilst Mintz's definition may fit a great number of shows in this genre, sitcoms are noted for their willingness to going beyond the boundaries of what is normally expected (Mills, 2005; 2009; Mintz, 1985). As such, we find sitcoms which play with the generic features of other programmes,

for example with sitcom mockumentaries such as *The Office*, *Parks and Recreation*, *Short Poppies* or *Summer Heights High*, which have been written and produced as sitcoms but more closely resemble documentaries. Similarly, some sitcoms such as *It's Garry Shandling's Show* resemble studio-based sitcoms but regularly feature monologues or jokes delivered directly to the audience by the titular character Garry Shandling. In this sense, the show shares many similarities to stand-up shows or light entertainment shows. These examples demonstrate then, that finding a catch-all definition for what the sitcom is and what features do or do not make a show a sitcom, extremely difficult.

In terms of the present thesis, the concerns about how to define a sitcom matter because in order to understand the ways in which viewers at home orient to these types of TV shows, we need to first understand how they have been constructed for those viewers. Herein lies a problem though, because part of the difficulty with understanding sitcoms is, as Mills (2005) observes, it is a genre of programming which is assumed, by audiences and those in the entertainment industry, that we already know how they work. The way in which sitcoms are taken for granted means that there is little concern for how the machinery of the sitcom operates. This is particularly noticeable in regards to how the humour operates within the sitcom, insofar that the 'funny' is an aspect of study which is "often sidelined" (Mills, 2009, p.5).

Indeed, whilst numerous sitcoms have been the subject of academic analysis, the overwhelming majority of this work utilises forms of content or textual analysis as a way of examining notions of representation, and how certain social groups or social issues are represented within them. For example, *South Park*, an adult animated sitcom, has received attention for how it portrays ethnicity (Chidester, 2012; Chaney, 2004), gay identities (Dennis, 2003), masculinity (Gardiner, 2005), sexuality (Gournelos, 2009), environmental concerns (Stewart and Clark, 2011), and motherhood (Nagy, 2010). Similarly, *The Simpsons* has been examined for its representations of urban life (Wood and Todd, 2005), religion (Pinsky, 2001), and environmental issues (Todd, 2002), *Benidorm* has been analysed for its portrayal of British holidaymakers (Prieto-Arranz and Casey,

2014), and the representation of different ethnic groups has been analysed in *King of the Hill* (Chaney, 2004). Elsewhere, the sitcom representation of women's rights (Holbert, Shah and Kwak, 2003), national identities (Beeden and Bruin, 2010; Griffin, 2008), ethnicity (Shaw, 2012; Wamsted, 2011; Esposito, 2009), class (Banville, 2011; Butsch, 1992; Tomascikova, 2010), gender roles (Walsh, Fursich, and Jefferson, 2008), fatherhood (Scharrer, 2001), Jewish identity (Wright, 2011; Gillota, 2012), adolescent identity (Wilson, 2009), otherness (Jontes, 2010), queer characters (Dhaenens and van Bauwel, 2012), body weight (Robinson, Callister and Jankoski, 2008) and gay masculinities (Linneman, 2008) have all received academic attention.

This type of work which uses forms of content analysis, sidesteps the problems associated with defining the sitcom as a TV genre discussed earlier but also, crucially, largely neglects the 'funny' aspect of the show. The fact that this type of programming is created and driven by humour, and as we will discuss shortly, laughter, is not captured in an analysis which utilises content analysis. If one wants to understand sitcoms as something which is a) constructed to be 'funny' and b) responded to as such by viewing audiences at home, then one needs to adopt a methodological approach which offers a fine-grained examination of how these particularities are accomplished. This present thesis is specifically concerned with the latter of these issues, that of how viewing audiences at home are responsive to the 'funny' in the sitcom. Therefore, the analytic and methodological approach taken here is one that affords a close inspection of the moment-by-moment unfolding of the sitcom on-screen whilst also allowing for an analysis of how viewers watching at home orient to, respond to and incorporate these shows into their interactions off-screen. This approach of CA/DP will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 2 of this thesis. For now, let us focus on the 'funny' and examine the ways in which the concept of humour has been approached by researchers in previous work. What shall be shown is how humour has been defined, explained and studied and, ultimately, how problematic the question 'what is humour?' is.

1.2 – Dissecting Humour

In the preface to his book 'A Subtreasury of American Humor' (1941), co-author E.B. White outlined the difficulty that one faces when trying to understand humour, remarking that "Humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind" (p.xvii). This quote is often reproduced in the opening sections to books or papers on humour due to the fact that it succinctly captures one of the key issues with studying humour. The issue which White is addressing here is related to the fact that any examination of humour relies on subjecting something that by its very nature is non-serious to a serious analysis and, in doing so, stripping away the very thing that gives it life, leaving the 'innards' which have a much smaller appeal. Arguably, this is one of the reasons why humour remains on the fringes on psychology, as observed by Roeckelein (2002) and Ruch (2008), despite humour being of potential interest to all disciplines of academic psychology (Martin, 2000, Martin & Ford, 2018).

Indeed, Chapman & Foot (2007) have remarked that "it is striking how comparatively little research has been done in the area of humour and laughter" (p.2). Whilst there has been some increased interest in research into humour and laughter, particularly within the discipline of linguistics (Bell, 2009), which will be discussed later in this chapter, but also within the field of "positive psychology" (e.g. Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2003) which examines positive experiences, emotions, and character strengths. As such, 'humour' is considered to be one of 24 character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and has been studied alongside for its relationship with, for example, happiness and resilience (Edwards & Martin, 2014). However, despite the revived interest in the subject, this is nevertheless still marginalised in academic work, and as such, historical claims that humour is a "genuine mystery" (Latta, 1998, p.3) or enigmatic (e.g. Berger & Wildavsky, 1993; Berlyne, 1972), still remain pertinent today.

Martin and Ford (2018) suggest two reasons why psychologists have not placed enough importance on humour as a topic of study. Firstly, they argue that the non-serious aspect of humour

could be considered as “too frivolous” (p.16) to be considered a worthy topic for serious study. A position which is also taken by Koller (1988) and Mulkay (1988), when commenting on the similarly noticeable lack of humour work conducted within sociology, with Mulkay arguing that sociologists have tended to confuse “the non-serious with the ‘trivial’ (p.1). Secondly, Martin and Ford note that an agreed upon and precise definition of what is humour has not been reached, (as will be shown in the proceeding section of this chapter), making it hard for researchers to decide what does or does not constitute humour, making operational definitions difficult to establish (which is especially problematic for studies which adopt experimental designs). These issues raised by Martin and Ford (2018) about the way in which humour is treated in the discipline of psychology and corroborated by Koller (1988) and Mulkay (1988) in relation to humour’s position as an area of study in sociology, establish humour studies as a neglected area of research. There has been, as Chapman & Foot (2007) put it, “an apparent unwillingness to take the subject seriously” (p.2).

That being said, there has been some attempts at dissecting the frog, and as a result, there are some broad traditions of humour research that have tried to define what humour is, establish what constitutes humour (as opposed to non-humour or seriousness), and have attempt to understand the functions of humour. Given that it is widely acknowledged that humour is multidisciplinary (e.g. Goldstein & McGhee, 1972; Ritchie, 2008, Martin, 2007, Dynel, 2009, Martin & Ford, 2018), the work that follows derives from a range of academic disciplines, most notably, psychology, philosophy, linguistics, sociology, and media and cultural studies. Though the pervasive nature of humour, making appearances in many settings and being found across all cultures (Morreall, 2009; Carroll, 2014), means it is not uncommon to see humour explored in other academic disciplines outside of these.

In order to answer the question ‘what is humour?’, there are two things that need to be considered; a conceptual aspect and a semantic aspect. The former of these will be discussed shortly in relation to formal theories of humour, which attempt to identify specific qualities, characteristics,

or functions of humour, but for the time being let us focus on the semantic aspect. This issue here relates to the way in which we talk about the broad concept of humour and how the discourse of humour is full of alternative ways of referring to it. Keith-Spiegel (1972) describes how there are a "myriad of other labels" which are "often used interchangeably with 'humo[u]r" (p.14) to ostensibly refer to the same phenomena which Koller (1988) likens to opening a "pandora's box of semantic problems" (p.3). What one may refer to as 'ridiculous', another may regard as being 'funny' or an example of 'wit'. Some, like Morreall (1983), may talk of theories laughter where others, such as Martin (2007), Carroll (2009), and Billig (2005), talk of the same theories as being theories of humour. For Bergson (1911/2008), it is the comic, but Schopenhauer (1819) and Sidis (1913) both refer to it as the ludicrous. All of the aforementioned appear to be discussing, broadly at least, the same thing. It is unclear and open to argument as to whether something such as 'wit', for example, is something different to humour or other forms of humour, or if it is perhaps a subgenre of the broader phenomena of humour.

Évrard (1996) refers to the "très grande élasticité sémantique" (p.6), that is the "very high semantic elasticity" that exists with the word humour, whereby academics will utilise this word in different ways. As a result, there is a blurring of distinctions, a merging of boundaries and a prevailing sense of ambiguity which researchers must navigate their way through (Keith-Spiegel, 1972). The exercise then is not just about dissecting the frog to reveal its innards but first agreeing upon whether it is a frog we are dissecting or something else entirely that resembles a frog and is frog-like, but not a frog (a toad?).

There is however, widespread agreement about the etymological history of the word 'humour' (e.g. Mcghee, 1979; Roeckelein, 1998, 2002; Billig, 2005; Carroll, 2014; Larkin-Galiñanes, 2017; Hempelmann, & Miller, 2017; Martin & Ford, 2018). In its early use, 'humor' referred to a liquid or fluid. In particular, it related to the bodily fluids which were believed to determine ones wellbeing, with a balance amongst the four fluids, or 'humors', (blood, phlegm, black

bile, and yellow bile), resulting in wellbeing and an imbalance causing pain and disease. According to Roeckelein, (2002), the balance of these four 'cardinal humors' was a key aspect of the teachings of the Greek physician Hippocrates and consequently much of what could be described as "ancient medicine" (p.11) was based on this concept. Building upon the teaching of Hippocrates, Galen, the Greek physician and writer, later introduced the notion of 'temperaments' to the theory of the four humors, each temperament, that is mood or general disposition, is the result of an excess of one of the four bodily fluids. This "personality of temperaments" (Roecklein, 1998) consisted of four personality types which corresponded to imbalances in the four humors. Therefore, someone with too much blood were sanguine (cheerful, warmhearted), whilst too much phlegm led to a phlegmatic (slow) disposition. Similarly, excessive levels of black bile would lead one to be melancholic (sad) or, if yellow bile levels were too high, choleric (fiery, reactive). This "*doctrine of the four humors*" (p.199, italics in original) gave rise to terminology such as 'good humor', 'bad humor', and 'humorless', which have persisted in the ways in which we talk about 'humour' today.

Similarly, the word 'humorist' which now refers to comedians or those involved in the writing of comedy, was used in the 16th century to describe an individual whose humors were inbalanced and as such, were eccentric or appeared ridiculous, making them targets for comic actors to mimic (Carroll, 2009). Continuing into the 17th and 18th centuries, Billig (2005) argues that the rise of theatrical comedy saw humorists, ("farcical characters with extreme temperaments" p.62), take centre-stage for audiences to laugh at and mock their oddness. Firmly rooting itself in the realm of the non-serious, humor, took on a much less restrictive meaning over time and, with a corresponding move away from Hippocrate's and Galen's approach to medicine, it took on the meaning which it occupies today.

Whilst the shift from the medical to the 'funny' is noted with the word humour, there is still nonetheless widespread disagreement about how to define it (Mulkay, 1988; McGhee & Goldstein, 1983; Martin, 2007; Martin & Ford, 2018). Consequently, definitions tend to be fairly broad but

contain similar ingredients of appreciation and recognition. For example, Long and Graesser, (1988) refer to humour, rather parsimoniously, as anything said or done "that is found to be comical or amusing" (p.37), similarly Ruch (2008) refers to "the perception that something is 'funny'" as being central to understanding humour. Carroll (2014) emphasises the importance of "comic amusement" (p.4), arguing that humour is whatever object produces it, whilst for Godkewitsch (2007), humour is a "process" (p.117), triggered by some humorous stimulus and terminates with a response which indicates it has been experienced as pleasurable, a position shared by Latta (1998) who refers to the 'humor process', stressing the psychological puzzle-solving involved in arriving at a laugh. Along these lines, others have incorporated the importance of laughter as being a key component to humour. Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) for example, states humour is an "intentional verbal or nonverbal message which elicits laughter, chuckling, and other forms of spontaneous behavio[u]r taken to mean pleasure, delight and/or surprise in the target receiver(s)" (p.206). A somewhat less parsimonious definition of humour is given by Martin and Ford (2018), who attempt to address the different facets of this phenomena, referring to it as

> "a broad, multifaceted term that represents anything that people say or do that others perceive as funny and tends to make them laugh, as well as the mental processes that go into both creating and perceiving such an amusing stimulus, and also the emotional response of mirth involved in the enjoyment of it." (p.3)

Despite the attempts of the researchers cited here, there does not exist one definition of humour that is able to fully capture the many forms of humour and/or delineate between the different terminology used to refer to the ingredients involved in humour. Partly this issue can be attributed to the fact that academic disciplines, and indeed the research traditions situated within them, all offer different explanations as to what ingredients are important for humour and/or they put a greater emphasis on certain processes over others. This is reflected in the theoretical models of humour and the broad research traditions they represent, which will now be discussed.

1.3 – Theoretical Models of Humour

In the previous section of this chapter, I put forward the idea that answering the question 'what is humour?' comprised two elements; a semantic and a conceptual one. We have explored the semantic issue, or "the brier patch of terminology" as Keith-Spiegel, (1972, p.14) refers to it, surrounding humour research. The conceptual issue on the other hand, is something which a series of longstanding theoretical approaches have attempted to address. Koller (1988) refers to these as 'macrotheories' which are all-encompassing, in that they attempt to highlight general functions or principles which operates in every instance of humour. There is widespread agreement that three broad theoretical groupings exist which separate out approaches to humour; superiority theories, incongruity theories and release theories (e.g. Raskin, 1985; Billig, 2005; Morreall, 1983, 2009; Martin & Ford, 2018). Keith-Spiegel (1972) is in agreement with these groupings though also offers some additional ones, such as 'configurational theories' (p.11) and 'psychoanalytic theory' (p.12), both of which appear to have been subsumed under the broader umbrella of either 'incongruity' (configurational) and 'relief/release' (psychoanalytic). Similarly, Koller (1988) includes a fourth 'ambivalence theory' in his overview of 'macrotheories', yet this too appears to have been collapsed into relief/release theories over time. With that in mind, let us take a closer look at the first of these macrotheories; superiority theory.

1.3.1 – Superiority Theories

The first major category of humour research are those that can be called the 'superiority' or 'disparagement' theories. Both Morreall (1983) and Critchley (2002) suggest that this is the oldest humour theory dating back to the writings of Plato and Aristotle. Whilst Billig (2005) argues that the superiority theory didn't really emerge until much later, there is nevertheless an agreement that ridicule is the central element in this conception of humour. During the 17th century, Thomas Hobbes, as part of his work on human nature, argued that what elicits laughter is a feeling of superiority which arises when one sees others who are infirm, weak or deformed. He commented that

laughter arises from the "sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves by comparison with the infirmity of others" (Hobbes, 1840, cited in Morreall, 1983, p.15) or as a form of "self-mockery" (Billig, 2005, p.52) whereby there is a disparagement between our present selves and our former infirmities and thus still a feeling of superiority. In short, laughter can be seen as congratulating oneself in the face of the misfortune of others, whereby laughter is the by-product of a feeling of superiority (the role that laughter plays in humour and the complex relationship between the two, will be discussed shortly).

1.3.2 – Incongruity Theories

'Incongruity theories' represent the second major tradition for humour research and attempt to place the origins of humour as being the provoked by incongruous features of the world, rather than the motives of the laughing individual as the superiority theories did (Billig, 2005; Martin & Ford, 2018). This approach to the study of humour is a step away from Hobbes's conception of laughter as being based in ridicule and instead suggests that the perception of incongruity is what determines whether something is funny. Broadly speaking, incongruity refers to anything which is perceived to be inappropriate, illogical, out of context, or different in some way to what is normally expected by individuals. As such, humour then, "reflects a contrast in meaning between two incompatible views of a scene", it is "a puzzle, a problem that must be solved for mirth to result" (Fine, 1983, p.160). It is an "intellectual reaction" (Morreall, 1987) to unexpected, inappropriate or illogical elements of a situation.

Incongruity theories can be seen as a product of the cognitive revolution in psychology which occurred in the 1960s, here the focus was on the cognitive-perceptual aspects of phenomena, and the study of humour was no different (Martin & Ford, 2018). One early incongruity theory, proposed by Koestler (1964), argues that humour arises when two frames of reference which are normally considered unrelated are juxtaposed or bought together. As such, humour, like scientific creativity, involved the bringing together of "disparate, seemingly incongruous ideas" (Billig, 2005, p.65). This

theory of bisociation proposed by Koestler, has in some variation, formed the basis of most contemporary theories of humour (Martin & Ford, 2018). Likewise, there is "widespread agreement" that the presence of incongruity is necessary for humour to be created (Ruch, 2008, p.25, see also Martin & Ford, 2018).

1.3.3. – Release Theories

The final category of humour research concerns theories grouped under the umbrella of 'release theories'. The "most eminent of the release theorists" (Keith-Spiegel, 1972, p.13) is Sigmund Freud. Underpinning Freud's work is the wider psychoanalytic principle that individuals have inherited instincts of sexuality and aggression which, if fulfilled, provide intense pleasure. However, these instincts conflict directly with social demands and consequently, are curbed from an early age (Billig, 2005). If this did not happen that person could not function as a moral, disciplined human being, thus social life would be extremely problematic. As such, individuals are not constantly tempted by these instincts because they are pushed out of conscious awareness into the unconscious. This is achieved through repression, the "disciplinary force" (Billig, 2005, p.144) which keeps control of the instinctual forces. However, the work of repression is never completely done as the forbidden instincts leave behind residual energy which provides a constant temptation to the individual.

Freud's work on humour is underpinned by the notion that there is a conflict between the unconscious instincts (the id) and the forces which try to prevent them from being fulfilled (the ego). This is a never-ending battle and the id is always attempting to get the upper hand on the ego and tries to enter the individual's consciousness (Billig, 2005). Freud argued that, like dreams, jokes provide the id an opportunity to gain the expression it seeks. However, the desires must disguise themselves in order to avoid the ego and its work as a mental censor. Freud (1991) described the "joke-work" that is instrumental in transforming the unconscious desires into the socially accepted form of jokes. 'Condensation', 'displacement', and 'indirect representation' are all techniques involved in this joke-work and are implicated in disguising the sexual and aggressive desires,

distracting the ego and allowing the repressed instincts to be expressed and enjoyed briefly (Billig, 2005; Martin & Ford, 2018). As such, the energy usually required to repress the desires is briefly made redundant by the joke and this is released in the form of laughter (Billig, 2005; Martin & Ford, 2018).

A large proportion of jokes were believed by Freud to be fulfilling this kind of psychological release. For example, Loewenstein (1958), argued that, in the context of psychoanalytic therapy, jokes told by patients in therapy sessions express either competition with the analyst or seductive wishes towards the analyst. That said, in order to also explain jokes that did not, he made the distinction between 'tendentious' and 'innocent' jokes; tendentious jokes referred to the ones that offered the release of repressed desires and thus "serve an aim" (Freud 1991, p.132). An innocent joke on the other hand "serves no particular aim" (Freud 1991, p.132) and does not facilitate the release of sexual or aggressive desires. Whilst both of these types of jokes involve similar joke-work, innocent jokes do so "for their own sake" (Billig, 2005, p.153) and are enjoyed for the clever joke-work only. That being said, Freud noted that tendentious jokes produce more laughter than innocent jokes which only result in "a slight smile" (Freud 1991, p.139). Therefore, because similar joke-work is in operation in both types of jokes, the fact that Freud noted a difference in responses to jokes suggests then that it cannot be the technical aspects of the joke that provoke laughter but the sexual or aggressive content that is masked by the joke-work.

The 'macrotheories' of superiority, incongruity, and relief, are firmly rooted in the disciplines of philosophy and psychology. Yet, it is worth acknowledging that there has been an increased interest in humour from a linguistic perspective (Bell, 2009). As such, it is worthwhile outlining some of the main theoretical contributions from this academic discipline.

1.3.4 – Linguistic Theories

The Semantic Script Theory of Humour (hereafter SSTH), was proposed by Raskin (1985) and has established itself as the "cornerstone" of the linguistic approach to humour (Ermida, 2008, p.84). As

such, it is considered the “most well developed” theory of humour which approaches the phenomena from a linguistic focus (Martin, 2007, p.89). Raskin’s (1985) SSTH is a model of humour competence; it seeks to explain how texts are recognized by individuals as being humorous. It is worth clarifying that Raskin’s conception of the individual is an idealized one, in that the SSTH is based around the notion of a “idealized homogeneous speaker-hearer community” (Chomsky 1965, p.3-4). Therefore, aspects of how the joke is performed by individuals and the context in which it occurs are dismissed as irrelevant. It is, as Martin (2007, p.89) puts it, a “model of a hypothetical information-processing system” and can be seen a “linguistic extension” of the incongruity theory tradition (Martin & Ford, 2018).

Central to the SSTH is the concept of a ‘script’. According to Raskin (1985) “the script is a large chunk of semantic information surrounding the word or evoked by it” (p.81). The suggestion made by Raskin is that words evoke or activate certain internal cognitive structures which contain information about the world. In addition, scripts are conceived as being graphs composed of lexical nodes which are connected together by semantic links such as synonymy and hyponymy (Ermida, 2008). It is assumed that a great deal of interconnectivity exists between these scripts, indeed Raskin postulates that the scripts of a particular language are linked as “a single continuous graph” or “semantic network” (Raskin, 1985, p.81).

In regards to jokes, Raskin’s “main hypothesis” (1985, p.99) is that there are two conditions which must be fulfilled for a particular text to be characterized as a “single-joke-carrying text”. The first is the notion of ‘script overlap’ whereby a particular text is compatible with two different scripts. This can either be total overlap (both scripts are compatible with the entire text) or partial (only certain portions or details of the text fit both scripts). Raskin’s second condition of ‘script opposition’ must accompany ‘script overlap’ in order for a text to be humorous. This opposition between scripts refers to the extent to which the two scripts trigger opposite meanings. These can be grouped into three basic oppositions; actual vs. non-actual; normal vs. abnormal; and possible vs. impossible (Attardo, 1994). In short then, the SSTH proposes that if a text is compatible with two different

scripts (either totally or partially) and these scripts are in some way opposed, then a text will be classified as being ‘funny’ (Attardo, 1994).

The SSTH has long since been criticised for the fact that it has been developed using only ‘canned jokes’ and faces problems when attempting to apply its theoretical principles to other types of humorous texts (Attardo, 1994, 2017; Attardo & Raskin, 1991). As such, Attardo and Raskin (1991) proposed a revision of the SSTH which they argue can account for any type of humorous text. The result was the ‘General Theory of Verbal Humor” (hereafter GTVH), which they claimed to be much broader than the SSTH in the sense that it is a linguistic based theory “at large” (Attardo, 1994, p.222) encompassing aspects of pragmatics, narrative theory and textual linguistics, moving beyond just being a sematic theory.

The GTVH is based on the idea that, when generating a joke, six knowledge resources (KRs) are accessed. These are hierarchically organized, as shown in FIG. 1.1. below with ‘script opposition’ (SO) at the top and thus deemed the most important. SO is carried over from the SSTH and it is argued that there will always be a script opposition in a humorous text (Attardo, 1994). The next KR on the hierarchy is ‘logical mechanism’ (LM) which is concerned with the way in which the two scripts of a joke are brought together (e.g. by juxtaposition). ‘Situation’ (SI) is the next KR in the hierarchy and is concerned with what the joke is actually about. This is followed by ‘target’ (TA) which identifies who the ‘butt’ of the joke is, be it an individual person or a group of individuals. The ‘narrative strategy’ (NS) KR is concerned with the fact that jokes take some form of narrative that is organized in a particular way, e.g. as a riddle or a ‘canned joke’. Finally, the ‘language’ (LA) KR is situated at the bottom of the hierarchy and considered the least important of the six KRs. This contains the information about how the joke is actually worded, including where the punch line is actually placed.

FIG.1.1

(Complete hierarchy of the six KRs – taken from Attardo & Raskin, 1991, p.325)

In sum, these marcotheories of humour, offer different ways of approaching the question 'what is humour?' As such, these models purport to be all encompassing and, as such offer a comprehensive explanation for all forms and variety of humour. Martin and Ford (2018) argue, these theories are also designed to be parsimonious and as such, be as concise as possible so not to be unwieldy for researchers but argue that this comes at the price of not being able to explain all varieties, subgenres, and permutations of humour. As such, researchers have instead relied on their own specific operational definitions based on the particular research questions that they are attempting to answer. Therefore, 'humour' is used as a general gloss that encompasses a range of phenomena. In the following section we shall examine some of the work which has looked at 'humour' in these broad terms.

1.4 – A Thing Called 'Humour'

Martin and Ford (2018) argue that humour is a form of "social play" (p.19) and emphasize the importance of social situations in creating humour, that is, the importance of interpersonal communication. Correspondingly, they suggest that there are four broad forms of humour that can be found in social life; jokes, spontaneous conversational humour, unintentional humour, and performance humour. Jokes, sometimes referred to as 'canned jokes', (e.g. Attardo, 1994, 2008, 2015; Zajdman, 1991, Fry, 2017), or 'standardized jokes' (e.g. Douglas, 1968; Mulkay, 1988; Mulkay & Howe, 1994), these are "short, amusing stories ending in a punch line" (Martin & Ford, 2018, p.20) that are "context-free and self-contained unit[s] of humo[u]r" (ibid, p.12), which can be deployed or "regenerated" (Zajdman, 1991, p.38) in many different social situations. As Mulkay (1988) puts it, these type of jokes are "a linguistic package with more or less stable content which can be passed from person to person" (p.8).

These pre-packaged, 'canned' jokes are often described as consisting of two parts: the setup and the punchline (e.g. Pickering et al., 2009; Berger, 1993; Sherzer, 1985; Martin & Ford, 2018). The setup involves a short narrative or "story" (Berger, 1993, p.15) which concludes with the presentation of the punchline, which "shifts the meaning in an unexpected way" (Martin & Ford, 2018, p. 20). It has been argued that these canned jokes are often prefaced with statements such as "Have you heard the one about…" or "Here's one you'll like…" (e.g. Fry, 2017; Martin & Ford, 2018) and often have "stock formats" such as "A man walks into a bar…" (Martin & Ford, 2018, p.20).

Much of the work that has examined the concept of 'humour' has used these standardized or 'canned' jokes as the object of study, a trend which can be observed in the linguistic approaches to humour which utilise Raskin's (1985) SSTH or Attardo and Raskin's (1991) GTVH, (e.g. Ritchie, 2004; Aarons, 2012; Attardo, 1994), the psychoanalytic study of humour (e.g. Freud, 1991), and also the work that has examined joking in interaction (e.g. Sacks, 1974, 1978; Norrick, 1993). Similarly,

Martin and Ford (2018) remark that jokes of this type serve as psychological analyses of humour's "equivalent of T-mazes or nonsense syllables" (p.23), both of which are a cornerstone of experimental psychology. One reason for this trend could be, as Dynel (2013) argued, that these type of jokes "constitute the most salient category of verbal humour" (p.viii) and, as such, if one was looking to dissect humour, then, as one would with frogs, one would examine the most commonplace species as a starting point.

An alternative explanation for this trend is outlined by Berger (1993), offering two reasons why jokes are used for analysts to study humour, the first being that "they are short and easy to reproduce" and the second that they "deal with the techniques of humour in an immediate and direct manner" (p.15). Ritchie (2000) has argued that the focus on jokes is a necessary "simplification" (para. #5) in order to "make some progress" (para. #5) in the study of humour. The hope being that if one can understand and develop methodology to understand jokes, then this can then be applied to other forms of verbal humour in the future. Ritchie's optimism however, does not appear to have been matched by progress in moving away from canned jokes as the object of study, which has continual focused on, as Mulkay (1988) puts it, the "disembodied" (p.2) jokes taken from their context and transformed into "cleaned up written versions" (p.57). Whilst 'jokes' have been most widely studied in academic work on 'humour', CA and DP offer a different way of examining 'humour'. This will now be discussed.

1.5 – Conversation Analysis, Discursive Psychology, & Humour

Thus far in this chapter we have seen the numerous attempts to answer the question 'what is humour?' and demonstrated that the success of a sitcom is dependent on it being 'funny'. However, this thesis will not be working within the parameters of one of, or trying to find support for, any of the 'marcotheories' mentioned earlier. Instead, the notion of 'humour' will be viewed much more sceptically. This scepticism is tied to the analytic and methodological approaches that will be taken in this thesis; Conversation Analysis (CA) and Discursive Psychology (DP) (both of which will be

discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2 of this thesis). There is a general concern within both CA and DP about the use of categories by analysts, such as Edwards (1991, 1994, 1997), who has demonstrated that categorisation is linked with accomplishing different social actions. Categories are used in talk to do different things, whether it is complaining, blaming or any number of discursive goals. Therefore, CA/DP researchers see categories, such as humour, as something which are deployed in talk to perform some social action.

The perspective on categorisation is linked to the broader concerns about "mind-world relations" (Edwards, 1997), these are issues about whether or not there are tangible, and therefore examinable, things (objects of study) which can be found using the correct methodology. This 'realist' stance is based on the belief that these 'things' are real and exist on some level which is sperate from individual interpretations or representations. Therefore, it is possible to use methods such as experiments or surveys to accurately examine these things, we can use them as "machinery for harvesting data" (Potter, 1997, p.149). Indeed, this realist perspective is one that has been taken by the overwhelming majority of work on humour, which has viewed this particular 'thing' as being something which exists, transcends contexts, and as a result is analysable. This is evidenced in the macrotheories of humour which are built around the notion that 'humour' is a thing which exists outside of interpretation and as such, with the right methods of analysis can be found and subjected to an objective analysis. Indeed, one realist position that can be taken with humour research is to treat the joke as being the basic unit of humour, as Leacock explains:

> "A joke may be defined as an item of humor reduced to a single point or particle. It represents the breaking up of humorous matter into its elements, so that we can examine and appreciate one little bit of it without any extraneous context. One might say that a joke is a self-contained humorous thought. Its essence is its isolation."

Leacock (1938, p.114)

Here then, humour is treated in a similar manner to the scientific study of matter, whereby we can take humour and reduce it down to its constituent parts. In doing so, we can understand what makes humour. However, an alternative way of approaching the mind-world relations issue, specifically in regards to humour, is to adopt a 'relativist' stance. From this perspective, rather than dealing with some examinable or 'real' phenomena, it is argued that what we are dealing with is representations, of which it is not possible to separate from whatever phenomena it is under examination (Wiggins, 2017). Indeed, from this perspective it is impossible to know whether a single real version of 'things' exists, and even if it does, it is not possible to determine whose representation of that thing is correct.

In discussing the CA approach to 'humour', Glenn and Holt (2017) argue that humour isn't particularly useful as an analytic category and suggest that it is instead a folk category which is used in general terms to "gloss an interactional event" (p.295) (e.g. "that show was really humorous") Citing Heritage (1984), Glenn and Holt argue that humour is an example of a 'typification' which CA/DP analysts try to avoid in their analyses because they lack specificity and therefore are not helpful in describing sequences of talk or social actions being performed. Whilst I acknowledge the problems with 'humour' as an analytic category, in this present thesis there will be occasions where this term is used to gloss over particular sequences of talk. The justification for this is based on the fact this thesis is concerned with sitcoms, which have been written with the intention to be humorous and responded to as this by viewers. As such, I argue that the sitcom is an example of humour-in-action playing out on-screen, these are shows that are written, filmed, edited and acted in a way that is designed to be humorous. In keeping with broader CA/DP concerns about focusing on phenomena as a member's concern, the use of 'humour' will be limited to instances where participants themselves orient to the fact that something 'funny' has occurred on-screen.

Despite being acknowledged as being able to "capture some important aspects of humor" CA has only really been "tangentially interested in humo[u]r as an object of study" (Attardo, 1994. p.331). Indeed, as CA views talk as a form of social action it is less concerned with explaining what

humour is and instead is interested in how individuals design their turns at talk to be seen as humorous, what interactional goals they are attempting to achieve and how others respond to these utterances. There are then, two broad areas in which CA could be seen to be examining humour-related phenomena; the first is concerned with identifying the particularities of joke telling and/or the ways in which 'jokes' are deployed in conversation to perform a particular social action (e.g. Sacks, 1974, 1978, 1992; Norrick, 1993) ;and the second is the focus on how laughter is utilised as an interactional resource (e.g. Jefferson, 1987; Glenn, 2003; Glenn and Holt, 2013; 2017). Broadly though, these two concerns can be encompassed in Glenn and Holt's (2017) summary, arguing that CA is interested in "how participants occasion, create and respond to what might readily be thought of as humorous materials without explicitly engaging the concept of humor" (p.295).

Instead, CA/DP work has examined joke-telling in interaction, the ways laughter is deployed in talk to accomplish different interactional business, and as such, I suggest that CA/DP can be seen to be interested in 'humour work'. That is, the ways in which the machinery of interaction is utilised in ways to accomplish humour. In this light, we can see humour as being a member's method; it is something which we can construct to 'do' something in interaction. For example, Mulkay, Clark & Pinch, (1993) demonstrated how 'humour' was used in negotiations between salespersons and customers to deal with interactional difficulties. Similarly, Clayman (1992) showed how 'humour' was used in political debates by politicians as part of their "rhetorical maneuvers" (p.51) to provide the audience an opportunity affiliate, through laughter, with their statements (though this could also lead to disaffiliative laughter).

Notably, CA methods of analysis have been utilised to examine 'jokes' in terms of how they are organised sequentially. For example, Norrick (1993) explored conversational joking and the way jokes are utilised in interaction. He demonstrated how "joking helps us negotiate greetings, fill uncomfortable greetings, fill uncomfortable silences, and change topics without offending anyone" (p.20). In doing so, "humor greases the gears of everyday talk" (p.20). More specifically, Norrick,

perhaps overly simplistically, argued that joking and laughter are two corresponding parts of an adjacency pair whereby laughter is an SPP that follows the telling of a joke (FPP). Further to this, Sacks (1974, 1978) examined the sequence organization and the ways in which turn-taking is utilised in joking. In particular, Sacks examined the canned "dirty joke' and showed that its telling is a highly organized social activity. As such, he demonstrated the "artfulness of the joke" (Sacks, 1978, p.250). He demonstrated that a joke is something that is carefully designed and composed of three adjacently placed sequence types; the preface, the telling, and the response sequence. The preface is designed to make a telling sequence relevant and may, amongst other sequentially relevant components, involve an offer or request for a chance to tell the joke, an initial characterisation of the joke (e.g. 'a dirty joke') or make reference to who the joke was originally told by and whether they are known by the recipient. The telling sequence follows the preface sequence and involves the joke-telling party delivering the joke until the completion, the punch line, is reached. If the recipient speaks during this sequence they have to do it "interruptively" (p.344). Once the punch line is delivered the response sequence is occasioned and the telling sequence finishes. "In minimal courses this consists wholly of laughing" (p.347) but there is no obligation to laugh as there are other systematic possibilities that can also be deployed by recipients such as silence or delayed laughing. That said, laughing produced after the completion of the telling sequence does have a "priority claim on a jokes completion" (p.348).

Sacks (1978) further explored the dirty joke describing how joke recipients undertake a "critical task" (p.258) upon joke completion to show they 'get' the joke that has been told. Likening jokes to puzzles that are solved "piece by piece" (p.258), Sacks emphasises the importance of recipient response to demonstrate an understanding of the joke. Failure to show that they have 'got' the joke will be treated as "a sign of one's lack of sophistication" (p.259).

We have seen then that CA approaches the concept of 'humour' with scepticism and instead examines the 'humour work' that is speakers utilise in interaction. Similarly, CA/DP have found

much more utility in studying laughter as an interactional phenomena in its own right, (we will discuss this in more detail shortly – see section 1.X). However, the relationship between humour and laughter is a complex one and is worthy of discussion here in order to better understand the context within which this thesis is situated.

1.6 – Humour and Laughter – A Strained Relationship

The macrotheories discussed in section 1.3 of this chapter offered alternative ways of answering the question 'what is humour?' Whether we were dealing with incongruity, superiority, a release, or a script opposition, a key ingredient that underpins each of these approaches is laughter. As Attardo (1994) observes, whether it is implicit or explicit, laughter is the "one common criterion" which underpins definitions of humour. Laughter is seen as being, as Ruch (2008) argues, "synonymous with humor" (p.23). Whilst the specific role of laughter may differ, the theories are broadly united in their positioning of laughter as being a physiological display or manifestation of some internal, cognitive or mental process (the thing referred to as 'humour'). As such, laughter is the external indicator of humour, the internal phenomenon, or as Raskin (1985) describes it, it is "the expression of the feeling of funniness" (p.1).

Indeed, whilst the particularities surrounding the what has caused the 'funniness' differs in the macrotheories, laughter is often taken as the expression of humour. For example, in Hobbes' (1840) superiority theory, laughter was conceptualised as the product of humour which was derived from the misfortune of others. Whilst incongruity theories, such as Koestler's Bisociation theory (1964), viewed laughter as being a display of recognising and solving the mirth-making "puzzle" in the incongruity theories. Whereas, release theories, such as Freud (1991), saw laughter as being the vehicle for discharging excess psychical energy. Regardless of which position one takes, there is an agreement that laughter is "the most common, overt indicator of the presence of humour" (Glenn and Holt, 2013, p.2).

The relationship suggested here between humour and laughter then, is built around the notion that if something makes you laugh then it is because you found it humorous and, conversely, if you find something humorous then you will laugh. There is, as Ermida (2008) describes it, a "supposed symmetry" between humour and laughter whereby a "proportional correlation" (p.6) between the two elements exist. Yet, there is widespread agreement that the relationship between humour and laughter is not as straightforward as this conceptualisation suggests, (e.g. Attardo, 1994; Raskin, 1985; Glenn, 2003; Provine, 2000; Martin & Ford, 2018; Glenn & Holt, 2013; Potter & Hepburn, 2010; Chapman & Foot, 1995; Ermida, 2008; Berlyne, 1972; Chapman, 1983). Key to this assertion is the observation that laughter is a pervasive feature of interaction (Glenn, 2003; Glenn & Holt, 2013) and, as such, occurs in a wide range of contexts and settings, many of which would be considered 'serious' and not based around humorous interaction. As Chapman (1983) puts it, "much laughter is generated under circumstances devoid of humour" (p.151)

For example, Provine (1996), in a study of naturally occurring laughter, found that less than 20% of the laughter they observed was performed in response to anything that could be considered humorous (i.e. jokes). Instead, the majority of the laughter was found in response to talk that wasn't "structured attempts at humor" but what he refers to as "banal" conversation (p.41). Similarly, Giles and Oxford (1970) have argued that there are seven forms of laughter which occur under different conditions: humorous, social, ignorance, anxiety, derision, apologetic, and tickling. Of these seven, only 'humorous' laughter is argued as being linked with something being 'funny', whereas the other forms of laughter are conceptualised as doing serious, that is non-humorous, business. For example, Giles and Oxford see anxiety laughter as being a form of tension release, such as laughing at a funeral or at being reprimanded.

Furthermore, the work that has adopted CA/DP methods of analysis has shown that laughter is a pervasive feature of interaction and is used to accomplish a range of 'serious' business, such as making and receiving complaints (e.g. Edwards, 2005a; Holt, 2012), dealing with delicate issues in

patient-doctor interactions (e.g. Haakana, 2001, 2002; Ticca, 2013), or handling calls to a suicide hotline (e.g. Sacks, 1992) and as such, we can see that the link between laughter and humour is not clear-cut and an unproblematic pairing.

Olbrechts-Tyteca (1974, translated in Gironzetti, 2017), offers five reasons why using laughter as an indicator of humour is problematic:

> "1) laughter largely exceeds humor; 2) laughter does not always have the same meaning; 3) laughter is not proportionate to the intensity of humor; 4) humor can provoke laughter or smiling; and 5) in many cases, neither laugter nor smiling can be observed directly"
>
> (p.406)

In addition, there is further evidence of this messy relationship comes from work that has demonstrated that, just as laughter can be produced without humour, so too can humour be produced without laughter. For example, Hay (1996, 2001) demonstrated that laughter is just one possible response to humour and that there are a number of different 'humour support strategies' that speakers can utilise when presented with something humorous. When self-deprecating humour is deployed, for example, recipients often offered sympathy or contradicted the self-deprecation rather than laughing at it. Furthermore, Drew (1987) demonstrated how humorous teasing is often responded to not with laughter but 'po-faced', serious responses which reject whatever is proposed in the tease.

In sum, what this work demonstrates is that the relationship between humour and laughter is neither straightforward nor symmetrical. Instead, as Glenn and Holt (2013) suggest, we should conceptualise the relationship between humour and laughter as being like two siblings who have a

"close, though complicated, relationship" (p.2). With that in mind, let us now return to the sitcom and discuss how the 'funny' is constructed in sitcoms.

1.7 – Doing 'funny' in the Sitcom

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the ways in which jokes are deployed in interaction has received some attention (e.g. Sacks, 1974, 1978; Norrick, 1993). Similarly, laughter has also been examined for the ways in which it is produced in relation to laugh responses to jokes or teasing (e.g. Sacks, 1992, 1974; Drew, 1987; Glenn & Holt, 2013; Glenn, 2003). Collectively, this work has focused on joke-telling and responding as an accomplishment between two or more parties that are involved in interaction together. As such, the participants are all co-present in some way, either face-to-face or remotely via the telephone or similar devices. Consequently, if we closely inspect these interactions we can see how humour is accomplished and, by looking at the machinery of this talk, identify who the teller of the joke was, who the respondents were, and what business the joke was doing at that moment in time.

However, the dynamics of joke-telling are different in the sitcom and this is something which has been overlooked when thinking about the way jokes are told, and as such, how 'humour' is produced, in interaction. In sitcoms, humour is often generated by non-verbal elements such as a character's facial expressions, their gestures or some other physical 'gag' such as wearing an ill-fitted outfit or smashing a priceless lightshade. Similarly, there is also "slapstick" comedy elements in some sitcoms, which are drawing upon the clowning style of producing comedy "by physical means rather than witty words" (Bouissac, 2015, p.76). Therefore, we might see a character fall down a hole or, in the case of the sitcom *Bottom* for example, we see one character hit the other around the head with a cricket bat. Yet whilst these aspects are evident in sitcoms, it nonetheless remains a type of programming which relies heavily on spoken dialogue to create the humour. As Mills (2009) remarks, "a sitcom with no jokes is not a sitcom and instead becomes something else" (p.5). As such,

the most substantive source of humour within these shows is derived from the interaction between the characters.

To that, I argue here that there are three key differences in the way that jokes operate in sitcoms: 1) the telling of the jokes, or construction of humour within the sitcom is removed from the audience watching at home. As such, there is no way in which the performers on-screen can communicate directly with the audience watching at home, 2) The humour created in sitcoms is not the accomplishment of one speaker or joke-teller, instead the 'jokes' are built over a series of spoken turns, often involving a number of actors, and, are largely conversational in that they do not have the same sort of structure which 'canned jokes', as identified by Sacks, (1974; 1978) and Attardo (2008, 2015), for example. Instead, the sitcom is an example of the type of comedy writing which Nash (2013) discusses which require "*within the text*, an executant and a respondent, whose interchanges are monitored by the respondent-outside the-text" (p.19, italics in original). Finally, 3) the humour produced in sitcoms is performed by actors who are not 'doing' joke-telling. The performers aren't knowingly telling a joke to a recipient, instead the interaction that they are involved in is played as serious for them, but non-serious for the audience. The comic actor who is playing the character is tasked with two things; firstly they must make sure that they deliver their lines in such a way so that it is clear to the audience that it is designed to be humorous, but in opposition to this, they must also ensure that the character they are playing is not seen to be 'in' on the joke and what is being delivered is not for a viewing audience but just part of their normal everyday talk. In other words, they (the performer) are being humorous whilst simultaneously they (the character) are not in on the joke.

To illustrate, consider the following extract taken from the sitcom *Ideal*. Here Nicky responds to a knock on her front door, finding another regular character Jenny in tears.

Extract 1.1. – Baby Jenny

```
1            ((Knock at door))
2    Nicky:  I'll ged it.
3                 (1.2)
4    Jenny:  U:hh uhh kuh
5    Nicky:  ↑Je::n. Whats the madda?
6    Jenny:  ~↑Social services av got ba:by jenny.~
7                 (1.5)
8    Jenny:  Ukhh ~they've had er befo:re but this time they wont give er
9            back.~
10                (0.8)
11   Jenny:  Snih ~↑↑Why cant they learn to sha::re?~
12   Nicky:  Arwh Je:n,
13                (0.9)
14   Nicky:  I'm so::rry.
15   Jenny:  Uhhh
16                (1.2)
17   Nicky:  Bu ↑↑why?
18                (0.9)
19   Jenny:  ~↑↑They said I'm not a fit mo:ther hh~
20   Nicky:  Oh no:, go:d.
21   Jenny:  ~Uhk it's a:rd to keep yur figure when you've been pregnant.
22                (2.0)
23   Nicky:  I don't think that's wha they meant.
```

In this sequence, the 'joke' here is based upon a series of misunderstandings by Jenny, who has had her baby taken away by social services. This scenario in itself is not humorous; there is nothing funny about a young mother crying because she has had her child taken away by social services. However, the humour here is constructed through Jenny's spoken turns and how these demonstrate to

the audience watching at home that she has misunderstood the situation. Unlike the ‘canned’ or standardized joke, there is not a clear setup and punchline. Instead, there are a number of points within this sequence which it becomes clear that Jenny has misunderstood the reasons why social services had concerns about her parenting and, given that these are occurring within the context of a sitcom, can be seen as being humorous. These instances span a number of turns at talk and are accomplished collaboratively through turn-taking. These sequences of talk rely on all parties involved to ensure that each utterance makes relevant the next spoken turn which can play upon the normative organization of interaction and exploit this for comedy effect. Therefore, the humour is not produced by one person simply telling a joke to the audience, but the humour is accomplished as a collaborative enterprise between the characters present in a particular scene. Furthermore, the success of this humour relies on these characters performing the dialogue as if it was not intended to be humorous by the show’s writers.

For example, in extract 1.1. the first line of this sequence which could be considered humorous is lines 8 and 11, where Jenny, through tears, remarks that social services have “had er befo:re but this time they won’t give er back” and follows this with “Snih ~↑↑Why can’t they learn to sha::re?~” These utterances, delivered by Jenny as serious and received by Nicky as being serious, are humorous in this context because Jenny is discussing the situation of having her child taken away by social services in the same way as a child would talk about having a toy taken from them. There is no clear setup and punchline here, instead the ‘joke’ here is accomplished by the sequential organisation of Jenny’s childlike utterance with Nicky’s line of questioning to understand why her friend is upset. Later in this sequence there is another humorous line delivered by Jenny which follows further ‘serious’ questioning from Nicky about what led social services to take her baby away (line 17). Here, the humour rests on the misunderstanding of the notion of being a ‘fit mother’, conflating ‘fit’ meaning capable with the colloquial meaning of ‘fit’ meaning attractive (lines 19 and 20).

What this brief example demonstrates is that, unlike the canned joke which has dominated the much of the work that has studied humour, the 'jokes' that appear in sitcoms are much more conversational in their design and as such, are deployed over a number of spoken turns. However, unlike conversational joking which is deployed in interaction, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the role of joke-teller and recipient are not present here as all speakers, (i.e. the characters in the sitcom), are involved in making sure that the 'joke' is delivered. As such, they are collaborative joke-tellers to recipients who are not present and cannot directly communicate with the teller (with the exception perhaps being sitcoms filmed in front of live studio audiences).

With this in mind, the three facets of the sitcom and the way that humour is accomplished in the show discussed earlier and illustrate here, present some interesting avenues for analysis which have hitherto been largely overlooked in studies of humour more generally. Moreover, there has been little work which has utilised CA/DP analyses to understand how the interaction in sitcoms is used to create 'humour'. One notable exception here is Elizabeth Stokoe's work on dispreferred next actions in the sitcom *Friends* as a way of occasioning laughter. Using a CA approach, Stokoe (2008) demonstrated that the writers of sitcoms occasion laughter from audiences by creating dialogue which breaches the normative organisation of interaction (e.g. turn-taking, adjacency, and preference). Another study by Bubel and Spitz (2006), examined the dialogue in the sitcom *Ally McBeal*, focusing specifically on a dirty joke, and demonstrated how the writers of sitcoms utilize interactions to develop the characters. This characterisation then becomes an important feature for how successful joke-telling is in the show, particularly in regards to how well a joke 'fits' the character who is delivering the material.

The studies of sitcom dialogue by both Stokoe and Bubel and Spitz, illustrate how the writers of sitcoms utilise their understanding of interaction to produce scripted dialogue which accomplishes different interactional business. But it's not just the writers, as Bubel and Spitz (2006) argue, the dialogue found in TV shows is:

> "co-constructed in a joint effort of recipients, actors, directors, screenwriters, producers, camera staff and cutters involved in the editing process – all drawing on their world knowledge and especially on their knowledge of communicative processes in everyday situations" (p.73)

Therefore, by closely inspecting the dialogue found in sitcoms, it is possible to see how the interactions found in these shows are the product of collaboration by all the staff involved, from production to broadcast. However, whilst the work of Stokoe and Bubel and Spitz demonstrates that the interaction in sitcoms is worthy of a fine-grained analysis, there are still a number of issues which remain unknown. Most notably absent, is how the on-screen joke-telling in sitcoms is attended to by audiences watching at home. In other words, what remains unknown here is how sitcom viewers actively participate in the unique joke-telling dynamics, (as discussed earlier in this section), performed in these shows. Bubel and Spitz's quote above outlines how the production of the sitcom is a co-constructed endeavour, but as Stokoe's work illustrates, the success of these types of TV shows also relies on audience member's making sense of the show they are watching. To this, Stokoe (2008) argues, "its data may be fictional, but these scripts are constructed by members who apply mundane knowledge about normative practices and rely on their audience to do the same in response" (2008, p.305). This present thesis will address this latter concern in regard to how audiences make sense of the sitcoms they are watching together. As such, what shall be examined in this thesis is the extent to which not only is the production of this type of TV programming is a co-constructed endeavour, but also the reception of these shows. This concern, especially in relation to sitcoms as a specific genre of programming, has hitherto not been subjected to the sort of fine-grained analysis which CA/DP offers. In order to situate TV comedy audiences in the broader context of audience studies more generally, I will now provide an account of the ways in which the audience have been conceptualised have been studied previously (an issue which will be revisited in the following chapter of this thesis, considered in broader discussions about naturalistic data).

1.8 – 'You have been watching' - Studies of the Audience

It is important to consider the fact that the sitcom is, like any other television programme, produced for broadcast to an audience. Whilst we shall examine the small amount of work that has examined sitcom audiences specifically and discuss the problems with this existing work later in this section, I want to first outline how audiences have been studied more generally. As such, this chapter offers an account of the changing approaches to audiences with the disciplines of psychology, communication and media studies, and cultural studies. However, whilst the specific interest in audiences differs within these disciplines, the general goal of this work is ultimately about understanding the relationship between audiences and media messages (i.e. TV). Therefore, the study of audiences within different disciplines share a similar history, which will be discussed here.

1.8.1 – Effects, Uses, or Decoding?

Early research into media audiences was concerned with "audiences as objects that are acted upon by media messages" (Sullivan, 2013, p.23). As such, the focus of this work was concerns about the 'effects' that these messages had on the audiences that viewed them. It was researchers from the Frankfurt School in the 1920s/1930s that first examined media effects on audiences as a way to explain the rise of Fascism in Germany. Described by Lacey (2001) as the "Hypodermic Needle Model" (p.145), it was proposed that audiences were passive beings, 'injected' by the media messages, uncritically absorbing and acting upon its messages. Morley (1992, p.45) describes the "repressive ideology" which was believed to be injected "directly into the consciousness of the masses" by the powerful leaders of the ruling class. In this light, media messages are seen as having a direct and powerful effect on audiences, thus it is a conception of a helpless audience. Consequently, this approach to audiences is sometimes referred to as the "pessimistic mass society thesis" (Morley, 1992, p.45).

The effectiveness of propaganda messages on audiences during World War II meant that there was increased interest in audience effects at that time and this continued in the years which

followed. Notably, in the field of social psychology, Hovland and colleagues (e.g. Hovland, Lumsdaine & Sheffield, 1949) were conducting experiments on the effects of propaganda messages. Underpinning the 'effects' research was the idea that an audience existed "in a naturally occurring state that can be interrupted and dramatically changed thanks to specific media messages" (Sullivan, 2013, p.47). As such, they were "mindless, undiscriminating, duped, vulnerable" (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.71).

Whilst there was widespread agreement between researchers across the disciplines that the media produced social effects, academics came to see that they were perhaps not as simple, all-powerful nor even direct at all (Morley, 1992). As such, an alternative model of audiences emerged which took the position that audiences were "active consumers of media output" rather than being a powerless "cultural dope" (Hutchby, 2006, p.6), exposed to the negative influences of media messages as proposed in the 'pessimistic mass society thesis'. Instead, viewers were reconceptualised as being selective and active participants who choose which messages to accept and reject (Morley, 1992; Gray & Lotz, 2012). The concern was not about what the media does to people but what people do with the media (Moores, 1993).

This tradition of looking not only at the effects that media messages had on audiences, but also the way in which audiences engage with the media message became to be known as the 'Uses and Gratifications' approach to audiences because, simply put, people "*use* the media, and they experience or derive certain *gratifications* from the media" (Hutchby, 2006, p.6. Italics in original). Whilst the uses and gratifications model was seen as a movement towards the conception of audience members as being 'active' users, rather than being helpless and passive audiences, it has been criticised for overplaying the amount of freedom that audiences have in 'using' the media (Moores, 1993). To this, Morley (1992) described a "pendulum effect" (p.78) that surrounded the back and forth nature of media research that has focused either entirely on media messages ('hypodermic needle' approach) or solely on the audience ('uses and gratifications' approach). As such, Morley

argued that one needs to examine three different elements of the mass communication process in order to gain a full analysis of it: 1) researchers need to study the production of media products; 2) the product itself should be subject to examination to uncover any messages it contains; and 3) the way that messages that are contained in the media products are decoded by audiences should also be analysed (Morley, 1992). These three components make up what Morley (1992) refers to as "The Circuit of Mass Communications" (p.77).

The work on the 'circuit of mass communications' was developed by researchers (including Morley) at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham in the UK and developed as an alternative to both the 'hypodermic needle' and 'uses and gratifications' models to media messages and audiences. The researchers at the CCCS proposed the "Encoding/Decoding Theory" which has since been heralded as "a vital breakthrough in debates about the media and their audiences" (Moores, 1993). One member of the CCCS group, Stuart Hall, laid the foundations for the encoding/decoding theory in his essay 'Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse' (1973). It was in this paper that Hall proposed that the entire communicative process from production to reception should be examined as a whole (the circuit of mass communication). He suggested that certain meaningful messages are 'encoded' into media output by the producers, arguing that these producers have a 'preferred reading' in mind when making particular media products which they want the audience to make. These 'preferred' readings are made more salient to viewers through the ways that the media product is organized or structured, encouraging viewers to take certain positions. Finally, the last link in this 'chain' is the 'decoding' process which audience members participate in to interpret and make sense of the messages they receive through the media.

An important point here is that the process of encoding and decoding "may not be perfectly symmetrical" (Hall, 1973, p.4). Whilst a 'preferred reading' has been built within a media product, it may be decoded differently by the audience (Morley, 1992). In this sense, a text can be seen as being

"polysemic" because there is more than one way which it can be read or decoded (Moores, 1993, p.17). Morley (1992) offers three positions that a decoder may take with an encoded media message: firstly, they may align with the 'dominant code' whereby they fully accept and interpret the message in line with what was 'preferred'; secondly, by aligning broadly with the 'preferred reading' but modify or resist certain aspects of it, decoders are said to be operating a 'negotiated code'; and finally, the decoder can adopt an 'oppositional code' which recognises how the text has been encoded but rather than adopting the 'preferred reading' chooses a "running critique of the preferred reading" (1992, p.89).

In summary then, the encoding/decoding model suggests that audience members take an active role in making sense of media messages and indicates that a number of different readings of media texts may be made by different audiences. Research that is underpinned by the theoretical concerns of the 'hypodermic needle model' was based around a simple stimulus-response methodology whereby visual stimuli would be presented to individuals and the effects it had on them were recorded. However, as the encoding/decoding model proposes a wide range of possible 'readings', researchers have moved away from experimental methods and instead attempted to understand the different ways that media messages are 'decoded' by viewers.

1.8.2 – An Ethnographic Turn

Since the 1970s, there has been, what Moores (1993) refers to as an "ethnographic turn" (p.1). This change in the way audiences were approached was, as Ang (1996) argues, the observation that TV audiences "have always behaved in less than perfect ways" (p.5) which did not necessarily align with researcher's "never-ending concern with television's 'effects' and 'uses'" (p.5). Therefore, the turn to ethnography represented a desire to understand media messages through the eyes of the audience; "to see the world as experienced by the participants themselves" (Gray, 1999, p.32) or understand media consumption "from the virtual standpoint of actual audiences" (Ang, 1991, p.165). Therefore, what

followed was a number of attempts by researchers to capture information about people's media consumption "from the virtual standpoint of actual audiences" (Ang, 1991, p.165).

For example, Hobson (1980) studied patterns of domestic life and the roles in which TV played within it through the use of interviews conducted with housewives. This was followed in (1982) with work on the British soap *Crossroads*. Hobson was partly concerned with the ways in which audiences interpreted the show but also considered the pleasures that were taken from watching it. Again, data took the form of recorded conversations gathered whilst sitting with the participants watching the show. Similarly, Ang's work (1985) was focused around one TV programme, in this case the American soap opera *Dallas*. Working with 42 letters sent from Dutch fans, Ang examined how these individuals 'decoded' the show, based on the ways in which audience members discussed the show in the letters that they sent.

One piece of ethnographic work on audiences more generally (i.e. not tied to one specific TV show), was carried out by Lull (1980, 1990) conducting long periods of participant observation and interviews with households to understand the 'social uses' of TV. In this work, Lull examined 200 families and looked at the ways in which the TV usage was integrated into their everyday lives. Based on this work, Lull suggested that there were two primary types of social uses of TV in the home: structural and relational. Structural uses are divided into 2 sub-types: environmental and regulative. Environmental uses see the TV being used to "create a flow of constant background noise" (1980, p.201-202) which accompanies other behaviours such as completing household chores. As such it acts as a background noise which can be given attention when individuals chose to do so. Regulative uses on the other hand, see the TV as being a "behavioural regulator" (1980, p.202) and punctuates activities such as mealtimes which occur during the day. As such "there is a time for viewing" (1980, p.202).

Relational uses of TV are those which see the TV as playing a key role in how social arrangements are organized and consist of 4 sub-types: communication facilitation,

affiliation/avoidance, social learning, competence/dominance. Each of these subtypes are concerned with how the TV is used for interpersonal accomplishments. For example, communication facilitation relates to the TV being used as a tool to facilitate conversations. Similarly, affiliation/avoidance provides families with a shared experience which they can do together, and this can serve to reduce the demand on individuals to feel the need to talk. Social learning on the other hand, is concerned with how the TV is a tool for learning, and competence/dominance relates to the opportunities that the TV presents for demonstrating competence (e.g. as gatekeeper of the household).

Lull's work here offers the most comprehensive account of how audiences use the TV to perform a range of social actions. However, whilst Lull argues that this work represents an ethnomethodological approach to audiences, this work nonetheless appears more akin to the forms of ethnography used by others in the aforementioned work, in that a close analysis of how these practices are accomplished is not provided, instead relying on generalisations of the phenomena observed.

Whilst there is sparse literature on sitcom audiences, some of the prominent ethnographic work on audiences has actually utilised sitcom audiences as a way of examining more general concerns about the ways in which people 'consume' media messages. For example, Jhally and Lewis (1992), examined the sitcom *The Cosby Show* and, through interviews with the show's viewers, debated how race was represented within the programme. They found that Black and White viewers had different perceptions of the characters in the show and the way they were portrayed. Similarly, Bodroghkozy (1995) analysed the letters and phone calls a broadcaster received about the sitcom *Julia*, revealing that black audiences and white audiences made different readings of the show. Whilst Chitnis, Thombre, Rogers, Singhal and Sengupta (2006) used focus groups and interviews to examine the different 'readings' and interpretations that Indian and American viewers had of the messages contained in the sitcom *Friends*.

Also, Kalviknes Bore (2012) utilised focus groups to examine the ways in which audiences respond to TV comedy. In particular, this work was concerned with the ways in which audiences perceived and responded to the 'laugh track' which is frequently used within sitcoms. To facilitate this discussion, participants were shown four TV comedy shows, two of which were British, (*The Office*, and *Smack the Pony*) whilst, the other two were Norweigan shows (a sketch show called *Melonas* and a mockumentary *Nissene på Låven*). Of the four shows, only Smack the Pony had a laugh track. It was revealed in the focus groups that there was a widespread dislike of the use of 'canned' laughter in TV comedy, with participants expressing concerns about the artificial nature of laugh tracks create and how they seem 'cheesy'. That said, it was also revealed that attitudes towards laugh tracks were dependent on the show, with the recorded laughter being viewed more positively in some shows than others.

Much less widely used in work which is considered to be ethnographic, (something that will be problematized and discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis), is video recordings of TV audiences as they are 'doing' watching TV. Instead, as the aforementioned work demonstrates, the focus has been on focus groups, interviews and, least frequently participant observation. However, there are some notable exceptions which can be found amongst some of the earliest work on TV audiences, for example, Betchel et al. (1972) utilised video recording equipment to examine TV viewing behaviour in situ. This work formed part of a multidisciplinary approach to audiences as part of the 'Surgeon general's scientific advisory committee on TV and social behaviour'. As such, the concern was largely to do with the 'effects' that TV had on viewers, but Bethcel et al.'s approach stands out from this collection of work for its attempt to examine audiences 'naturally' in their homes. Whilst questionnaires and other ethnographic measures were used here, these were used as a point of comparison for the TV cameras that filmed 8 families for a 6 day period. The cameras were connected to a truck which was parked in the drive and this was monitored at all times (thus resembling the ethnographic practice of observation). There were 2 cameras, one mounted over the

TV and the other aimed at the TV (the former being a methodological choice made for this present thesis).

The findings revealed that "television viewing does not occur in a vacuum" (p.299) and as such, Betchel et al. (1972). produced an extensive list featuring all the other behaviours that accompanied TV watching in their data. This included, reading, doing homework, playing board games, and wrestling but also featured mimicking the TV, answering back to the TV, and asking question about TV programs. As such, it appears that there is a range of behaviours which occur whilst people are 'watching TV'. However, Bethcel et. al (1972). Did not examine these behaviours in fine-detail, as an interactive approach would. Therefore, whilst this work is helpful in indicating just how much other 'business' gets done whilst watching TV, the way in which these are organised around the watching of TV is still unknown. Therefore, the close analysis of these sorts of behaviour which CA/DP offers, could illuminate these findings.

It is only recently that it seems the use of video recordings to study audiences has re-emerged as a way of examining 'natural' audiences in action (however problematic this notion may be when applied to this type of ethnographic work – as I discuss in Chapter 2). For example, Jayasinghe & Ritson (2012) and Jayasinghe (2015), approached this subject from a marketing perspective, conducting a six-month long video ethnography of eight Australian families to examine the ways in which individuals respond to TV advertising. This work revealed how family identity roles are mediated and reinforced by the adverts that play out in between TV shows and demonstrated how media advertising messages were attended to differently by members of the family. In sum, the suggestion here is that audiences are active participants in the consumption of TV content and that family domestic life plays a role in determining how adverts are engaged with and which are attended to.

In chapter 2 of this thesis, I discuss the problem with ethnographic methods and as such, I will just briefly identify some of the general issues with this type of methodology here. Firstly,

Hepburn and Wiggins (2007) argue that the fine-grained details of a situation are difficult to capture in ethnographic observations because researchers are limited in what they are able to record and view at any given time. Furthermore, if a particular practice under analysis is fast-paced, it is hard for an observer to record everything that has happened. Similarly, in relation to the open-ended interviews which are used in ethnographic analyses, Potter and Hepburn (2005) illustrate a number of problems with this method. For example, there are a range of social science agendas that come in to play in the interview situation which are imported in the question construction (in particular the terminology used) and the way in which the interview itself is set-up. This is further evident when one considers the use of social categories. Participants in interviews are usually selected on the basis that they are a member of a particular social category (e.g. housewives, as studied in Hobson's 1980 work). However, individuals will use talk to position themselves in different ways with respect to category membership. Furthermore, issues of stake and interest shape the way individuals talk about certain issues (Potter, 1996).

In short, whilst this ethnographic work represents a clear shift towards attempts at collecting naturally occurring data, the ethnographic approach of observation and note taking does not allow a close inspection of exactly how the observed behaviour plays out in real time and cannot provide a detailed account, (i.e. sequential organisation, turn construction, or performative quality) of the interaction that has taken place. Furthermore, the accompanying notes that are created by researchers are interpretative and may not fully capture the complexity of the behaviours that are present at the time. A CA notion of working with recordings made in situ mitigates the problems raised by Hepburn and Wiggins (2007) and allows for the discursive practices suggested by Potter and Hepburn (2005) and Potter (1996) to be examined and, consequently, one can assess the extent to which these issues are made relevant and oriented to during instances of sitcom watching. However, before we examine the CA/DP approach to audiences, let us first examine another problematic domain of audience studies; co-viewing research.

1.8.3 - Watch with Mother

One strand of audience research which has continued within the tradition of 'effects' research, is work which is concerned with the role of parent and child co-viewing and what effect that parental mediation has on children's responses to their understanding of different media messages. Whilst work of this nature occupies a much smaller space in the study of audiences more generally, it nonetheless provides us with an indication of how TV viewing is an active process. Summarizing co-viewing studies, Anderson and Field (1991) argue that a key problem with this work is that it is "most frequently obtained offline" (p.200). In this case, the authors are using 'offline' in the sense that TV watching is not analysed directly, in situ and practices of co-viewing are not observed as they are occurring but is considered retrospectively via diaries, questionnaires, and surveys. For example, Nathanson (2001) used surveys to examine the ways in which parental mediation effected children's attitudes towards violent television programming. Similarly, Paavonen, Roine and Lahikainen (2009) used parental reports to examine the effect of co-viewing on TV-induced fears in children, finding that co-viewing did not lower the prevalence of children's TV-related fears. Further 'offline' work of this nature, concerns studies examining 'effects' of parental mediation in laboratory settings. For example, Mattern and Lindholm (1985) examined the extent to which mother's negative comments in response to violence in the show *The Incredible Hulk* effected their subsequent violent behaviour. Findings revealed that the input from their mother reduced aggressive behaviour in boys but increased these behaviours in girls.

Elsewhere, there has been little work that has examined co-viewing in relation to sitcoms, however, one notable exception is the experimental work of Banjo, Appiah, Wang, Brown and Walther (2015) who examined what effect co-viewing had on adult participants responses to the racial comedy *The Boondocks*. Using White and Black participants, they found that when Black viewers watched racial comedy with Black co-viewers (in-group members) they experienced greater levels of perceived similarity and identification with the characters on-screen than they did when

watching alongside White co-viewers (out-group members). This work, whilst highlighting the importance of considering TV watching as a social activity, were based on subjective measures of responses and was conducted within a laboratory setting. As such, this work does not further our understanding of the ways in which 'co-viewing' actually occurs as part of everyday life.

There has however, been some limited studies which have attempted to examine the effects of co-viewing in more naturalistic settings, where recordings are made in situ. However, this work is still not concerned with examining how these interactions take place (e.g. the sequential organisation of this talk) and instead uses an experimental type approach, relying on coding and quantification of data. For example, Fisch, Akerman, Morgenlander, McCann Brown, Fisch, Schwartz and Tobin (2008) examined the extent to which on-screen text could facilitate interactions between parents and their children. To test this, the researchers used 3 different versions of children's programming, containing either: 1) a 'Mommy bar' which provided parenting tips and jokes; 2) an 'educationally enhanced bar' which provided prompts for interaction; or 3) no on-screen text. The findings revealed that parents who received on-screen text interacted more frequently with their children.

As I say though, this work is interested in quantifying the interactions present, placing importance on how frequently the interaction between parent and child took place. As such, like the ethnographic work discussed in the previous section, it is not concerned with examining how audiences 'do' sitcom watching as a collaborative accomplishment which is underpinned by interaction. Therefore, sitcom watching has hitherto not been examined as a situated and locally organized social practice, and therefore, this present thesis is ground-breaking in that regard. However, there has been some notable work on TV audiences more generally which have used CA methods to reveal the high levels of social organization that underpin TV watching with others, as accomplished through talk. These studies will now be discussed here.

1.8.4 – Audiences and CA

There has been no previous academic work which has used CA, (or DP), to explore sitcom audiences. Indeed, there has been little academic work which has used these methodological/analytical approaches to understand audiences more generally. There are however, a couple of notable exceptions. The first is a series of studies carried out by Gerhardt (2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010), which looked at the way in which groups of people watch football matches together on TV. This work, uses CA methods to examine the ways in which participants interact with and around the TV. As such, her work demonstrates how interaction is shaped by the football match that is playing out on-screen. For example, in Gerhardt (2006), it is illustrated how turns at talk are fitted around the talk of the commentators on-screen leading to one coherent stream of conversation, rather than two opposing/competing channels of talk. Similarly, in 2007, Gerhardt showed the importance of gaze and how this was managed by co-viewers who were dealing with two competition objects to look at, namely the TV and their co-viewer.

Gerhardt's work illustrated how watching football on TV was a highly organized and structured activity that is built around and through the interaction between co-viewers. Similarly, in another rare study that uses CA methods to examine audiences, Ergul, (2016) looked at Turkish women watching TV together. In particular, the ways in which co-viewer's talk is adjourned is discussed and how the TV is utilised as a resource by individuals to adjourn, that is suspend, ongoing sequences of talk. As with Gerhardt's body of work, this study demonstrated how 'active' participants were when watching TV and stressed the importance of a discursive analysis to uncover the ways in which interactional business is accomplished. This work has provided a framework for which the study of audiences can be examined using CA/DP methods and as such, this present thesis shares methodological similarities with this work however, whilst Gerhardt looked at football matches and Ergul examined TV shows more generally, this thesis will add a novel contribution to

this body of work, shedding light on how sitcom audiences 'do' watching TV together. Something which has hitherto not been subject to a close analysis.

There is another aspect of sitcom audiences which warrants some discussion here which brings together a number of the issues discussed previously, including concerns about the sitcom as a distinct genre of TV programming, how these shows have been produced to be 'funny', and the notion that audiences watching at home are assumed to be responding to the show in specific ways (principally with laughter). The aspect in question is that of the 'laugh track' which is often audible in sitcoms and will now be examined.

1.9 – Canned Laughter

In his work tracing the origins of pre-recorded laugh tracks, Smith (2005) argues that the first TV show to use it in its broadcast is *The Hank McClure Show* in 1950. These 'laugh tracks' or 'canned laughter' are "the aural embodiment of the audience, captured electronically and transmitted alongside the programme in order to show that real people found the events on-screen funny" (Mills, 2009. p.102). Despite a recent trend of sitcoms moving away from using laugh tracks in the broadcasts, it is nonetheless still seen as one of the "most distinctive markers" (Mills, 2009, p.81) of this genre of programming.

Medhurst and Tuck (1982) argue that the audible laugh track is an attempt by sitcom producers to recreate the historic comedy tradition of the 'music hall' and as such, the laugh track functions as a "electronic substitute for collective experience". Therefore, it is inviting viewers to "feel at one with the few dozen people s/he can hear laughing, and by extension with millions of others across the country" (p.45). Similarly, Mills (2009) makes the observation that laugh tracks don't just indicate that something is funny but "it suggests something is obviously, clearly, unarguably, unproblematically funny" (p.81)

The recorded laughter heard on many sitcoms is not placed there by accident. In fact, Robert Cialdini (2007) argues that it's actually an example of how social influence operates in everyday life. Cialdini's work is underpinned by the idea that there are two systems that are involved in decision making and judgments. System 1 is automatic, largely involuntary and operates with little effort, whilst System 2 requires much more effort, requiring attention and concentration. Given the low amount of effort needed, System 1 is utilised more frequently, relying on rules of thumb, stereotypes and other trigger features. This is preferable because decisions need to be made quickly because "we haven't the time, energy or capacity for it" (p.7). Now this is where the recorded laugh track becomes important, as Cialdini argues that what it is doing is exploiting a viewer's tendency to take shortcuts and rely on System 1 processing. The shortcut here is relying on the behaviour of others as being evidence of what is right or the appropriate thing to do at a given moment. Therefore, audible laughing of the unseen audience gives the viewer of a sitcom a "convenient shortcut for determining how to behave" (p.116), i.e. that they should be laughing at that point. This notion, which Cialdini refers to as 'social proof', offers TV sitcom producers a chance to make the audience at home laugh, regardless of how humorous the material on-screen is.

Indeed, there is a body of work which has shown that recorded laugh tracks do result in increased levels of audience laughter. For example, Chapman (1973) examined "canned laughter" under experimental conditions by presenting participants with tape-recorded jokes, either with canned laughter or without canned laughter. Participants were asked to rate jokes on a "10-point funniness scale" (p.572) but were also, unbeknownst to them, observed for their overt responses to the jokes on a 4-point mirth scale. The findings indicated that the jokes which included canned laughter generated more overt 'mirth' from participants but did not significantly increase how funny the jokes were rated. Similarly, Martin and Gray (1996) played a live radio comedy show to participants, which they listened to alone using headphones. Half of the participants heard the show as it was broadcast which included audible audience laughter. The other participants listened to an

edited version of the show which had this laughter edited out. As well as being asked to rate the show, all participants were videotaped from being a smoked-glass screen and their facial responses and audible laughter were recorded. Again, results indicated that recorded laughter significantly increased the amount of participant laughter.

Along the same lines, Nosanchuk and Lightstone (1974) utilised an 'Asch-type paradigm' to examine the effect of canned laughter on levels of conformity. In this experimental study, participants were placed inside a booth, asked to put on a set of headphones and were required to judge how funny they found a series of 10 recorded jokes that would be played to them. For 5 of the jokes, participants believed that they could hear the laughter of other participants, whilst the remaining 5 were not accompanied by laughter. The laughter here was the key experimental manipulation and was not produced by other participants but was instead edited into the recordings they were hearing. Results indicated that the presence of laughter had a moderate effect on private evaluations of how funny participants found the jokes, showing a higher mean humour rating in the 'laughter' conditions in 3 of the 4 series of experiments, but the differences with audible responses were "startingly large" (p.155) with there being a significantly higher amount of participant laughter when participants heard other people laughing. Indeed, 40% of the participants produced little to no audible responses without the recorded laughter but did produce laughter at a "stable level" (p.156) throughout the simulated laughter condition.

Finally, similar findings were obtained by Leventhal and Mace (1970) who showed high school students one of two slapstick comedy movies, one contained no audible laughter whilst the other was edited to include bouts of laughter. Students who viewed the film with the laughter included produced more laughter and smiling than those who viewed the film with no recorded laughter. However, unlike the previous studies discussed above, the difference between these two groups was not significant. Regardless, the work of Chapman, Martin and Gray, Nosanchuk and Lightstone, and to a lesser extent Leventhal and Mace, offer support for Cialdini's (2007) assertion

that canned laughter acts as 'social proof' which exploits system 1 processing and, by doing so, increases the likelihood of laughter being produced by individuals who hear it.

In sum then, sitcoms are a unique genre of programming that has often relied on an extradiegetic recording of laughter which is broadcast with the show. This laughter can be seen as having a number of roles and, as we have seen here, there is some work to give substance to claims about 'effects'. However, the use of this 'canned' laughter is built around an assumption that audiences are homogenous and respond to TV comedy in the same ways. As shall be examined in this present thesis, there are a number of ways in which an audience watching at home can respond to the sitcom. Whilst laughter is one possibility, it is not the only one. Similarly, the way laughter is produced, the amount of laughter produced and crucially, when laughter is produced in relation the sitcom are all up for negotiation by viewers and are highly dependent on the specific interactional context within which it occur. These things can only be determined as the result of a fine-grained inspection which is utilised in this present work.

1.10 – Research Aims

There are three research aims which will be addressed through the course of this thesis. Firstly, given that the practice of sitcom watching has hitherto not been subjected to a fine-grained and close inspection by using methods which afford this level of detailed analysis, CA/DP methodology will be utilised "*to explore how people watch, engage with, and understand sitcoms together in a domestic setting*". This work then, will treat sitcom watching as a socially situated practice and, as such, will look at the ways in which people 'do' it as part of their everyday life. Moreover, this work will examine how interaction is utilised by co-viewers to engage with and make sense of the sitcom they are watching together and how these discursive practices are sequentially organized and ordered.

A second research aim is "*to examine the ways in which laughter is utilised by sitcom viewers*". This aim is based around the notion that there is a complex relationship between sitcoms and laughter (as discussed by Mills, 2005, 2010). As such it is a genre of television programming

unlike any other because of the fact that it is written, produced and performed to be funny and it is this which is the primary concern. The importance of laughter to sitcoms can be seen in the recorded laugh tracks which have traditionally accompanied broadcasts. Yet, a close inspection of how sitcom audiences actually laugh when watching sitcoms together at home has hitherto not been attempted. Moreover, there have been no attempts to examine the ways in which the laughter produced by sitcom viewers is organized as part of a broader sequence of interaction and what role laughter is playing in accomplishing interactional business in this setting. Therefore, this present thesis will offer an insight into the ways in which laughter is deployed by sitcom viewers.

The final aim, "*to explore the ways in which people interact with each other whilst watching TV"*, addresses the interaction between sitcom co-viewers. Again, this treats sitcom viewing as a socially situated practice, but more than that, one that is underpinned by interaction between co-viewers. As such, a close inspection of the talk with is produced by viewers, how this is talk is attended and oriented to by co-viewers, and the extent to which this talk is occasioned by and fitted around the TV, will be explored in this thesis.

1.11 – Summary and Thesis Overview (or, Plot Synopsis)

To conclude this chapter, I will bring together the academic work that has been discussed here and make it clear how the forthcoming chapters are informed by this existing literature. As such, it will be made clear which gaps in the literature this work will address. Broadly, this present thesis offers a close examination of how sitcom viewers 'do' watching sitcoms together as part of their normal TV viewing practices. As we have seen in the discussion of the existing literature, the limited amount of work which has attempted to examine audiences 'naturally' has relied on methods which are described as ethnographic (e.g. focus groups, observations, or interviews). As such, in chapter 2 of this thesis I will discuss why this type of methodology is problematic and is not capturing the full interactive situation within which the participants are engaged. Consequently, this thesis will be positioned in relation to the existing literature on audiences and will argue that CA/DP methods of

data collection and analysis are best placed to capture the fine-grained aspects of audiences who are 'doing' sitcom watching. This approach has hitherto not been utilised for the study of sitcom audiences, and there exists limited work of a CA/DP nature which has examined non-sitcom audiences (e.g. Ergul, 2016; Gerhardt, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010),

Whilst laughter has been identified as key aspect of sitcoms, the sparse research which has examined laughter in relation to TV programming has been experimental and has looked at the 'effect' of laughter on the laughter of others (e.g. Chapman, 1973; Provine, 1996). Chapter 3 provides a fine-grained analysis of the laughter produced by 'real' audiences when they are watching sitcoms with others in their everyday life. Moreover, this chapter provides a comprehensive guide for transcribing the performative qualities of laughter in interaction which builds upon my earlier work with Alexa Hepburn (Hepburn & Varney, 2013). As result, this chapter illustrates how varied laughter is as interactional phenomena and how this variation can be captured by analysts without an overreliance on categorisation or description. This chapter of the thesis also provides a close inspection of how laughter is deployed as responsive turns at talk to the on-screen humour found in sitcoms.

Chapter 4 of this thesis builds upon the analyses made in chapter 3 and demonstrates how laughter can be used by speakers to deal with issues of accountability and stance. In particular, it is shown how laughter is deployed by individuals in ways which orients to the nature of the material that is playing out on-screen. As such, it is argued that if one uses the detailed transcription illustrated in Chapter 3 of this thesis, we can see how instances of laughter are highly sensitive to what the humour that is present in a particular joke is based on. For example, we see how issues concerning material which is potentially racist or shocking in some way are oriented to by viewer's laughter. These instances of laughter are discussed in relation to their role in displaying stance and managing the accountability that laughing at this sort of improper material presents. This performative aspect of laughter has hitherto not fully been examined in previous work of this nature, therefore what we see

is additional ways in which laughter is deployed as a member's method which can be used to 'do' certain actions in talk. As such, it is shown here how it is not just the presence of laughter that is an important feature of sequences of talk, but also the way in which this laughter is performed for others that is crucial in determining the role that laughs play in interaction.

In chapter 5, we look at how sitcom viewers utilise question and answer sequences (Q-A sequences) to solve problems which they encounter in the course of their sitcom here. Here we shall see how co-viewers collaborate together to ensure that all members can 'do' the watching of the sitcom, and this is monitored for and actioned by one co-viewer after consultation with their co-viewers. Similarly, this chapter will demonstrate how problems of understanding are tackled using Q-A request sequences. These will be shown to either deal with general information about the show that is playing out on-screen, such as identifying how many episodes there are in a series, or more specific requests that are designed to address issues surrounding 'getting' the jokes that play out on-screen. These concerns will be discussed in relation to the CA/DP notion of accountability.

Finally, in the closing scenes of this thesis, readers will be presented with a discussion about the findings from this thesis and how they are situated in relation to the academic work that has previously explored some of the phenomena examined in this present work. Furthermore, a critique of the methodology used for this thesis will be given, considering how this study of sitcom audiences fits with issues of 'participant reactivity' and attempts to collect naturalistic data.

Chapter 2
Watching People Watching TV:
Methodological Considerations

2.0 – Chapter Overview

This chapter is concerned with the methodology that was utilised in order to collect data for this thesis, the analytic approach that has been taken in order to examine this data and how these issues fit within broader concerns about sampling, interpretation, and issues surrounding how much particular methodologies may 'effect' the data collected. By the end of this chapter, it will be clear why the decision was made to utilise video recordings for this project and why CA/DP are most adequate analytic approaches to examine the fine-grained and locally situated practices that are deployed by people watching sitcoms together in their homes.

Section 2.1 of this chapter engages with the debates surrounding the problems with using ethnographic methods, (largely comprised of observation and interviews) to study audiences and why CA/DP can provide new insights into how groups of people watch TV together. Following on from this in Section 2.2, the notion of naturalistic data is discussed in relation to video recordings that are commonly used in CA/DP research. In particular, the rationale behind this method of data collection is outlined and the rationale for using it in this present thesis is made clear.

In Section 2.3, readers are introduced to the sitcom watching data that was collected for this thesis. Outlined here are the details surrounding ethical considerations, the ways in which participants were recruited for the study, a breakdown of the complete dataset, and a discussion about how the recordings were made and how the recording equipment was setup in each recording site. The rationale behind the sampling and placement of the video camera will also be discussed in line with broader arguments in CA/DP. Speaking of which, section 2.4 of this chapter provides an in-

depth account of both CA and DP, explaining what the key concerns of these approaches to interaction are and how this is represented in the ways in which data is recorded and transcribed for analysis. Following on from this, the ways in which the particularities of CA/DP transcription were modified to deal with the demands of data collected for this current project are illustrated in section 2.5 of this chapter. Here it will be made clear how existing transcription conventions were tweaked in order to capture two streams of audible dialogue (one from the TV show playing out on-screen and one from the audience watching off-screen).

Finally, section 2.6 will offer a summary of the key points made in this chapter and how the broader methodological concerns for CA/DP, but also qualitative work that utilises video recording more general, have been addressed in this present thesis. First though, let us begin by exploring the role of participants in the research on TV audiences and how the ways in which ethnographic work has tried, but not fully been able to, give participants a voice in the research process.

2.1 – Giving Participants A Voice

As discussed in Chapter 1, much of the work on TV audiences has its roots in the academic discipline of cultural studies or communication and media studies (e.g. Hall, 1973; Lull, 1980, 1990; Hobson, 1980; Morley, 1980, 1992; Ang, 1985, 1991, 1996). This work represented a change in the way in which audiences were both conceived and studied. More specifically, there has been a shift to see audiences as active and critical viewers of media messages, rather than passive viewers who are "mindless, undiscriminating, duped, vulnerable" (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.71) and consequently, the ways in which audiences have been studied have been modified in order to capture the numerous and "less than perfect" (Ang, 1996, p.6) ways in which TV audiences engage with media messages. As Sullivan (2013) put it, there has been both a theoretical and methodical shift in audience research. The theoretical shift in the reconceptualization of audiences was discussed in chapter 1 (section 1.9) of this thesis so we will not revisit that in detail here. However, the methodological shift does warrant

some attention because this aspect of audience studies provides a backdrop for the research conducted in this thesis and the role of the audience in it.

When the concern with audiences was on the potential 'effects' of the media, audiences were conceptualised as 'objects' which could be acted upon by unseen forces who controlled the content of the media messages (Ang, 1996; Sullivan, 2013). Consequently, the methods to examine these effects were concerned with the measurement of the magnitude of these effects, therefore both experimental and survey/self-report measures were utilised. In this way, there is much common ground between the way that the behaviourist tradition in psychology examined behavioural or attitudinal responses to some stimuli (Philo, 1990). Indeed, the experimental approach to, and focus on, 'effects' is still the dominant way of exploring media messages in psychology, especially cognitive psychology (Sanborn & Harris, 2019). Indeed, Livingstone (1990) suggests that the move towards cognitive and experimental methods in social psychology has meant that the 'social' has been stripped from our understanding of audiences. Moreover, Livingstone argues that work that would otherwise provide insight into the interpersonal and discursive practices of media audiences has been side-lined, or "ghettoised" (p.2), into the more general 'effects' research.

The shift towards ethnographic work that has however been seen in cultural studies and communication and media studies, the "ethnographic turn" as Moores (1993, p.1) calls it, demonstrates an effort to move away from methodology that treats audiences as objects to be changed, influenced, or effected, and instead attempts to capture the dynamics of audiences. More importantly, the turn to ethnography represents a desire to understand media messages through the eyes of the audience; "to see the world as experienced by the participants themselves" (Gray, 1999, p.32). Therefore, focus groups, participant observation, and interviews were often utilized together under the umbrella of ethnography to gain insight to what Ang refers to as "actual audiences" (1991, p.165) (e.g. Lull, 1980; Hobson, 1980, 1982; Jhally & Lewis, 1992; Fiske & Dawson, 1996; Katz & Leibes 1990; Morley, 1980)

However, the extent to which the ethnographic work is in fact 'ethnographic', has been questioned by some researchers. This position, articulated most clearly by Billig (1997) and later reiterated by Seiter (1999), argues that the term 'ethnography' is actually utilised loosely by many who are researching media audience. Both Billig and Seiter emphasise the importance of extensive, prolonged fieldwork in ethnography, yet much of the work conducted on audiences actually does not include this aspect and instead just use more general qualitative methods of interviews or focus groups. There is though, an issue that is even more problematic here which relates to the attempts of ethnographic work to examine 'real' audiences which concerns the treatment of talk/interaction. Whilst ethnographic audience research is claiming to provide the audience with a voice, the ways in which talk is utilised by participants, and the context within which it occurs is often completely ignored (Billig, 1997; Seiter, 1999). As a consequence, talk is taken on face value whereby what individuals say is treated as evidence of what they believe, are feeling, or thinking. The performative qualities of what is being said, the context within which utterances take place, and the broader sequence of interaction (i.e. what came before or after) is disregarded by researchers. In short, ethnographic work may be providing participants with a greater 'voice' in the research process when compared to surveys and quantitative measures of audiences but this voice is hushed, selective and not being fully listened to by researchers.

It is acknowledged by both Billig (1997) and Seiter (1999) that the discursive focus of Conversation Analysis (CA) and Discursive Psychology (DP), and indeed the ethnomethodology foundations upon which these approaches are built, could provide new insights into our understanding of audiences and the ways in which they interact with media messages. Yet there is, as Livingstone (1990) suggested earlier in this chapter, an unwillingness to utilize CA and DP to answer questions about media audiences in social psychology, with similar reluctance being noted in cultural studies and communication and media studies (Billig, 1997; Seiter, 1999).

With this in mind, the current thesis will be addressing these concerns about the role of the participant, and the participant's voice, by utilising CA methodology to examine audiences and examining their conduct within the framework of CA and DP. More specifically, this work will be going further than the, notably sparse, ethnographic studies on audiences watching situation comedies shows (sitcoms) together. Not only does this approach emphasize the importance of the talk that is produced by individuals, the CA/DP tradition also places an emphasis on the specific context within which the talk is taking place, addressing a further concern raised by Billig and Seiter above. The notion of 'context' is tackled by conversation analysts by collecting data in situ with minimal interference by the researcher. As such, this data is 'naturally occurring' and not distorted by researchers, ensuring no detail is lost or omitted. This concept of 'natural' or 'naturalistic' data, in contrast to other forms of data collection will now be discussed in relation to this thesis.

2.2. – Collecting 'Natural' Data

A central component to both Conversation Analysis (CA) and Discursive Psychology (DP) is the use of recordings gathered in situ of interactional practices as they 'naturally occur'. Such recordings can be seen as attempts to capture the world as it happens (Boden, 1990) by observing behaviour, especially interaction, as it would take place "without research observation" (ten Have, 2010, p.69). That is, behaviour that would be occurring regardless of whether there was a researcher recording it or not. Potter (2009) describes this as the "dead social scientist test" (p.612), whereby data can be considered naturalistic if it wold still be happening if the social scientist that is collecting it was run over on the way to the university. This position contrasts with experimental studies which rely on artificial approximations or reconstructions of real life which are, as Potter (1997) puts it, "got up by the researcher" (p.149). Similarly, surveys, interviews and focus groups would all be considered to be providing 'got up' which only exist because the researcher created the interview schedule, arranged the interview and selected the participants etc.

There are further benefits of researchers using naturalistic data which are outlined by Potter (2009). As well as a discussion of these points, I shall also demonstrate why these aspects of natural data are particularly useful for the study of TV audiences in parentheses. The benefits are as follows: 1) researchers are working with the phenomena of interest directly, not relying on descriptions or reporting of particular practices (e.g. in terms of audience studies, naturalistic data, as exemplified in this present thesis, goes to the audiences directly and is not based on participants to report how they 'do' sitcom watching), 2) the action-orientated and situated nature of talk is retained and the broader sequences of interaction within which a particular piece of talk is produced can be examined. (e.g. it is possible to see what has occasioned a particular piece of talk and how it is responded to by, in this case, co-viewers), 3) By examining the phenomena in situ, researchers are better positioned to examine how participants orient to specific settings and/or institutions (e.g. researchers can see exactly how individuals orient to on-screen TV content in their own homes), 4) it is possible to avoid "flooding" (p.612) the interaction with the use of the categories relating to researcher assumptions about the phenomena being studied (e.g. broad notions such as 'decoding' (Hall, 1973), can be avoided and the focus can be placed instead on the turn-by-turn sense making that viewers engage in), and finally, 5) it is easier for the researcher to centre on the situated practices rather than the persons or institutions involved (e.g. TV watching as a situated and organized practice can be foregrounded, rather than this being taken-for-granted and instead seeing the TV as being a mediating force which 'effects' audiences).

Both CA and DP are underpinned by the notion that every detail in interaction is important and nothing can be "dismissed a priori as disorderly, accidental, or irrelevant" (Heritage, 1984, p. 241). As a result, both CA and DP have a long tradition of working with recordings obtained in situ which captures as much of that setting as possible. Initially, this was audio recordings, indeed Harvey Sacks' initial observations about the structures of talk were developed around a corpus of calls to a suicide prevention helpline (Sacks, 1992). For Sacks (1984), there were two key advantages to using

audio recordings owing to the fact that not only could they be studied “again and again” (p.26) but they could be also be shared with, and analysed by, other people. However, with advances in the technology and availability of video recording equipment, there has been an increasing reliance on the use of video in CA/DP work (Knoblauch et al., 2012; Heath, Hindmarsh and Luff, 2010).

The shift towards video recordings has a number of advantages for CA/DP researchers, offering them the chance to capture non-verbal aspects of interaction, such as gaze and embodied actions, which are deployed by speakers which audio recordings alone cannot record. Indeed, non-verbal behaviour such as gestures, gaze and pointing have been shown to be not only commonplace in interaction but also important to the ways in which interactional business is achieved (e.g. Gerhardt 2007; Goodwin, 2000, 2003a, 2003b; and Goodwin and Goodwin, 2000). Important to this present thesis, both Glenn (2003) and Ford and Fox (2010) have demonstrated that laughter is something that is an embodied action which involves non-verbal behaviour (e.g. smiling, posture, gaze). As such, it was important to adopt a recording method that could capture these particularities if they do present themselves.

Similarly, work by Heath (1997) has shown, for example, how individuals manipulate objects within an environment, referred to as artefacts, in the course of interaction. These artefacts are made relevant and oriented to in talk and play a key role in how social actions are accomplished. Our understanding of how these non-verbal features of interaction are deployed by individuals has only been made possible by the use of video recording equipment. By comparison then, audio recordings alone can now be seen as being “inevitably ‘incomplete” (ten Have, 2007, p.71), because they do not capture “the textures and rhythms of social life in motion.” (Bates, 2015, p. 1).

Whilst the use of a video camera opens-up new avenues of analysis by capturing both verbal and non-verbal aspects of interaction, the equipment used is larger, and therefore more noticeable to participants. This could raise concerns about “the intrusion of the camera” (Drew, 1989, p.99) and whether its presence will alter participant’s behaviour. These concerns about the presence of

recording equipment come from broader methodological concerns which are levelled at experimental studies which use artificial settings or reconstructions. These are concerns about participant 'reactivity' or "demand characteristics of the experimental situation" (Orne, 1962, p.779). For example, Orne (1962) examined Milgram's famous social psychology experiment on obedience to authority, whereby it is suggested that participant's behaviour, (in this case, administering electric shocks), could have been altered by the fact that they were picking up on 'cues' about what the hypothesis of the study may have been and acted in a way which distorted the results. Orne argued that 'cues' could be found in a number of places including the experimental procedure or the setting of the experiment. Similarly, Rosenthal and Rosnow (2009) and Rosnow and Rosenthal (1997), have documented the number of ways in which methodological design and procedures used during studies can alter the ways in which participants behave, illustrating a number of 'artefacts' of the research process.

Hepburn and Wiggins (2007) however, offer three rebuttals to this issue of 'reactivity'. Firstly, if participants are concerned about the presence of a camera, they are usually concerned about issues which are not related to the research topic (e.g. swearing or disclosing intimate information). Along these lines, Drew (1989) argues that whilst the presence of a camera may cause a possible disturbance at first, this becomes "unimportant" (p.100) because CA's focus is not on tracking the occurrence of certain behaviours or responses, but how interactional business is accomplished. The management and accomplishment of this business would still be analysable if, for example, a participant offered apologies or accounts for their swearing.

Secondly, video recording technology is a "pervasive and often unremarkable feature of people's lives in the West" (p.17) and, as such, is something which people are familiar with and unconcerned with. For example, calls to large organizations are often recorded and CCTV footage is being gathered in many public spaces. Thirdly, CA research is often conducted in places where serious business is being negotiated (e.g. courtrooms, police interviews, helplines) therefore, people

are less concerned about the recording and more focused on the business at hand. Whilst this latter is less relevant to the present thesis, as recordings were collected in people's homes and engaged in non-serious sitcom watching, it nevertheless illustrates how the presence of a camera is unlikely to affect the business under examination. Regardless of these issues outlined by Hepburn and Wiggins (2007), as shall be demonstrated in the following section (section 2.3), a number of considerations were made to further reduce the 'intrusion' of the camera to allow for naturalistic data to be collected. These issues of 'reactivity' will be further discussed in the concluding chapter of this thesis (chapter 6 – Reflections on Methodology).

In summary then, CA/DP research favours the use of data which is naturally occurring or naturalistic. The advantages of such a position are clearly stated by Potter (2009), and the suggested benefits of such an approach to data have also been considered here in relation to the study of audiences. Given the reluctance of audience studies work to focus on naturally occurring data, instead using interviews, surveys or focus groups, this present thesis will be based upon naturally occurring data as a way of examining sitcom audiences watching their shows in their own homes. In this way, the data collected would pass Potter's 'dead social scientist test' and offer an insight into what normal, everyday sitcom watching practices are like, regardless of whether this research was happening or not. Specifically, the longstanding tradition within CA/DP of using video and audio recordings will be utilized as this allows interaction to be captured with minimum inference from the researcher (in sharp contrast with ethnographic methods of observation or interviews). Such data will provide access to the world of the participants, giving them a voice which has hitherto been muted and/or misrepresented by virtue of the methods used to collect the data which has ignored the discursive, locally organised and situated practice of TV sitcom watching. As a result of these concerns, the sitcom watching data collection was formed. The ways in which this was achieved will now be discussed.

2.3 – The Sitcom Watching Data Collection

As has been established earlier in this chapter, and more fully in Chapter 1 of this thesis, there is little academic work that has examined audiences in situ to explore the naturally occurring ways in which groups of people 'do' TV watching in the course of their daily life and the way in which "naturally occurring interactions", as Schegloff and Sacks (1973) refer to them, are utilised by individuals. There are a couple of notable exceptions which have demonstrated how groups of people watching TV together engage in talk to achieve interactional business and the role in which the on-screen content is featured within and oriented to in this talk. This work, first discussed in Chapter 1, (section 1.9.4) will be revisited as these studies have informed the methodological decisions made in this present thesis.

Gerhardt (2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010), examined the ways in which TV viewers watched televised football matches together. In this series of studies, Gerhardt has demonstrated the ways in which the interaction between co-viewers is shaped by and fitted around the on-screen football game. For example, Gerhardt (2006) shows how turns at talk are fitted around the commentator's talk on-screen, so that just one coherent conversation is produced, as opposed to competing with the talk on-screen. Also, in 2007, Gerhardt illustrated how participant gaze was managed by co-viewers to deal with the fact that there were two streams of dialogue; one from their co-viewer and one from the TV set.

Similarly, Ergul (2016) examined the ways in which Turkish women watching reality TV together. This work also utilised video recordings to gather 'natural' data of the ways in which the women's talk was constructed around the show that was playing out on-screen. In particular, the ways in which co-viewer's talk is adjourned is discussed and how the TV is utilised as a resource by individuals to adjourn, that is suspend, ongoing sequences of talk. The importance of gaze was also illustrated thanks to Ergul's use of video recording. In the same vein as both Gerhardt and Ergul, this present thesis utilises audio and video recording equipment to capture audiences watching TV as part

of their normal routine in their 'natural' TV watching environment. In this case, that environment was the participant's homes.

2.3.1 – Participant Recruitment

In line with the notion of the 'dead social scientist test', proposed by Potter (2009, p.612), this thesis set out to capture audiences 'doing' sitcom watching on TV in exactly the same sort of manner they would have been if the research had not have been taking place. Consequently, there were two criterions that needed to be satisfied in order to take part in this research; 1) that participants would be watching a sitcom at some point, as they would do normally as part of their TV watching behaviour and 2) this sitcom watching would be happening alongside at least one other person. The second of these criteria was important because this work specifically set out to examine how people interacted whilst watching the TV together and examine sitcom watching as a social practice. Therefore, solo viewing was not deemed to be appropriate for this brief.

As is common in CA research, there was no specific demographic criteria for participants (e.g. gender, age, ethnicity) (Kendrick, 2017; Clayman & Gill, 2012; ten Have, 1999; Heritage, 1988; Sacks, 1992). Instead the focus of this work was on the particular situation (watching sitcoms together) and the situated practices that could be found here. Again, this links to CA/DP's drive towards collecting naturally occurring data and the way in which categorisation is approached. As Mondada (2013) outlines, "CA aims to discover the natural living order of social activities as they are endogenously organized in ordinary life, without the exogenous intervention of researchers imposing topics and tasks or displacing the context of action" (p.34). In other words, CA is looking for social order and action as being localised in specific contexts (an endogenous stance) and as such, cannot be fully understood if taken out of the particular context in which is produced or considered in terms of some categorisation imposed by a researcher (exogenous approach). Therefore, CA aims to examine participants as part of a "natural group" (Kendrick, 2017, p.4) and as such, the participants who make up this group are not determined by the researcher. As such, CA research is often

interested in how individuals 'do' interaction in specific contexts and this context becomes the basis for participant selection rather than any on the basis on any participant characteristics (e.g. ethnicity, gender or relationship status). The focus then becomes on interaction situated in a given setting and what participants who are 'doing' in that given context, at that given time.

With these considerations in mind, a total of twenty-seven participants (N = 25) took part in this study, making up 14 groups of sitcom watchers and a combined recording time of 11 hours and 57 minutes. Participants from 13 of the groups were recruited by word of mouth amongst family and friends, and therefore represented a convenience sample. The 14th group was comprised of students from a UK university who shared accommodation. One of the members of this group volunteered for the recording following a request which I sent to all the students on a particular social science module (after seeking approval from the module leader). Some participants appeared in more than one recording but with different co-viewers (e.g. recordings 10 and 11) or were recorded on more than one occasion (e.g. recording 9 and 10).

2.3.2 – Ethical Considerations

In line with the ethical guidelines of both Loughborough University and the British Psychological Society (BPS), all participants were asked to sign informed consent forms (Appendix item, A). Before signing, the aims and demands of the research, (to examine groups of people watching sitcoms together as part of their usual TV watching routine), were discussed face-to-face with participants which allowed them to ask questions about the research. It was made clear to all involved that they should just carry on as they normally would if the camera was not there; they were free to talk, leave the room, drink, eat, etc. It was stressed that there was no 'right' way of watching the show and that there was not a particular behaviour or response that I was looking for which they needed to be concerned about.

Participants were assured that their identities would remain anonymous, in that pseudonyms would be used in any written transcripts and no personal data will be collected aside from their

recorded images. On this note, participants were given the option to have their identities obscured in any of the videos used in the research (which no participant wanted to take advantage of). Furthermore, participants were informed that they were free to withdraw from this research at any point and at no point would their participant in this study present any risk to their mental or physical wellbeing. In sum, these considerations met the BPS requirements in relation to concerns about 'valid consent', 'confidentiality', 'risk' and 'deception' (BPS, 2018).

2.3.3 – Camera Placement and Overview of Recordings

Recordings were collected during 2009-2010 and a breakdown of the recordings in presented in Table 2.1. This outlines which show participants were watching, how long the recording lasted, the number of participants, the name of participants (pseudonym), their relationship and which show they were watching, which episode/s they were watching, whether the show had a recorded laugh track, and the country of origin (a more detailed overview of each of the shows being watched can be found in the appendices, Appendix B).

TABLE 2.1 – Overview of Sitcom Watching Recordings

Recording #1 Duration: 01:45:00 No. of Participants: 2 - Paul & Barry Relationship: Married Couple Sitcom: Phoenix Nights Episodes: 1-4, Series 1 Sitcom Country of Origin: UK Format: DVD	

Recording #2 Duration: 01:02:05 No. of Participants: 4 - Annette, Beverley, Carol, & Denise Relationship: Student flatmates Sitcom: Outnumbered Episodes: 5, 6 (partial), and 7, Series 2 Sitcom Country of Origin: UK Format: DVD	
Recording #3 Duration: 00:33:03 No. of Participants: 2 - Barbara and Jim Relationship: Married Couple Sitcom: Come Fly With Me Episode: 1, Series 1 Sitcom Country of Origin: UK Format: Recorded TV	
Recording #4 Duration: 00:29:24 No. of Participants: 2 – Graham and Norma Relationship: Married Couple Sitcom: One Foot in the Grave Episode: 1, Series 1 Sitcom Country of Origin: UK Format: DVD	
Recording #5 Duration: 01:02:28 No. of Participants: 3 – Jim, Chuck & Barbara Relationship: Married Couple and Son Sitcom: Benidorm Episode: 1, Series 4 Sitcom Country of Origin: UK Format: Live Broadcast	

Recording #6 Duration: 00:31:18 No. of Participants: 2 – Tina and Bob Relationship: Married Couple Sitcom: Outnumbered Episode: 1, Series 1 Sitcom Country of Origin: UK Format: DVD	
Recording #7 Duration: 00:33:35 No. of Participants: 2 – Greg and Maude Relationship – Married Couple Sitcom: Only Fools and Horses Episode: 1, Series 4 Sitcom Country of Origin: UK Format: DVD	
Recording #8 Duration: 01:08:34 No. of Participants: 2 – Linda & Eric Relationship: Married Couple Sitcom: Benidorm Episode: 7, Series 3, Christmas Special Sitcom Country of Origin: UK Format: Live Broadcast	
Recording #9 Duration: 00:55:16 No. of Participants: 2 – Erin and Lenny Relationship: Couple Sitcom: American Dad Episode: 1, Season 9 Sitcom Country of Origin: USA Format: Recorded TV	

Recording #10 Duration: 00:28:19 No. of Participants: 2 – Lenny and Erin Relationship: Couple Sitcom: Friday Night Dinner Episode, 7, Series 2 Sitcom Country of Origin: UK Format: Recorded TV	
Recording #11 Duration: 00:50:28 No. of Participants: 3– Harry, Russ & Estelle Relationship: Dad, Son and Daughter Sitcom: Friday Night Dinner Episodes: 2-3, Series 1 Sitcom Country of Origin: UK Format: DVD	
Recording #12 Duration: 00:31:05 No. of Participants: 4– Harry, Russ, Estelle & Peggy Relationship: Dad, Son, Daughter & Mum Sitcom: Miranda Episode: Sitcom Country of Origin: UK Format: DVD	
Recording #13 Duration: 01:02:11 No. of Participants: 2 – Geoff and Marion Relationship – Married Couple Sitcom: Mrs Brown's Boys Episode: 1 & 2, Series 1 Sitcom Country of Origin: UK Format: DVD	

Recording #14 Duration: 01:04:52 No. of Participants: 4 –Brian, Sue, Jim, & Barbara Relationship: Friends, 2 x Couples Sitcom: Benidorm Episode: 2, Series 5 Sitcom Country of Origin: UK Format: Live Broadcast	

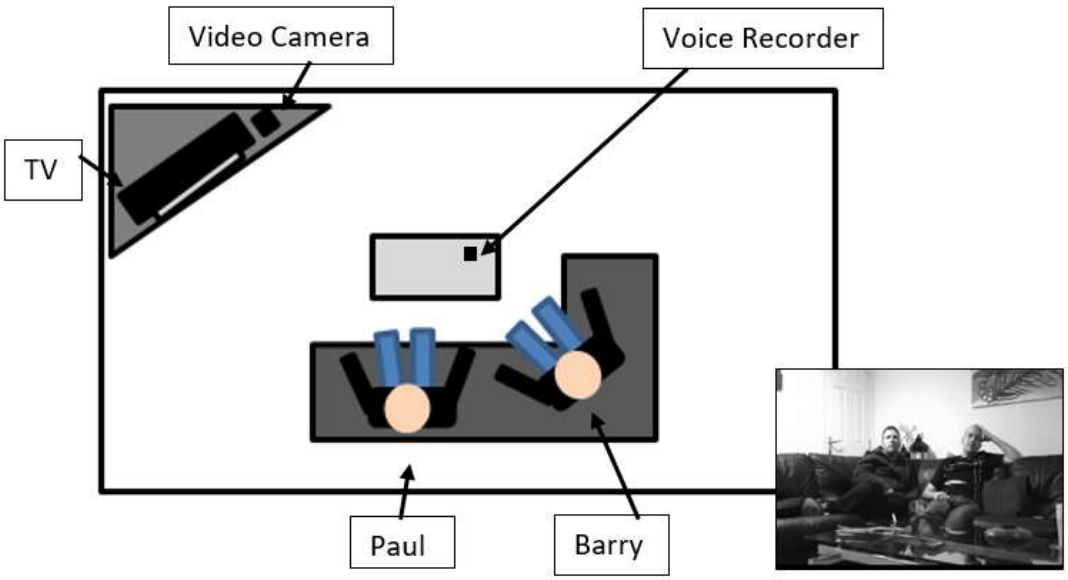
The first step in data collection was establishing whether participants would be watching a sitcom with at least one other person at some point as part of their TV viewing routine. This was the only sort of recruitment criteria that was utilised for this study, in that participants had to be 'doing' sitcom watching as part of their day. In order to further increase the eligibility to participate, the mode of sitcom watching was not restricted, therefore participants could watch via live TV or some form of recorded broadcast, whether this be DVD/video/downloaded file or via a service like Sky+/Tivo, Similarly, there were no restrictions on which sitcoms would be appropriate for this study, but it was discussed beforehand about which show they would likely be watching. This ensured that the show was indeed a sitcom and a show which falls into the broader genre of light entertainment (e.g. panel shows or broadcasts of live stand-up) (see Chapter 1 of this thesis and Mills, 2005, 2010 for discussions about sitcom as a distinct genre of programming).

Once it was recognised that an instance of sitcom watching would be taking place at some point in the near future, (remember, this had to pass the 'dead social scientist test'), participants were asked whether they would be willing to have a small camera and microphone set up in the room in which they would be doing said sitcom watching. If in agreement, a time prior to the sitcom watching was agreed and the recording equipment was setup in their room. This allowed them to familiarise themselves with the presence of the camera and microphone, and further reduce their

“hyperconsciousness” (Clayman & Gill, 2009) of the fact they are being recorded. This measure has been shown to be effective in other studies which have used video recordings (e.g. Laurier

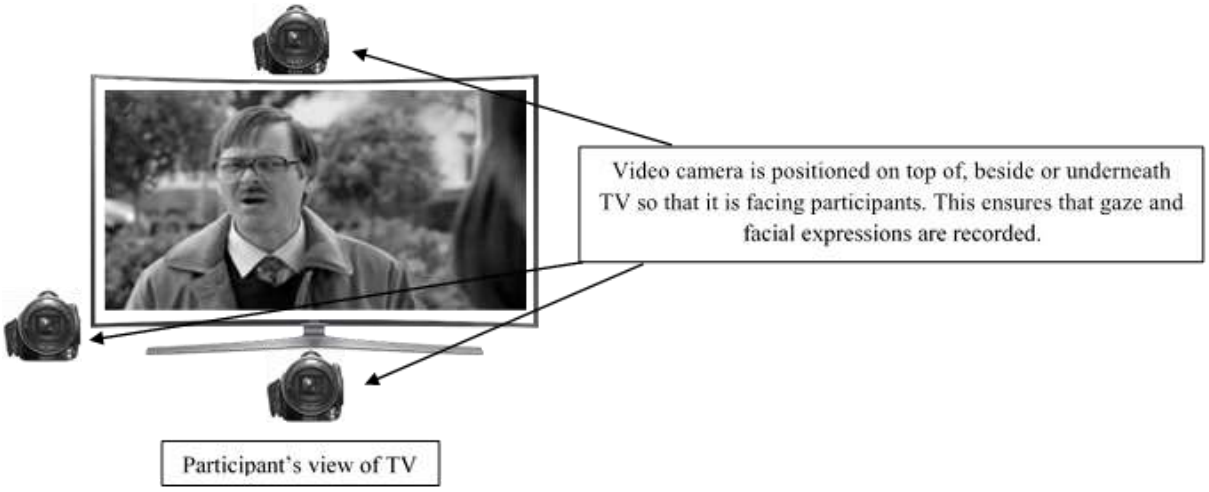
FIG. 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 (below) provide further information about how recordings were set up in participant’s homes, however the exact placement of the equipment was dependent on the layout of the room. FIG. 2.1 provides a bird’s eye view of the setup used during recording 1 (Paul & Barry).

FIG. 2.1 ***Top-down view of setup utilised for Recording 1 (Paul & Barry)***



In terms of camera placement, a key concern was that participant’s gaze could be tracked as this was something which previous work, for example by Gerhardt (2007), had shown to be an important part of TV watching behaviour. As FIG. 2.2 shows, there was some variation in placement which was dependent on the layout of the room, but attempts were made to situate the camera as close to the TV as possible. In this way, the camera would be effectively ‘looking back’ at participants who were looking at the TV.

FIG 2.2 – *Camera Placement from Participant's View*

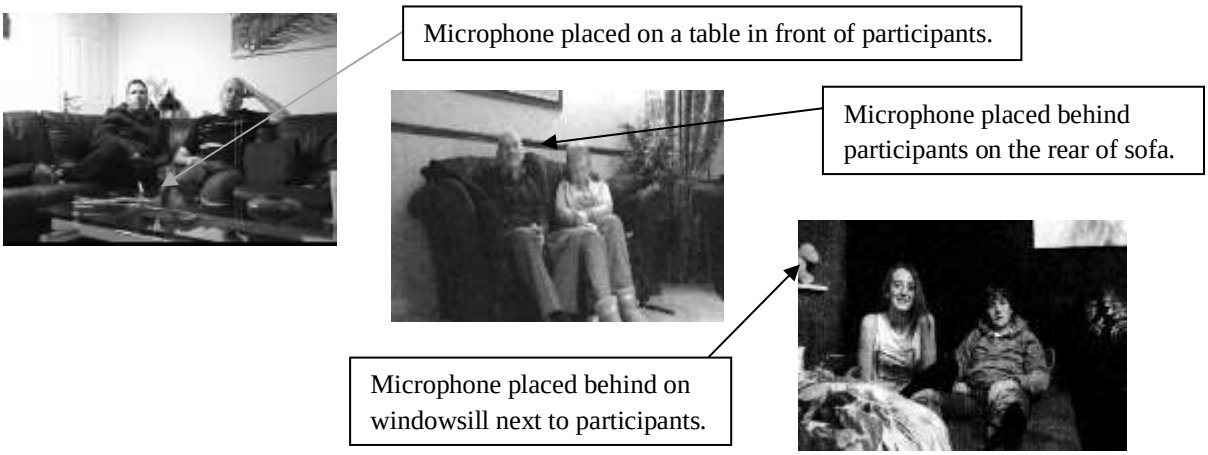


Whilst it would be possible to set up a number of cameras within the participant's homes, such a measure would be much more intrusive, increasing participants "hyperconciousness" of the fact they were being recorded (Clayman & Gill, 2009, p.591). As such, this would jeopardise the 'naturalistic' nature of the data, and crucially, given that participants were seated watching TV, it is unlikely that they will be frequently moving around the room. Therefore, a single-camera setup was used which has been shown to be an effective way of recording interactions (e.g. Heath, Hindmarsh & Luff, 2010; Laurier & Philo, 2006; Richardson & Stokoe, 2014, Llewellyn, 2015). Similarly, this work has also demonstrated how data can be reliably obtained without the presence of a camera operator. Such a measure would require the researcher to be present and, as such, would not offer any benefit over the ethnographic observation in terms of 'naturalness'. In early work that utilised video recordings, e.g. Goodwin, (1981), recordings were limited by the length of the tape that was being recorded onto, requiring regular changes from an operator. However, advances in technology have negated this issue and therefore, a camera can be left on a tripod for many hours. As such, in this present work, no operator was present in the recordings once recordings began, ensuring that there was minimal intrusion and maximum 'naturalness'.

The most problematic aspect of placing the video camera so near to the TV is that the camera is also in close proximity to the in-built speakers. Consequently, the microphone on the video camera

fails to record much of the spoken dialogue between the viewers because it is effectively 'drowned out' by the much louder sound of the comedy on-screen. As the talk of the participants is of the upmost importance to this work, a small supplementary microphone and audio recording device was placed in close proximity to the participants to provide a much clearer audio recording of any interaction between the co-viewers. Again, to ensure that the presence of this equipment was not too noticeable, and as such, not too intrusive on the practice of sitcom watching, microphones were carefully placed near to participants but, where possible, not visible to participants. FIG.2.3 below, illustrates some of the ways in which the supplementary microphone and audio recording equipment was positioned.

FIG. 2.3 – *Examples of Microphone and Audio Recording Device Placement*



Having access to audio and video recordings that were gathered in situ, and as such 'naturally occurring', a method of analysis that explores the sequentially ordered and systematically produced nature of interaction was most appropriate here. Therefore, the interlinked analytic approaches of conversation analysis and discursive psychology were utilised in this present work. The key concerns and particularities of these analytic perspectives will now be discussed.

2.4 – Data Analysis: Conversation Analysis and Discursive Psychology

The data collected for this thesis passes Potter's "dead social scientist test" (2009, p.612) in that it has captured a series of events that would have been happening that way, regardless of whether the camera was present or not. In this case, it has captured a record of how people go about watching sitcoms on TV together as part of their everyday life. In order to understand how these practices are organized, and examine the research aims outlined earlier in this thesis, an analytic approach that explores the sequentially produced and recipient-designed practices which work to construct order in this social setting, needs to be adopted. With this in mind, conversation analysis (CA) and discursive psychology (DP) will be used because of the emphasis they place on "the methods people use in doing social life" (Sacks, 1984, p.21).

2.4.1 – Conversation Analysis: Background

CA emerged in the 1960s through the work of Harvey Sacks and his collaborators Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson and is "the study of talk-in-interaction" (Psathas, 1995, p.1). Interaction between individuals is viewed as being the "primordial scene of social life" (Schegloff, 1996a, p.4), in that, "all forms of social organization…are managed through conversation between persons" (Drew, 2005, p.74). Therefore, rather than beginning with a theoretical conception or specification of 'structure', CA examines how participants in interaction accomplish social order (Liddicoat, 2007). Indeed, CA work is underpinned by the notion of "order at all points" (Sacks, 1984, p.22), that is, that orderliness can be found in all conduct in interaction. This social order does not pre-exist interaction but is produced in-situ by individuals in the course of their interactions, as such it is a "produced orderliness" (Psathas, 1995, p.2). Along the same lines, CA treats the notion of 'context' as something that is projected by and a product of, the actions of the participants and is made available in and through the interactions individuals make in interaction (Heritage and Clayman, 2010). As a result of this 'situated' nature of talk-in-interaction, conversation analysts favour the use of data that is naturally occurring, that is, recorded at the site of its production.

From a CA perspective then, talk is not "language idling" (Drew, 2005, p.86); it is not just a way of describing or filling time. Rather, people are doing things with their talk. The focus is not just on what people say but what people are doing with their talk (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2008). It is through interaction that social action is accomplished and CA attempts to uncover how these actions are ordered or organized by the individuals who produce them (Psathas, 1995). But more than that, CA aims to identify precisely the practices, procedures and resources which individuals use in talk to do what they mean to be doing with it but also be recognised as doing that particular action by other participants (Drew, 2005). In other words, the focus is on the "shared sense-making practices" of individuals in conversation who can be seen as "sense-making actors" (Pomerantz and Mandelbaum, 2005, p.151). Along these lines, Heritage (1984) describes CA as analysing "the *competences* which underlie ordinary social activities", but more specifically, it concerns itself with the competences which are used and relied on when engaged in "intelligible, conversational interaction" (p.241, italics in original).

In short, there are, as summarized by Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2017), 3 basic theoretical assumptions upon which CA is built: "(i) that talk is a form of action; (ii) that action is structurally organized; and (iii) that talk creates and maintains intersubjectivity" (p.74). We have discussed i) and ii) above, and indeed we will revisit them throughout the thesis, but let us explore iii), the assumption of intersubjectivity a little more. Intersubjectivity can be defined as "joint or shared understanding between persons" (Sidnell, 2010, p.12) and a concept which is studied across the social sciences. CA however, approaches intersubjectivity in a way which differs from psychology and much of sociology which sees it as "an intra-psychic phenomenon" (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2017, p.74) and instead sees intersubjectivity as something which is accomplished by participants in interaction. As such, understanding in interaction is "produced and owned by the participants in interaction, and generated as an endogenous feature of interaction" (Heritage and Stivers, 2013, p.664). To this, CA approaches understanding as something that plays out publicly in interaction, whereby a turn at talk is characterised as displaying "a hearing or analysis of a preceding one" (Sidnell, 2010, p.12). For

example, in producing a turn which is hearable as an answer, then that speaker is showing that the prior turn was understood to be a question, (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2017), or in the case of an utterance accepting an invitation, then this is an indication that that speaker understood the prior turn to have been an invitation (Heritage & Stivers, 2013).

The theoretical assumptions upon which CA is built have a direct bearing on the sorts of interactional phenomena that CA concerns itself with. Four of these key concepts; turn taking, turn design, social action, and sequence organization will now be discussed.

2.4.2 – Conversation Analysis: Key Concepts

Drew (2005) outlines four of the basic concepts that underpin CA's approach to conversation. These will be used as the foundations upon which my analysis of the TV watching data will be based. The first of these concepts is that of 'turn taking'. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) observe that overwhelmingly there is only one party speaking at any time and when there is a change of speakers this is usually done with minimal gaps and overlap. They propose that talk is divided into Turn Construction Units (TCUs) which are built out of lexis, clauses, phrases or sentences. Initially a speaker is entitled to just one TCU with the right to speak next, and thus produce another TCU, passed on to a different speaker. Upon the completion of a TCU there is a Transition Relevant Place (TRP) where "turn-transfer becomes relevant" (Wooffitt, 2005, p.27) and another speaker may begin talking.

The second basic concept identified by Drew (2005) is the notion of 'turn design'. Turns are designed by speakers in two senses; firstly, they design their turn to perform a particular action and secondly, they select how they will perform the particular action by choosing between alternative ways of doing or saying it. As there are many different ways of performing actions, the speaker is tasked with "a meaningful *choice*" (ten Have, 2007, p.137, italics in original) in deciding how to design their turn at talk. Spoken utterances are designed to be understood by a recipient and as such, the way a turn is constructed will reveal what mutual knowledge the speaker assumes the recipient

shares with them (Sacks and Schegloff, 1979). Turn design then is crucial in building intersubjectivity between participants whereby a 'next turn' is the way in which speakers can display their understanding of the prior turn and, should there be a misunderstanding, this can be addressed in the turn that follows (Clift, 2016).

'Social action' is the third concept that Drew outlines and, as mentioned earlier, draws upon the belief that that interaction is the "primordial scene of social life" (Schegloff, 1996a, p.4). As such, turns at talk are constructed to perform particular social actions or manage some activity, (Drew, 2005). Therefore CA, and as we shall see shortly, DP, are built around the idea that people are doing things with their turns at talk. CA attempts to uncover how this is accomplished by taking an "empirically grounded" approach to social action (Schegloff, 1996b) that is, analysts must find evidence to demonstrate that any action they identify is understood and experienced as that particular action by the individuals involved in the interaction. This approach to talk works on the notion that spoken utterances are fitted to and made relevant by some prior conduct whereby if one analyses the responsive turn one can see what the recipient understood that prior conduct to be doing.

The final concept identified by Drew (2005) is 'sequence organization' which relates to the way in which turns at talk "cluster together" and develop courses of action (Liddicoat, 2007, p.105). CA operates on the assumption that these 'clusters' of turns at talk are connected in "systematically organized patterns or sequences" (Drew, 2005, p.89) and it is through these that the tasks and activities of interaction are managed (Heritage, 2005). At the very heart of sequence organization is what Schegloff and Sacks (1973) referred to as the 'adjacency pair'. These pairs of utterances are the "most basic sequence organization" (Drew, 2005, p.89) and feature an initial utterance that is produced by one speaker (the first pair par [FPP]), which is followed by an utterance produced by another speaker (a second pair part [SPP]), (Sacks and Schegloff, 1973). The SPP is fitted to the FPP and is from the same pair type as the initial utterance and one of a range of "sequentially-relevant next actions" (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2008, p.60) There is then, a "conditional relevance" of an SPP once the first has been produced in the sense that if a recipient does not produce an appropriate

response to an FPP it will be noticeable (Drew, 2005, p.89). For example, if a speaker asks a question, an FPP, a corresponding answer is made conditionally relevant SPP. That's not to say that it will definitely follow but, as Heritage and Clayman (2010) describe it, the producer of what would be a SPP is made "normatively accountable" (2010, p.23) to do so. That is, if the answer is not forthcoming the recipient will be held accountable for their failure to supply one (the concept of accountability will be unpacked further in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis). This notion of accountability, along with the four key CA concepts outlined by Drew (2005); turn-taking, turn design, social action, and sequence organization, will form the building blocks from which I will develop my analysis of my sitcom watching data.

In the following final section on CA, I will discuss the ways in which CA is actually carried out as a means of discovering, describing, and analysing the "recurrent practices of interaction that constitute the central object of study" (Sidnell, 2013, p.77), informed by the key concepts examined above . In other words, our interest here is how we actually 'do' CA.

2.4.3 – Conversation Analysis: Doing CA

CA is not only defined by its fine-grained and systematic analytic approach to interaction, but also by its rigorous and distinct methodological component (Sacks, 1984; Sidnell, 2013; Heritage & Stivers, 2013; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2017). The methodology of CA involves "detailed empirical studies of specific, observable, interactional phenomena" (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2017, p.74) as a basis for discovering and describing the "methods persons use in doing social life" (Sacks, 1984, p.21). Sidnell (2013) likens the analyst who is in the process of doing CA to cartographers of the 18th century who were mapping the globe. He argues that, like the cartographers, the job of an analyst isn't just to discover something new but to also 'map' them for the reader by offering detailed descriptions of the phenomena they have found.

At the beginning of this chapter, in sections 2.1 and 2.2, we discussed the issues surrounding the use of 'naturally occurring' data and how this is a key feature of CA because of the fact that even

the tiniest detail in interaction cannot be dismissed as irrelevant (as we will discuss in section 2.5, Sacks, frequently talked about “order at all points”, [Sacks,1984 p.22]). As a consequence, CA is sensitive to the fine-grained or “microscopic” (Antaki, 2011, p.2) features of interaction which is made visible through the use of highly detailed transcripts which are used alongside the recordings made in situ of the actual interaction (we will explore this aspect of CA work in relation to the present thesis in section 2.5). Careful transcription of the data, utilising the notation conventions established by Jefferson in the early days of CA (see Jefferson, 2004), is a prerequisite of CA and will be completed before analysis begins (it is also helpful in familiarising the analyst with their data).

Once data has been transcribed, analysis can begin. Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2017) document 6 key steps involved in ‘doing’ CA. These are as follows:

1) ‘Noticing’ of a conversational phenomenon of interest
2) Assembling a preliminary collection of candidate instances of the phenomenon
3) Identifying the largest, or most important, subset within the collection
4) Analysing the clearest cases of the phenomenon within this subset
5) Analysing less transparent cases
6) Analysing deviant cases

Wilkinson and Kitzinger, (2017, p.83)

Let us briefly examine these 6 steps a little more, starting with step 1 and the process of ‘noticing’ conversational phenomenon. CA does not typically begin with an expectation or assumption about what will be found in the data. Therefore, interactional phenomena are not discovered in interaction on the basis of “some preformulated theorizing” (Psathas, 1995, p.45) but instead analysts are expected to approach data with an open mind (ten Have, 2010) and be led by the data in hand. Sacks (1984) argues that analysts should instead base their analyses on “close looking” (p.25) and an “unmotivated examination” (p.27) of the data, proposing that it is through the careful inspection of

talk that we can begin to see how order is produced. The rationale here is linked to the broader scepticism that CA has for using preformulated theories or ideas as a basis for making analytic claims. Instead, Sacks (1984) argues that observation should be the basis for theorising, whereby 'close looking' can show us things that were hitherto "not currently imaginable" (p.25). Furthermore, Sacks cautions against an approach to data which presupposes certain practices or speculates about how 'typical' certain occurrences are, asserting that "from close looking at the world we find things that we could not, by imagination, assert were there. We would not know they were "typical". Indeed, we might not have noticed that they happen" (p.25). Thus, observation of the data forms the basis upon which the rest of the analysis is built.

Whilst engaging in an open-minded inspection of the data, conversation analysts will begin to 'notice' things about the interaction they have recorded, this could be particular practices, sequencings, or other "initially unremarkable features of the talk or other conduct" (Schegloff, 1996, p.172). Once the analyst has 'noticed' something then they will ask themselves the question "what are these doing" (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2017, p.82), in other words, what action is this particular thing doing in that specific time in the interaction? These questions are replayed by the analyst over repeated viewing/listening of the data.

Once the analyst has begun to notice things in their data, they can move on to the next step in the process of CA and can begin to collect together instances of the particular phenomenon which has attracted their attention. These could be composed of "numerous instances of similar phenomena" or could be a collection instances where there is something "structurally complex and transparently significant" (Psathas, 1995, p.46). In the early stages of building a collection, there is a more relaxed specification of what does or does not count as an example of the phenomena and analysts are encouraged to collect examples "inclusively" (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2017, p.82). Analysts will then refine the collection with a view to adopting a more rigorous and precise

specification for whatever ‘it’ is that will be the subject of their analysis, leading onto the third step of CA.

As part of the process of refining the collection of data, groupings will emerge and that will allow analysts to identify ‘subsets’ within the whole collection. Wilkinson and Kitzinger, (2017) suggest that it is typical for analysts to focus their analysis on the largest of these subsets. This will provide the analyst with plenty of instances to engage with and move onto the fourth step of analysis, which is looking for the clearest cases of a phenomena. At this stage of analysis, there will be a number of instances which, broadly speaking, share similar characteristics in terms of how a particular action is accomplished over a series of turns. The analyst can then map out how the interaction plays out and identify other places in the data where similar business occurs.

However, there may also be instances whereby the phenomena of interest is deployed in interaction which is less transparent or is found in a sequence where it does not follow the ‘typical’ pattern of how the interactional business is bought about. Thus step 5 involves examining data which shows “differing trajectories for the accomplishment of the action to be seen” (Liddicoat, 2007, p.11). The analyst then, will be able to assemble a map of how these sequences of interaction unfold, detailing some of the possible routes that can be taken to reach the destination.

The final step involves “cases in which there is a clear departure from an established pattern” (Wooffitt, 2005, p.130). The analysis of these ‘deviant cases’ is an important part of doing CA (e.g. Heritage, 1998; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998; Heritage & Atkinson, 1984; Heritage & Stivers, 2013). These cases are deviant in the sense that they don’t follow the typical interactional trajectory but are not, as their name may suggest, outliers. Instead they are “instances that ‘prove the rule’ (Heritage & Stivers, 2013, p.665) The reasoning here is that if, as suggested by the typical cases, there is a normative way or pattern to how certain interactional phenomena plays out, then any deviance from this should be treated by speakers as problematic and oriented to as consequential in talk (e.g. Heritage, 1984; Heritage & Stivers, 2013). In other words, the fact that something which was

normatively expected to happen hasn't happened and is noticeable to the speakers involved, then "the interactants were nonetheless acting in accordance with the assumption that it should properly be forthcoming" (Clayman & Maynard, 1995, p.8). These deviant cases then show us that the interactional phenomena which the analyst has selected as important are, crucially, also important to the participants engaging in interaction. To this, Clayman and Maynard (1995) suggest that these deviant cases can confirm initial analysis but may also enrich analysis because it shows "how the same principles operate within, and thereby generate, a nonstandard course of action" (p.8).

2.4.4 – Discursive Psychology

In addition to the core CA principles outlined above, some of the central, and interlinking, elements of DP research will be drawn upon in my analysis. DP contrasts with what Edwards (1997) refers to as "cognitivism". The cognitivist approach to psychology sees all human action as being the product of internal cognitions and knowledge-based processes. This way of doing psychology presupposes that these cognitive processes are "proper…definite…sitting out there in the world, or in our heads, categorically separate from emotion and social life, waiting for psychologists to find and explain them" (Edwards, 1997, p.27). Along these lines, talk is simply the means by which individuals express their thoughts, intentions and feelings about a given, external world.

DP however, takes a non-cognitivist approach to psychological issues. Rather than talk being viewed as the conduit through which psychological states are communicated, it is instead seen as the "primary arena for action, understanding, and intersubjectivity" (Wiggins and Potter, 2008, p.73). In other words, it is an approach that examines how psychological concepts and categories of mental life are made relevant, invoked, oriented to, and described by individuals in both text and talk (Edwards, 1997).

In relation to the conceptions of humour outlined earlier, one can see that they contrast sharply with DP's non-cognitivist approach to psychology. In these theories, humour is explained in terms of internal mental processes (e.g. feelings of superiority, perceptions of incongruity or

unconscious aggressive and sexual impulses) which presupposes that 'humour' is something that exists in some concrete, external world and is available to be experienced, understood and responded to by individuals just like any number of other cognitive or perceptual stimuli. The context in which this humour arises in and how this 'humour' is actually performed in interaction is largely ignored, instead the focus has been on researcher constructions of canned jokes, puns, riddles etc. examined in isolation, with aspects of their 'telling' stripped away. DP then, like CA, stresses the importance of examining phenomena in situ and not relying on psychological theorizing, instead favouring an "analysis based in the pragmatics of social action" (Edwards, 2005, p.260). In relation to my own research then, I wish to use DP principles to highlight how the notion of 'humour', like other psychological emotions and states, is not necessarily something that is a cognitive concern but something that is both rhetorical and discursive. Consequently, one should not be viewing instances of humour in a vacuum but as part of a larger interactional sequence which seeks to accomplish some form of social action.

Along similar lines, DP is also concerned with how psychological business is managed and handled in interaction (Edwards, 2005). DP uses the principles and methods from both discourse and conversation analysis and applies them to psychological themes. Whilst CA can be seen as a respecification of the notion of social structure and organisation, discursive psychology has respecified "the very object of psychology" (Wiggins and Potter, 2008, p.73) and provided a critique of the traditional ways of 'doing psychology' by reworking psychological practices as discursive practices. In the context of the present thesis, it is the notion of 'humour' that will be of particular interest from a DP perspective. As discussed in Chapter 1, humour is conceptualised as something that is found, understood/perceived by individuals and then appreciated by its recipients. The role of 'cognitions', or other internal mental processes, is foregrounded in this cognitive-perceptual viewpoint. However, DP would view humour very differently, one where those internal cognitive issues such as 'understanding' and 'appreciation' are considered alongside other similar words from the "psychological thesaurus" (Edwards, 2005, p.263) and instead are concepts that are managed,

handled and negotiated by individuals in talk. These latter concerns map directly onto the research aims of this project related to how people understand sitcoms together and therefore, DP principles are particularly helpful in offering a framework through which to examine these and will be discussed throughout this thesis.

The way in which the data collected for this thesis will be presented is through detailed written transcripts. This practice is commonplace in CA/DP research, but the demands of this specific data presented some unique challenges. The ways in which these issues have been addressed are discussed in the following section.

2.5 – The Challenges of Transcription

According to Jenks (2011), transcripts of recorded data can be seen to have four broad functions, firstly, they are used represent the audio/video data collected by analysts. Secondly, transcripts assist researchers by allowing them to get a hold of something tangible which, given the source data is recorded in real-time and that numerous things can happen at once, may be missed by researchers. A third function of transcripts is that they help researchers to disseminate their findings and share them with others (e.g. colleagues, peers, or supervisors). In doing so, there is the opportunity for someone to examine the data afresh. Finally, transcripts offer researchers something that can be verified by the wider academic community and substantiate the observations/claims that an analyst makes. For CA/DP there is something else which is demonstrated through the use of highly detailed transcripts which relates to one of the core principles upon which CA is based. This principle, or "pillars of CA" as Heritage & Stivers (2013, p.663) refer to it, is the assertion that every detail matters.

The notion of "order at all points" which was put forward by Sacks (1984, p.22) and has underpinned CA/DP work, is reflected in the way in that highly detailed transcripts of video/audio recordings are used as part of the analytic process. These transcripts operate on the principle that "no order of detail in interaction can be dismissed, *a priori*, as disorderly, accidental, or irrelevant" (Heritage 1984, p.241) and as such, attempt to capture "what was actually said and how and when it

was said" (Drew, 2005, p.78). This is made possible by the use of a comprehensive system of transcription which was developed by Gail Jefferson whilst working as a 'clerk/typist' for Harvey Sacks (Lerner, 2004). This system, as summarized in Jefferson (2004), focuses on capturing the properties of turn-taking (onset of simultaneous speech, gaps within and between turns) but also the features of how talk is delivered such as speed, emphasis, volume, and whether any sound is stretched (Hepburn & Bolden, 2013, 2017; Wooffitt, 2005). Similarly, with the increasing use of video recording equipment, transcripts have attempted to also capture non-verbal behaviour which is used by individuals in interaction (e.g. Goodwin, 1981; Heath, Hindmarsh & Luff, 2010; Mondada, 2016). By using these detailed transcription conventions, analysts can preserve many of the features of talk that are evident in the actual recordings. In this sense they are "transcriptions of actual occurrences in their actual sequence" (Sacks, 1984, p.25).

With these considerations in mind, let us now consider the actual sequences of interaction that was recorded in the sitcom watching data. Certainly, utilising the transcription conventions outlined by Jefferson (2004) would allow for detailed records of the talk produced by sitcom viewers to be captured unproblematically. Similarly, non-verbal aspects of the interaction, such as gaze and pointing, could also be represented here by following conventions outlined by analysts such as Goodwin (1981), Gerhardt (2007), and Mondada (2016). The combination of these approaches would afford a detailed account of the interaction found on the video/audio recordings. However, it soon became apparent that focusing on just the sitcom viewers was not providing a complete picture of the interaction that was occurring in the data, a key component was missing; the on-screen dialogue.

A close inspection of the recordings revealed that off-screen interaction did not exist separate to the talk that was playing out on-screen, with content from the TV serving to occasion certain responses and make relevant topics for discussion. Of particular concern here, was the fact that participants off-screen were responding to humorous content on-screen and therefore, if transcripts only reflected the off-screen interaction then half of what was going on here was not being captured.

Therefore, rather than seeing participant's interaction off-screen as being separate to the dialogue on-screen, it was important to view the talk here as one larger sequence of interaction but with two channels of interaction; one comprised of 'real life' interaction between co-viewers and one scripted on-screen which is produced for the off-screen viewers. If the broad concerns of CA/DP in regard to every detail of interaction being important are to be upheld, then all of the interactional business that is going on here needed to be captured in transcripts.

The issue here is not just one of audible talk however, as much of the humour that is produced on-screen in sitcoms is either non-verbal or is based on the juxtaposition of non-verbal and verbal aspects. This can be considered in-line with the notion of 'multimodality', that is the ways in which resources such as gestures, gaze, facial expressions and body movements which are utilised by individuals in interaction (e.g. Mondada, 2016). In particular, CA is interested in the way in which these multimodal practices are embodied in interaction to accomplish different social actions. As discussed earlier in this section, transcripts have been modified in ways which attend to the non-verbal conduct of participants and capture these multimodal practices (e.g. Mondada 2016) however, this work is ostensibly still only dealing with one source of multimodal data (i.e. whatever is recorded in 'real life' by the researcher). In the case of the sitcom watching data however, there are two channels of multimodal interaction and therefore the transcript needs to be sensitive to this concern.

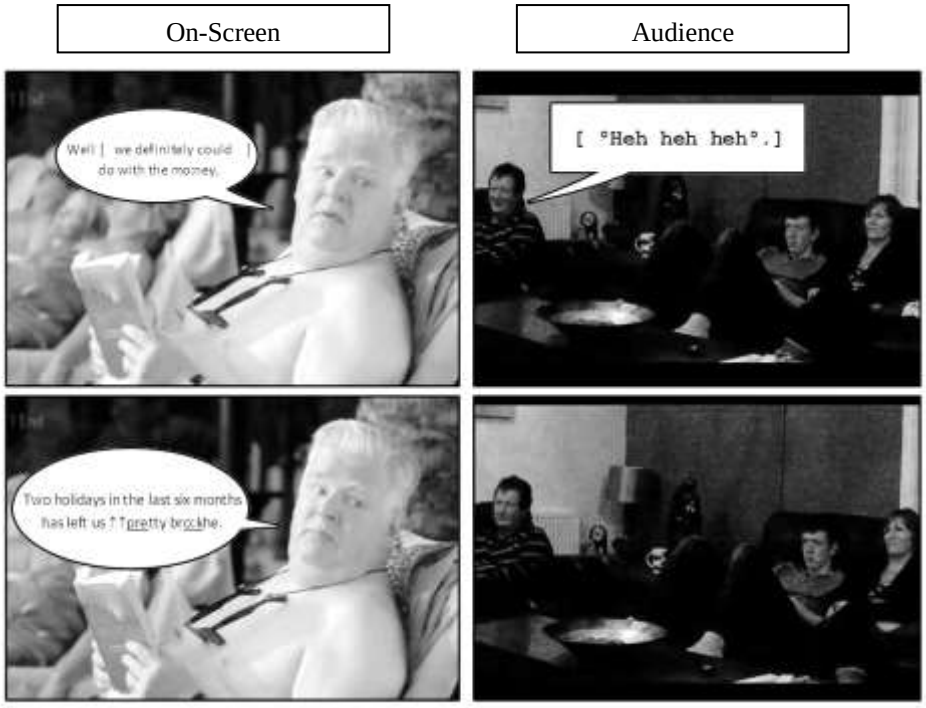
The previous work discussed earlier in this chapter which has used video recordings to analyse TV watching behaviour, namely Gerhardt (2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010) and Ergul (2016), has focused more heavily on the off-screen interaction of the participants than the talk that is playing out on-screen. A notable exception being here being Gerhardt (2006) which demonstrated how TV football audiences construct their interaction around the talk of the on-screen commentators so that one single, coherent conversation emerges. Regardless, this previous work has not tackled the multimodal practices of the actors on the TV and how these are aligned with the multimodal or

embodied practices of the viewers at home. As such, modifications to existing transcription conventions were required in order to capture the complexities of the multiparty and multimodal interaction both on-screen and off-screen.

Initially, inspiration was taken from Laurier and Brown (2014) and their work on film editing practices. In this project, Jefferson transcript conventions were embedded in speech bubbles using the software 'Comic Life'. This software, used for creating comic strips, allowed for two streams of data to be presented side by side, so that the left represents on-screen content whilst the right illustrates what was happening off-screen. FIG 2.4 gives an example of this method of transcribing the data.

FIG. 2.4

Example of Transcript Created with 'Comic Life' Software



Initially, this way of dealing with the demands of the sitcom watching data seemed appropriate. However, it soon became apparent that there were some additional problems presented by this method of transcription. Firstly, there is an issue with the amount of space that is required for a transcript like this. A traditional Jeffersonian style transcript of this data, as shown below in FIG 2.5, occupies a much smaller space. Given that this instance of data is only a few seconds long, and only

contained two utterances of spoken dialogue, some of the extracts contained in this thesis which consist of a number of spoken turns both on-screen and off-screen, as well as overlapping multiparty talk from both the TV and the participants at home, transcripts using Comic Life would occupy a number of pages.

FIG. 2.5.

Fragment of transcript without multimodal modification

```
1     Don:  Well [we definitely could] do with the mo:ney,
2     Jim:       [    °Heh heh heh°  ]
3                 (0.3)
4     Don:  Two holidays in the last six months has left us ↑↑pretty
5           bro:khe.
```

Another problem, and potentially more substantive, was that whilst Comic Life allows two streams of video to be presented side-by-side, timings are harder to represent in this manner. For example, the 0.3 second gap on line 3 of FIG. 2.5 is lost in the FIG. 2.4 transcript. As these aspects of interaction are important parts of a CA/DP analysis, not including fine-grain details about the sequential organisation of talk was deemed too problematic and alternative ways of presenting the data were sought.

Inspiration this time came from Charles Goodwin (2000, 2003a, 2003b and 2007) and his collaboration with Marjorie Goodwin (2000). Focusing on individuals taking part in an archaeological dig and children playing hopscotch, the Goodwins demonstrated how non-verbal behaviours such as gaze and pointing could be presented alongside talk to enhance the information presented in a transcript. In this work, still images from the recorded video were used to compliment the transcribed words with annotations and arrows to demonstrate movement or pinpoint certain features. FIG. 2.6 shows an example of how the formatting proposed by the Goodwins could be used to present the sitcom watching data outlined above.

FIG. 2.6

Fragment of a Final Transcript Used in This Project

1 Don: Well [we definitely could] do with the mo:ney,

2 Jim: [°Heh heh heh°]

3 (0.3)

4 Don: Two holidays in the last six months has left us ↑↑pretty bro:khe.

Using the Goodwin transcription conventions, a transcript which is detailed, yet also not overly cumbersome, can be produced. Here the multimodal practices occurring on-screen and off-screen can be included via still images and linked to spoken dialogue via arrows. A further modification that I adopted for this present thesis is also visible in FIG. 2.6. whereby the on-screen dialogue is differentiated from the off-screen talk of the participants. As shown on lines 1 and 4, the Jefferson transcription conventions are applied as usual to the on-screen talk but the text is presented in a different, sans serif font, 'Calibri', whilst the off-screen talk of the participants is transcribed in the widely used 'Courier New' font. To further aid the differentiation between the two channels of talk, the on-screen talk is presented in a grey font (e.g. lines 1 and 4 of FIG. 2.6.), giving the participant's talk off-screen prominence but also illustrating where this talk was placed sequentially in terms of what was playing out on-screen.

This method of transcription has been utilised throughout this thesis and will form the basis of the analyses that are provided forthwith. For each extract there is an element of compromise about what is needed to be included in order for the reader to make sense of the data presented. Attempts have been made to enable readers to 'see' the two channels of interaction playing out as one combined sequence of talk-in-action, with multimodal practices illustrated where possible and/or

relevant to the analysis being made. As such, these transcripts align with Sacks' concern about 'order at all points' and provide insight into how the interaction between co-viewers is sequentially designed, made relevant by and is responsive to, the on-screen sitcom they are watching. A broad sketch of these interactions will now be discussed in section 2.6.

2.6 – The Sitcom Watching Data: Some Preliminary Observations

In this section I will provide the reader with a general overview of the complete dataset which is informed by observations made when familiarising myself with the data. This is by no means intended to be exhaustive and instead is provided as a way of making visible to the reader, the sorts of interactional phenomena that played out in the data, on a recording-by-recording basis.

The presentation of these observations is very heavily caveated, and readers are cautioned about drawing any analytic conclusions from the data in this form. In order to provide the overview, I have identified a number of broad classes of occurrence which was found in the recordings, which will be discussed shortly, and the frequency of these has been noted. This practice is something which is not typically encouraged in CA/DP (e.g. Schegloff, 1993; Heritage, 1995). The reasoning behind this is nicely captured by Sidnell (2013) who observes "Any particular instance of a phenomenon or practice is ultimately unique – involving some particular group of participants using specific words to achieve a locally relevant outcome" (p.77-78). Therefore, by grouping together interactional phenomena under some analyst-defined category (something which I take issue with in subsequent sections of this thesis – e.g. section 3.2), based on some operational definition, these practices are presented as equivalent; that every one is the same. Which they are not. Far from it in fact. In reducing the phenomena observed in the data to a frequency, the variation that is displayed and made a virtue of in the analysis contained in this thesis, is completely erased. Furthermore, the relevance of any given phenomena to the ongoing interaction is also stripped away. As such, we don't know what occasioned the production of this phenomenon, we can't see what business this

phenomenon is involved in, we can't determine exactly where this phenomenon occurred in relation to the other things that are happening at that time.

In short then, what follows here is an attempt to provide the reader with a flavour for the broad sorts of things that I observed in the recordings. Think of these as my 'noticings' that were used in the early stages of analysis. They are, as Heritage (1995) suggests, "a means for isolating 'interesting phenomena'" (p.404) which assisted me in drawing out phenomena from the data. A high frequency does not indicate high importance or significance. More likely, categories of responses which tended to briefly punctuate interaction resulted in higher frequencies but the part they played in the ongoing interaction was not particularly remarkable. For example, in many of the recordings there was a high frequency of solo laughter. This laughter was deployed overwhelmingly via single laugh particles which were not oriented to by co-viewers. Conversely, whilst the group laughter that occurred was not as frequent, its production was much more pronounced and was much more complex in terms of its sequential design, the ways in which co-viewers joined and coordinated their laughter and the ways in which it was bought to life by the participants. Similarly, these periods of extended group laughter were often, as we see in the analyses later in this thesis, the grounds upon which further sequences of interaction were launched. All of these features are stripped away when we reduce these practices to categories.

Nevertheless, what we see here are the frequencies of two broad classes of responses to the sitcom: 'Laughing Responses' and 'Elaborate Responses'. The former of these relates to the types of laughter that was observed in the data, whilst the latter is concerned with the sort of responses that were not necessarily related to the 'funny' aspect of the sitcom but saw the on-screen TV sitcom as the basis for some further interaction. There were six potential laughing responses that were tracked: 1) '*Solo laugh – sitcom oriented*' referred to occasions where only one party laughed and this was responsive to the sitcom; 2) '*Solo laugh – non sitcom orientated*', was recorded when one party laughed but this was not responsive to the sitcom; 3) '*Solo laugh accompanied by orientation to co-*

viewer' captured moments where one party laughs but shows some orientation to their co-viewers, such as directing their gaze or nudging them; 4) '*Solo laugh leading to group laughter*', these instances begin as a single party laughing but were subsequent joined by other parties; 5) '*Unmitigated group laughter – sitcom orientated*' was recorded when more than one party laughed in response to the sitcom simultaneously; whilst 6) '*Unmitigated group laughter – not sitcom orientated*' referred to moments whereby the group laughed simultaneously but this was not responsive to the sitcom but some other event off-screen.

In terms of other responses, collected together under 'Elaborate responses' due to the fact they often tended to play out over a number of spoken turns, was divided into eight responses: 1) '*Question-answer*' was recorded when one of the participants launched a question-answer sequence; 2) '*Evaluation*' referred to instances whereby one of the viewers offered an evaluation either of something on-screen or off-screen (e.g. one of their co-viewers); 3)'*Noticing*' orients to one of the participants drawing attention to an aspect of the sitcom which other participants may have missed; 4) '*Joke*' related to the instances whereby one of the co-viewers attempted to generate laughter either by building upon the on-screen content or commenting on something which occurred off-screen; 5) '*Explanation or Account*' refers to times in the recording whereby participants would engage in a sequence of explaining some aspect of the sitcom to their co-interlocutors or would proffer an account as an explanation of their own conduct (e.g. after a solo laugh which is not taken up by others); *6*) There were occasions whereby participants would attempt to predict what was going to happen next on the sitcom, these were recorded as '*Prediction*'; 7) '*Sitcom business related*' responses were ones which handled some problematic element of the sitcom watching (e.g. negotiating which episode to watch), whilst 8) 'Non-sitcom business related' referred to sequences of talk which dealt with something that was not related to the sitcom watching, and instead were dealing with other interactional business (e.g. One participant asks the other 'Did you go bowling yesterday?'). Having defined each of these practices, what follows is a breakdown of each of the

recordings and how frequent these instances were within them. The number assigned to the recordings here corresponds to the numbers in section 2.3 of this chapter (Table 2.1). As such, let us begin with recording 1.

Table 2.2

Table Showing Frequencies of Laughter Responses and Interactions Between Participants in Recording No.1

Laughing Responses	**Frequency (instances)**
Solo laugh – sitcom orientated	53
Solo laugh – non-sitcom orientated	1
Solo laugh accompanied by orientation to co-viewer	13
Solo laugh leading to group laughter	21
Unmitigated group laughter – sitcom orientated	26
Unmitigated group laughter – not sitcom related	1

Elaborate Responses	**Frequency (instances)**
Question-Answer	24
Evaluation	20
Noticing	12
Joke	1
Explanation or Account	3
Prediction	0
Sitcom Business-related	5
Non-sitcom business-related (off-topic)	7

Length of recording: 01:45:00

In Table 2.2. we can see that over the course of the recording there was a high occurrence of solo laughter in response to the sitcom, but also a number of instances of joint laughter (e.g. solo laugh leading to group laughter, unmitigated group laughter – sitcom related) and laughter which oriented to co-viewers. In terms of non-laughter responses, there were a high frequency of question-answer sequences, evaluations and also noticings. There was, however, no predictions made and only one instance of a co-viewer attempting a joke.

Table 2.3

Table Showing Frequencies of Laughter Responses and Interactions Between Participants in Recording No.2

Laughing Responses	**Frequency (instances)**
Solo laugh – sitcom orientated	58
Solo laugh – non-sitcom orientated	0
Solo laugh accompanied by orientation to co-viewer	1
Solo laugh leading to group laughter	29
Unmitigated group laughter – sitcom orientated	10
Unmitigated group laughter – not sitcom related	05

Elaborate Responses	**Frequency (instances)**
Question-Answer	6
Evaluation	11
Noticing	3
Joke	2
Explanation or Account	7
Prediction	0
Sitcom Business-related	7
Non-sitcom business-related (off-topic)	15

Length of recording: 01:02:05

Recording 2, as shown in Table 2.3, featured a similar amount of solo laughter to recording 1, but had much fewer instances of solo laughter with orientations to co-viewers. There was also comparatively less unmitigated group laughter which was responsive to the sitcom, however there were a higher frequency of group laughs which were responsive to non-sitcom business. As with recording 1, there were also a high number of occurrences where one party's laughter was joined by other members of the group. The highest frequency of elaborate responses were those which were categorised as 'off-topic' and were therefore not orienting to the sitcom. However, sequences which contained evaluations were the next frequent in this recording. As with recording 1, no predictions were made here.

Table 2.4

Table Showing Frequencies of Laughter Responses and Interactions Between Participants in Recording No.3

Laughing Responses	**Frequency (instances)**
Solo laugh – sitcom orientated	22
Solo laugh – non-sitcom orientated	0
Solo laugh accompanied by orientation to co-viewer	8
Solo laugh leading to group laughter	7
Unmitigated group laughter – sitcom orientated	4
Unmitigated group laughter – not sitcom related	1

Elaborate Responses	**Frequency (instances)**
Question-Answer	3
Evaluation	3
Noticing	0
Joke	3
Explanation or Account	1
Prediction	0
Sitcom Business-related	1
Non-sitcom business-related (off-topic)	6

Length of recording: 00:33:03

Recording 3 was shorter than both recording 1 and 2 and therefore we see fewer instances of many of the responsive behaviours. In terms of laughter, sitcom orientated solo laughter was the most frequent response, followed by solo laughter which was accompanied by an orientation to co-viewers. A similar pattern of lower frequencies can be observed with the elaborate responses, but ‘off topic’ sequences of interaction were the most frequent in this recording. There was, however, the same number of occasions where question-answer sequences were launched, evaluations made, and ‘jokes’ told. As with both recording 1 and 2, no predictions were made here.

Table 2.5

Table Showing Frequencies of Laughter Responses and Interactions Between Participants in Recording No.4

Laughing Responses	**Frequency (instances)**
Solo laugh – sitcom orientated	21
Solo laugh – non-sitcom orientated	0
Solo laugh accompanied by orientation to co-viewer	0
Solo laugh leading to group laughter	10
Unmitigated group laughter – sitcom orientated	19
Unmitigated group laughter – not sitcom related	0

Elaborate Responses	**Frequency (instances)**
Question-Answer	1
Evaluation	2
Noticing	1
Joke	3
Explanation or Account	2
Prediction	0
Sitcom Business-related	4
Non-sitcom business-related (off-topic)	0

Length of recording: 00:29:24

Table 2.5 indicates that the range of different laugh responses in recording 4 were much less variable with 3 of the 6 categories of laughter response not appearing at all. Unlike previous recordings, solo laughter is less frequent than laughter that is jointly produced (if solo laugh leading to group laughter and unmitigated group laughter are grouped together). In terms of more elaborate responses, we see that no predictions are made and no ‘off topic’ interaction takes place, instead the highest frequency occurrence is for interaction based upon ‘doing’ watching the sitcom, followed by sequences where one of the participants makes a ‘joke’.

Table 2.6

Table Showing Frequencies of Laughter Responses and Interactions Between Participants in Recording No.5

Laughing Responses	**Frequency (instances)**
Solo laugh – sitcom orientated	26
Solo laugh – non-sitcom orientated	0
Solo laugh accompanied by orientation to co-viewer	0
Solo laugh leading to group laughter	14
Unmitigated group laughter – sitcom orientated	1
Unmitigated group laughter – not sitcom related	0

Elaborate Responses	**Frequency (instances)**
Question-Answer	12
Evaluation	7
Noticing	1
Joke	1
Explanation or Account	6
Prediction	1
Sitcom Business-related	1
Non-sitcom business-related (off-topic)	4

Length of recording: 01:02:28

There are two laugh responses which were dominant in recording 5, these were solo laughter which oriented to the sitcom and solo laughter that was picked up by co-viewers and led to joint laughter. There were hardly any examples of other types of laugh responses. In terms of elaborate responses, question and answer sequences were the most frequent, followed by occasions where an explanation or account was provided by one of the co-viewers.

Table 2.7

Table Showing Frequencies of Laughter Responses and Interactions Between Participants in Recording No.6

Laughing Responses	**Frequency (instances)**
Solo laugh – sitcom orientated	7
Solo laugh – non-sitcom orientated	0
Solo laugh accompanied by orientation to co-viewer	11
Solo laugh leading to group laughter	0
Unmitigated group laughter – sitcom orientated	1
Unmitigated group laughter – not sitcom related	0

Elaborate Responses	Frequency (instances)
Question-Answer	1
Evaluation	0
Noticing	1
Joke	0
Explanation or Account	0
Prediction	0
Sitcom Business-related	0
Non-sitcom business-related (off-topic)	0

Length of recording: 00:31:18

Recording 6 stood in contrast to the other recordings in that responses of any type were infrequent. Most commonly produced by the co-viewers was solo laughter that was accompanied by an orientation to another party. There was only one instance in the recording whereby participants laughed together. In this sense, recording 6 was atypical.

Table 2.8

Table Showing Frequencies of Laughter Responses and Interactions Between Participants in Recording No.7

Laughing Responses	Frequency (instances)
Solo laugh – sitcom orientated	15
Solo laugh – non-sitcom orientated	0
Solo laugh accompanied by orientation to co-viewer	11
Solo laugh leading to group laughter	11
Unmitigated group laughter – sitcom orientated	9
Unmitigated group laughter – not sitcom related	0

Elaborate Responses	Frequency (instances)
Question-Answer	4
Evaluation	10
Noticing	14
Joke	4
Explanation or Account	8
Prediction	2
Sitcom Business-related	3
Non-sitcom business-related (off-topic)	3

Length of recording: 00:33:35

In contrast to recording 6, recording 7 featured a high number of instances of many of the different forms of laugh responses and contained at least 2 examples of each of the elaborate responsive

actions. In particular this recording featured a high number of occurrences of noticing, evaluations and explanations or accounts. Given that this recoding is comparatively shorter than others in the data set, Table 2.8 reveals a high frequency of overall interactional business.

Table 2.9

Table Showing Frequencies of Laughter Responses and Interactions Between Participants in Recording No.8

Laughing Responses	**Frequency (instances)**
Solo laugh – sitcom orientated	15
Solo laugh – non-sitcom orientated	1
Solo laugh accompanied by orientation to co-viewer	0
Solo laugh leading to group laughter	8
Unmitigated group laughter – sitcom orientated	1
Unmitigated group laughter – not sitcom related	0

Elaborate Responses	**Frequency (instances)**
Question-Answer	23
Evaluation	9
Noticing	6
Joke	1
Explanation or Account	9
Prediction	0
Sitcom Business-related	1
Non-sitcom business-related (off-topic)	6

Length of recording: 01:08:34

In a similar manner to recording 7, Table 2.9 displays how recording 8 featured a high frequency of certain elaborate responses. Particularly marked here is the number of occurrences of question-answer sequences, however there is also examples of evaluations and explanations or accounts being deployed by interlocuters. Conversely, the amount of laughter observed in this recording is much smaller.

Table 2.10

Table Showing Frequencies of Laughter Responses and Interactions Between Participants in Recording No.9

Laughing Responses	**Frequency (instances)**
Solo laugh – sitcom orientated	44
Solo laugh – non-sitcom orientated	9
Solo laugh accompanied by orientation to co-viewer	4
Solo laugh leading to group laughter	40
Unmitigated group laughter – sitcom orientated	18
Unmitigated group laughter – not sitcom related	5

Elaborate Responses	**Frequency (instances)**
Question-Answer	3
Evaluation	13
Noticing	4
Joke	5
Explanation or Account	8
Prediction	0
Sitcom Business-related	7
Non-sitcom business-related (off-topic)	2

Length of recording: 00:55:16

Recording number 9 is another example of a recording which has a high occurrence rate for most of the responsive actions, with only 'prediction' not being deployed by speakers here. This recording also has a high frequency of solo laughter which is sitcom orientated and solo laughter which leads to group laughter. However, the other forms of laughing response were also present here at different points of the recording (though we cannot establish exactly when from the data when presented this way).

Table 2.11

Table Showing Frequencies of Laughter Responses and Interactions Between Participants in Recording No.10

Laughing Responses	**Frequency (instances)**
Solo laugh – sitcom orientated	42
Solo laugh – non-sitcom orientated	0
Solo laugh accompanied by orientation to co-viewer	3
Solo laugh leading to group laughter	34
Unmitigated group laughter – sitcom orientated	22
Unmitigated group laughter – not sitcom related	1

Elaborate Responses	**Frequency (instances)**
Question-Answer	3
Evaluation	8
Noticing	1
Joke	4
Explanation or Account	5
Prediction	2
Sitcom Business-related	5
Non-sitcom business-related (off-topic)	6

Length of recording: 00:28:19

Table 2.11 indicates that recording 10 also provided a high number of occurrences for each of the responsive actions that were being examined (barring solo laughter which was not sitcom orientated). We see here a high number of solo laughs in response to the sitcom, but there are a greater number of instances whereby both parties are engaging in laughter (if unmitigated group laughter is combined with solo laughs which lead to group laughter). There is also at least one example of each of the more elaborate responses present here.

Table 2.12

Table Showing Frequencies of Laughter Responses and Interactions Between Participants in Recording No.11

Laughing Responses	**Frequency (instances)**
Solo laugh – sitcom orientated	28
Solo laugh – non-sitcom orientated	0
Solo laugh accompanied by orientation to co-viewer	7
Solo laugh leading to group laughter	7
Unmitigated group laughter – sitcom orientated	12
Unmitigated group laughter – not sitcom related	0

Elaborate Responses	**Frequency (instances)**
Question-Answer	4
Evaluation	5
Noticing	3
Joke	0
Explanation or Account	3
Prediction	0
Sitcom Business-related	4
Non-sitcom business-related (off-topic)	1

Length of recording: 00:50:28

In recording 11 we see that the most frequent laugh response is solo-laughter oriented to the sitcom, however, we can also observe that unmitigated group laughter was also frequently found in this recording. When combined with solo laughs with accompanying orientation and solo laughter that led to group laughter, we can see that the overall laughter responses are produced in comparatively similar frequency.

Table 2.13

Table Showing Frequencies of Laughter Responses and Interactions Between Participants in Recording No.12

Laughing Responses	**Frequency (instances)**
Solo laugh – sitcom orientated	21
Solo laugh – non-sitcom orientated	3
Solo laugh accompanied by orientation to co-viewer	0
Solo laugh leading to group laughter	11
Unmitigated group laughter – sitcom orientated	12
Unmitigated group laughter – not sitcom related	1

Elaborate Responses	Frequency (instances)
Question-Answer	5
Evaluation	13
Noticing	3
Joke	3
Explanation or Account	0
Prediction	0
Sitcom Business-related	2
Non-sitcom business-related (off-topic)	1

Length of recording: 00:31:05

As with recording 11, which featured 3 of the same participants as recording 12, Table 2.13 demonstrates that there were comparable levels of solo and jointly produced laughter in this recording. However, what is interesting here is that there is a substantially higher frequency of evaluations being deployed in response to the sitcom.

Table 2.14

Table Showing Frequencies of Laughter Responses and Interactions Between Participants in Recording No.13

Laughing Responses	Frequency (instances)
Solo laugh – sitcom orientated	41
Solo laugh – non-sitcom orientated	1
Solo laugh accompanied by orientation to co-viewer	37
Solo laugh leading to group laughter	4
Unmitigated group laughter – sitcom orientated	53
Unmitigated group laughter – not sitcom related	0

Elaborate Responses	Frequency (instances)
Question-Answer	2
Evaluation	3
Noticing	10
Joke	3
Explanation or Account	4
Prediction	3
Sitcom Business-related	3
Non-sitcom business-related (off-topic)	5

Length of recording: 01:02:11

Recording 13 contained a large number of instances of 3 forms of laughing response: solo laugh – sitcom orientated, solo laugh accompanied by orientation to co-viewer and unmitigated group

laughter – sitcom orientated. Whilst the exact nature of these instances cannot be ascertained from the data in this form, this data poses some interesting questions about how the joint laughter present here was found much more frequently than other recordings. Whilst the frequencies of the elaborate responses are not particularly pronounced here, aside from 'noticing', this recording does contain at least two examples of every type of interactional phenomena that was being sought out.

Table 2.15

Table Showing Frequencies of Laughter Responses and Interactions Between Participants in Recording No.14

Laughing Responses	**Frequency (instances)**
Solo laugh – sitcom orientated	25
Solo laugh – non-sitcom orientated	0
Solo laugh accompanied by orientation to co-viewer	1
Solo laugh leading to group laughter	29
Unmitigated group laughter – sitcom orientated	21
Unmitigated group laughter – not sitcom related	0

Elaborate Responses	**Frequency (instances)**
Question-Answer	5
Evaluation	3
Noticing	2
Joke	4
Explanation or Account	4
Prediction	2
Sitcom Business-related	2
Non-sitcom business-related (off-topic)	2

Length of recording: 01:04:52

In this final snapshot of the sitcom-watching data, recording 14 once again features at least 2 examples of each of the elaborate responses that were under scrutiny here, which is similar to recording 13 in that regard. We can also see that there were 3 types of laugh response that were utilised by participants most frequently: solo laugh – sitcom orientated, solo laugh leading to group laughter, and unmitigated group laughter – sitcom orientated. Again, if one combines together solo laughter leading to group laughter and unmitigated group laughter on the basis that they are both

examples of jointly produced laughter, then we see that this was overwhelmingly the most frequent response in this recording.

In sum, what these 14 illustrations of the sitcom-watching dataset demonstrates is that a) there was a wide variation in the types of responsive actions produced by participants across the recordings, but also b) that even within recordings, participants engage in a range of responsive actions within the space of one session of sitcom watching. Now, as stated at the beginning of this section, this data is presented with the large caveat that by reducing these actions to frequency counts, we are unable to determine exactly how, when, and to what end these sequences have been produced for. Thus, in order to understand what is happening here we need to dig a little deeper.

2.7 – Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have detailed the methodological considerations that were taken in order to best examine the research aims put forward in the previous chapter. As such, I have situated this thesis in the context of existing debates surrounding the use of ethnographic methods and have demonstrated how they present some problems for analysts looking to analyses audiences. In particular, concerns about giving participant's a voice in the research process and how this aligns with the broader concern of recording naturalistic or naturally occurring data.

This chapter also described the sitcom watching data that was recorded for the analyses presented in the forthcoming chapters of this thesis. The methods of recruitment, the ethical considerations, and some background details about the participants were all covered here. These issues were then considered in the broader context of CA/DP research and it was shown how these analytical approaches are uniquely placed to understand how groups of people 'do' sitcom watching together, something which has hitherto not been examined from a discursive and interactional perspective. In addition, this chapter also detailed the methodological decisions that were taken to

ensure that any data collected was appropriate for CA/DP analysis and, in particular, the notion of ‘naturally occurring’ behaviours.

In the latter part of this chapter I provided a comprehensive account of how existing transcription conventions which are widely used within CA/DP research were modified to accommodate the two parallel channels of talk which were recorded for this thesis (i.e. the on-screen sitcom and the off-screen participants), and how still images have been utilised to provide further supporting information about the non-verbal behaviour of the participants off-screen and also the actors performing the comedy on-screen. Finally, in the closing section of this chapter, readers were given an overview of the recordings obtained for this present work. Here, the frequencies of occurrence for two broad classes of responsive action were displayed and discussed. These were presented to provide illustration only, and readers were cautioned about making analytic claims about this data due to the fact that frequency counts gloss over the vast amount of interactional business at play.

Chapter 3

The Many Sounds of Laughter:

Capturing and Transcribing its Particularities

'And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!'
He chortled in his joy.

- Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, 1871

3.0 - Chapter Overview

This chapter is about laughter. Which, given that this project is about examining the ways in which groups of people watch TV sitcoms together, is probably unsurprising. After all, as Mills (2005) argues, laughter plays an important role in sitcoms not only because this is the response that the writers, producers and actors are attempting to generate but it also occupies a noticeable role in the sitcom via the 'canned laughter' that is included in many sitcoms. In that way, laughter is not just a desirable audience response, but it is "part of the text" (p.14). As discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis, the ways in which these laugh tracks operate in sitcoms is open to discussion, but nevertheless, the fact that audible laughter is heard in many sitcoms makes this a unique genre of programming. For example, when watching an episode of the horror series *The Walking Dead*, viewers are not treated to audible screams, produced by an unseen audience, accompanying the appearance of a reanimated corpse bursting through the window. Similarly, whilst many genres of TV programming afford a range of responses from the viewing audience, for sitcoms the central concern is making audiences laugh. The belief held by the writers and producers, however problematic it may be, is that the success of a sitcom is based on whether it makes people laugh (Mills, 2005, 2010).

Yet, the problem faced by the people making the sitcom is that there is no way of determining exactly how the audience at home will respond. For Mills (2010), the inclusion of the laugh track as 'part of the text' is a way of signalling "an *intention* to be funny" (p.102, italics in original). As such, a viewer sitting at home is being told what they, as an audience, should be doing and when they should be doing it. Therefore, when there are instances where viewers at home do not laugh, or do not laugh as loudly or for as long as the invisible on-screen audience, (and in the course of this chapter we will see that audience responses are both varied and often subtle), they are being encouraged to notice that they "responding differently" (p.104).

Mills' assertions however, are not based on a close inspection of actual sitcom audiences in situ, that is in their homes. As such, there is much about the role of laughter in the practice of sitcom watching which is largely speculative. This present thesis then, offers an opportunity for the laughter produced by sitcom viewers to be analysed in fine detail. Moreover, the laughter can be considered in relation to the local context in which it is produced and how it is sequentially organised in terms of the broader interaction setting in which it appears. Indeed, this chapter offers a detailed account of laughter, not just as produced in response to sitcoms, but laughter as a purposive and organized feature of interaction more generally. As such, there are two issues which are tackled in this chapter; 1) a close inspection of the ways in which laughter is deployed by sitcom viewers, demonstrating how varied and complex laughter is as a phenomenon, and 2) how this variation and complexity can be captured by analysts hoping to understand laughter as a discursive practice, (or members' method, as Edwards 1997 refers to it). This latter concern was borne out of the inadequacy of existing CA/DP transcription conventions to fully capture the hitherto largely overlooked performative qualities of laughter in interaction. Therefore, this chapter offers some potential ways in which CA/DP researchers can better capture laughter in their written transcripts, based on the numerous and varied instances of laughter found in the sitcom watching data.

Section 3.1 begins by looking at transcription conventions more generally, engaging with broader arguments about the importance of accuracy and detail in CA/DP transcription. This will provide readers with an understanding of the role that transcription plays in the CA/DP research process and why analysts dedicate time and effort to ensure that the written transcripts they produce are detailed and accurate. This will then lead onto a discussion about the way that laughter has been treated by analysts in Section 3.2. In this section of the chapter, the vernacular ways of talking about and describing laughter will be problematized for the reader, making it clear that in order to better understand the particularities of laughter, we need to examine it without relying overly on analyst interpretation and classification. The CA transcription conventions are presented here as a counter to these issues, specifically those found in the work of Gail Jefferson (1985; 1987; 2004) and Gail Jefferson and colleagues (1977, 1985). However, in light of varied ways in which laughter is performed in the sitcom watching data, it will also be argued that current transcription conventions for laughter could be further developed (the groundwork of which can be found in Hepburn & Varney, 2013) and existing ways in which researchers have attempted to capture interactional practices like laughter in written transcripts will be discussed. These will then be considered in relation to the sitcom watching data.

Section 3.3 combines the central arguments of sections 3.1 and 3.2 to allow for a close inspection of laughter found in the data collected for this present thesis. In doing so, readers will be made aware of the complexity and variability of laughter produced by sitcom viewers but also, be given guidance on how the performative qualities of laughter can be better captured in written transcripts. This is unpacked in Section 3.4 which illustrates exactly how performative features of laughter can be captured in transcripts (building on my earlier work with Alexa Hepburn – Hepburn & Varney, [2013]) As such, it will be demonstrated how we can get a better understanding of the ways in which laughter is utilized in interaction if we dedicate more attention to the way in which laughter is transcribed. The extracts featured in this section, of actual examples of laughter as

produced by sitcom viewers, provide readers not only with specific examples of laughter in action, but also reveals how the practice of 'doing' sitcom watching is underpinned by laughter (a thread continued in Chapter 4 of this thesis). Moreover, this laughter is shown to be even more complex and variable than has hitherto been demonstrated in CA/DP work.

This chapter concludes with section 3.5, which ties together the main arguments made in this chapter and outlines how the research aims of this thesis have been addressed by this work. Let us first begin with a look at the practice of transcription, as utilised in both CA and DP. This will help to provide a context for the analyses made within this chapter and situate this work in the broader context of CA/DP, and the way that laughter is tackled from these perspectives.

3.1 – Transcribing Talk: Insights from CA

In order to better understand the contributions that this chapter is making to CA/DP and the ways in which laughter is captured in CA/DP transcripts, it is first important to understand the rationale behind the fine-grained transcription used for these types of analyses. In particular, the function that transcripts play in the CA/DP research process will be discussed and it will become clear as to why analysts dedicate so much time producing highly detailed transcripts. In the methodology section of this thesis (Chapter 2), I outlined the ways in which I developed a system for transcribing two sources of dialogue, (the audience and the sitcom), simultaneously so that issues of overlap, sequence design and the ways in which audience interaction oriented to the show that they were watching on-screen. This has been achieved by utilising different fonts for each of the sources of talk and by including images to give readers an idea about what the audience members are watching on TV, as well as allowing the non-verbal aspects of the interaction to be made available to the reader. These formatting and layout designs were made in response to the unique challenges that the sitcom watching data presented in terms of concurrent streams of multiparty interaction. However, the drive to capture as much detail as possible in the written transcripts for this project were also motivated by the importance that is placed on written transcripts in CA/DP work.

As discussed previously, CA and DP are concerned with naturally occurring phenomena and rely heavily on the use of audio recordings as a way of capturing phenomenon in situ (Sacks, 1984, 1992). With the increased availability of video recording equipment, analysts now frequently utilise both audio and video recordings when studying a particular phenomena, taking advantage of the affordances that this technology provides for capturing non-verbal behaviour (e.g. Goodwin, 1981; Heath & Luff, 2013; Heath, Hindmarsh, & Luff, 2010; Knoblauch et al., 2012). Whether utilizing audio or video recording equipment, written transcripts are created and used as a "convenient referential tool" (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008, p.70), allowing analysts to get to grips with their data.

That being said, whilst the transcripts that are used by CA/DP are detailed reconstructions of audio or video recordings of actual social interactions, they are never treated as definitive. Instead, the transcripts are considered to be a carefully produced rendering of the data that can be consulted alongside the actual recording of a particular interaction. At no point does the transcript alone become the data upon analysis is made, instead analysts repeatedly consult their recordings when developing their analyses and are used in conjunction with the transcripts rather than separate to (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008; Jenks, 2011; Hepburn & Bolden, 2013). This notion is in contrast to how interpersonal communication is treated outside of CA. For example, Hopper (1988) compares the CA research process and the social psychological research process and highlights how social psychologists will use transcripts as a form of data reduction or simplification. Once transcribed, their recordings can be discarded and the transcript can be used as a resource which can be coded and used to test hypotheses. This approach to data reflects a broader view within social psychology that aspects of talk such as interruptions or laughter are "interchangeable parts for interaction" (p.57), where all instances of these phenomena are treated equally and the performative and/or sequential qualities are not important.

In CA/DP however, the transcripts made represent a more general concern with "order at all points" (Sacks, 1984, p.22), as discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis. But there is also something else

that is reflected in the transcripts used for this type of research and that concerns the notion of interpretation and the attempt to remove this from the analyses made by researchers. Just as CA/DP approaches data in a way that every detail matters and that nothing can be discarded as irrelevant (e.g. Heritage, 1984), the CA/DP approach also operates on the basis that analysis is not based on any pre-existing theory or assumption about a particular phenomena that we are trying to find support for (e.g. Sidnell, 2010). Instead, CA and DP analysts are concerned with making claims about a phenomena based on the data itself and forming a "data-based argument" (tenHave, 2010, p.120). As such, analysts are expected to engage in "unmotivated looking" (Psathas, 1995, p.45), which involves being open to discovering things about a phenomena, rather than examining it based on assumptions of what one would expect to find. As Schegloff (1996) puts it, "an examination not prompted by prespecified analytic goals" (p.172).

The careful attention to detail in the transcripts used for a CA/DP research project help analysts to be able to make available to others examples for their data, which demonstrate the ways in which a particular phenomena operates. As such, the written transcripts that track the fine-grained particularities of talk, offer analysts the ability to mount arguments based on what actually happened in the data in all its 'messiness' (Potter, 1997). The 'warts and all' approach to transcription provides analysts the chance to step back from a phenomena and observe how orderliness is created and negotiated by the individuals involved in doing whatever business it is that they are doing. As a result, analyst interpretation is reduced and instead the focus becomes on how participant's themselves make sense of the phenomena under analysis as a "member's concern" (Edwards, 2007, p.31).

With this is mind, let us now turn our attention to the broad phenomena of 'laughter' and discuss the way that this is talked about in both academic work and everyday life. As will be made clear in the following section, the ways in which laughter is talked about and described is highly

interpretative and purposeful. As such, this poses an interesting challenge for CA/DP's treatment of descriptions and categories and the broader concern of reflexivity.

3.2 - Moving Beyond the Vernacular

In the English language there are a number of vernacular terms which are used when talking about laughter or different types of laughter. We might, for example, describe somebody who is laughing as chuckling, or sniggering, or giggling. Similarly, laughter can be raucous, dirty, bursting out, uncontrollable, or sarcastic. All of these ways of categorising or defining laughter are deployed as a way of distinguishing one instance from another. As we saw with the quote from Carroll's Through the Looking-Glass at the beginning of this chapter, we owe a debt to literary figures for providing us with words to use to distinguish between types of laughter. Crucially though, these vernacular words are not synonymous or interchangeable and each carry with them a level of positive or negative valence. If we were attempting to build a negative description of someone, for example, we may refer to them sniggering or laughing sarcastically, or if we were trying to liken somebody to a child we may categorise their laughing as giggling. Similarly, if we want to talk about laughter that is so forceful that it caused the person to black out, as in the case reported by Cox et al. (1997), we could talk about the "hysterical laughter" (p.242) which preceded the momentary loss of consciousness, as a direct result of watching the sitcom *Seinfeld* (Cox et al. refer to this "Seinfeld Syncope"). In short, the way in which we talk about laughter is purposeful and whatever word we use to describe it is consequential for the broader interaction within which it appears.

Take for example the first appearance of the word 'titter', used to describe an embarrassed, short and partially suppressed laugh, was in Daniel Defoe's 1725 pamphlet 'Every-body's Business, is No-body's Business'. In this work discussing the salaries and conduct of servants, Defoe recalls how he mistakenly kissed the "chamber-jade" because she was too well dressed, thinking that she was instead the mistress of the house. He recalls "I was soon undeceiv'd by a general Titter, that gave me the utmost confusion" (p.xiii). By choosing to describe the laughter he experienced as a

‘titter’, Defoe was giving readers a feel for the performative qualities of the laugh which distinguished it from other instances of laughter (i.e. the partially supressed quality) but, more importantly here, he was describing this laughter in a way which helps establish a particular version of events and the people involved. Rather than laughing aloud at Defoe’s mistake, the ‘titter’ he reports helps him to builds a description of the event which emphasises the embarrassment felt by all, whilst downplaying the humour of the situation (i.e. there was not an eruption of laughter). In doing so, Defoe can also comment on the issues of status and power at play here related to the master-servant relationship, and emerge from this telling not as a man who was mercilessness mocked for his faux pas by those seen as of lower status to himself but a man who has been misled and caused embarrassment for all because the chamber-jade was too well dressed. Their stifled laughter indicates an acknowledgement of the embarrassing nature of the event but also orients to the impropriety of laughing at one’s superior.

In short, Defoe’s example here, and Carroll’s ‘chortled’ from the beginning of the chapter, illustrate how the words in which we use to classify laughter or describe its features are consequential. They are not just descriptions whereby each is synonymous, they are doing something purposeful, whether written or spoken, and are deployed to provide a particular version of events or to cast those laughing in a certain way. This process of categorization is something which Edwards (1991, 1994, 1997) has demonstrated in inextricably linked with social action. Whether we are trying to persuade, accuse, blame or achieve any number of discursive goals, “categorization is *something we do*, in talk, in order to accomplish social actions” (1991, p.517). Similarly, Potter (1997), discusses the notion of ‘reflexivity’ which relates to the position that “descriptions are not just *about* something but they are also *doing* something” (p.47, italics in original). In this light, descriptions are not just words used to refer to some abstract, self-evident or tangible thing, but they are highly interpretative and involved in actually creating a version of that thing. From this point of view, and indeed it is one that is underpins both CA and DP research (e.g. Potter, 1996; Sacks, 1972, Hepburn

& Wiggins, 2007; Wiggins, 2017; see also Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis), the ways in which laughter is described and oriented to in interaction should be seen as purposeful.

However, if we acknowledge that the ways in which we describe and talk about laughter is tied with a level of subjectivity and reflexivity, then this presents a potential issue for researchers looking at laughter and who want to make analytic claims about different types of laughter that they have recorded in interaction. After all, if the words used to categorise and describe laughter are linked with issues of subjectivity and interpretation, then how do researchers communicate to a reader what it was about a particular instance of laughter which led them to make the claim that they did? Similarly, what was it about a particular laugh which led them to refer to it as a 'dirty laugh', for example? Also, how does an analyst uphold the broad CA concern that every detail matters when dealing with laughter without using the sort of loaded descriptions which rely heavily on interpretation? The preliminary steps to answering these concerns can be found in the work of Gail Jefferson (1979, 1984, 1985, 2010) and her colleagues (1977), which have provided CA with the tools for dealing with laughter and giving analysts the opportunity to make observations about what laughter is 'doing' in interaction.

Jefferson et al. (1977) provide a number of observations about laughter that can be made when it is subjected to a careful transcription. Notably, they demonstrate how in instances where people are laughing together, they are not necessarily laughing in unison, that often laughter will stop once somebody starts to talk, and that this talk will follow without a gap or any overlap of the laughter. This work also put forward the concept of a "laugh unit" (p.6) and the suggestion that, like turns at talk, an instance of laughter could have possible completion/transition places build into it. The observations made here, and developed further by Jefferson (1985, 2004), demonstrate that laughter is a systematically designed feature of interaction that is utilised by speakers to accomplish a range of social actions. But more than that, Jefferson and her colleagues have given analysts some tools that they can use to begin to capture laughter in their written transcripts. Using the conventions

outlined by Jefferson et al. (1977) and Jefferson (1985), we can capture details about the number of syllables, or parts, that make up a piece of laughter by transcribing each audible particle as 'hah'. Therefore, an instance of laughter that had 3 audible syllables would be transcribed as 'hah hah hah', which we could refer to as 3-part laugh unit. By doing this, the duration of an instance of laughter can be captured and the sequential placement in any ongoing interaction can be observed. In addition to this, by utilising different "voiced vowels" (Hepburn & Varney, 2013, p.28) in conjunction with the 'h', analysts can also go some way in capturing aspects of the sound or pronunciation of the laughter. Therefore, open mouthed laugh units can be represented as 'hah' but more closed mouth, stifled laughter can be presented as 'huh/heh/hih/hoh'.

Jefferson's "path breaking work" (Potter & Hepburn, 2010, p. 1543) on the transcription of laughter and the conventions outlined in her work have endured and have provided the basis for analysing laughter in much of the work that has adopted conversation analytic methods (Glenn, 2003; Glenn & Holt, 2013; Hepburn & Varney, 2013; Hepburn & Bolden, 2017). As a result, CA research has been able to demonstrate that, far from being just a unitary response to something perceived to be humorous, it has shown laughter "to be a far more complex and multifaceted phenomenon" (Holt, 2013, p.1), which is deployed in meaningful ways in interaction. However, the transcription conventions outlined by Jefferson are not always the most helpful and/or appropriate method of capturing laughter found in recordings obtained in certain settings. This has meant that analysts have created ways of modifying transcription conventions on laughter, and other laughter relevant phenomena, in order to better meet the demands of their data. For example, McIlvenny, Mettovaara, & Tapio (1993) in their work on audience responses to stand-up comedy, were dealing with mass audience responses to comedians and, as such, could not capture the particularities of a bout of laughter in the fine-grained detailed that Jefferson et al. (1977) proposed. McIlvenny et al. instead took inspiration from Atkinson's (1984) work on political speeches, whereby he transcribed bursts of applause using as a sequence of 'x's, capitalising them to indicate raised volume or intensity of the

clapping. This allowed Atkinson to track the sequential placement of applause in relation to the ongoing politician's speeches. For example, in the extract below, (Extract 1), featuring a speech by Labour MP Tony Benn, we can see the point at which the audience overlaps his talk and where this applause is the loudest (indicated by the capitalised 'X's).

Extract - 3.1

(Labour Party Conference, 1980 – taken from Atkinson, 1984, p.42)

(22) (Labour Party conference, 1980)

Benn: . . . I have been responsible now for five years to see the policies develop in the sub-committees, come to the executive, be discussed, go to the unions for consultation, be discussed in the liaison committee with the unions, come to conference, be endorsed; and then I have seen them cast aside in secret by those who are not accountable to this [movement. Comrades I invite you to support]=

Audience: [x-xxXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX]=

Benn: =[this motion]

Audience: [XXXXXXX]XXXXXX . . . . (standing ovation)

This method of transcribing a mass response, allowed Atkinson to determine the ways in which politicians could 'trap' applause from the audience (a "claptrap", 1980, p.47). Taking this forward, McIlvenny et al. (1993) used sequences of 'h's to represent audience laughter, again using capitalisation to indicate raised volume, allowing them to illustrate where audience laughter was sequentially located and responsive to the comedian's jokes (as shown in Extract 2, below).

Extract 3.2

(Bill Hicks: B19 – Taken from McIlvenny et al. 1993, p.231)

```
BH:          i got a(.)classic face: that
             i don't know what's wrong with my face but
             people i don't even know walk up to me out of the
             blue
             and go <<what's wrong>>.          ((imitative))
              (0.5)
AUD:         hhhhhhhhhhh-h-h-h

BH:          nothing.  (0.7)
       A->   <<well it takes more energy to frown than it does
             to smile>>  ((face))
AUD:                     [hh-h-h-]

BH:    B->   yeah (y'know)it takes more energy to point that out
             than it does to leave me alone.
AUD:                                          [hhHHHHHHHHHhhh
             hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh
                   [-x-x-   -x-]
BN:                [yeah really(.)so why don't you
```

By using the broad the principles for transcribing laughter as outlined by Jefferson, (e.g. the use of h's of different sizes to indicate volume), McIlvenney et al. were able to capture the laughter of audiences, map the sequential placement and, as a result, identify and explore the phenomena of "laugh traps" (p.230), which are the devices used by comedians to get audience members to laugh.

The attempts by analysts to capture the particularities of laughter and how it is placed sequentially in broader sequences of interaction, once again reflect the broad CA/DP notion of "order at all points" (Sacks, 1984, p.22) but they also represent attempts to move away from the sort of problematic categorisation and description that Edwards (1991, 1994, 1997) and Potter (1997) discuss. However, as shall be demonstrated later on in this chapter, there are still performative aspects of laughter which are not fully captured using existing transcription conventions and therefore, even when analysts are carefully tracking laughter's placement, this may lead analysts to utilise descriptions or characterisations of instances of laughter which are overly interpretative (e.g. by referring to a bout of laughter as 'dirty' or 'sarcastic').

Elsewhere, written transcripts that do not engage with the fine-grained particularities of laughter, that is, ones which have not closely adhered to Sacks' concern for "order at all points"

(1984, p.22), tend to simply note the occurrence of laughter as they would for other forms of non-spoken phenomena (Jefferson, 1985; Hepburn & Varney, 2013). In these transcripts, laughter is relegated to being reported in double parentheses, alongside coughing or sneezing, (e.g. "((laughs))"). There are a number of problems with this way of transcribing laughter, not least because it is built on, at best, the assumption that all laughter is equal and, at worst, the assumption that laughter's presence in interaction is inconsequential and therefore we only need to acknowledge that it happened and we don't need to discuss this any further. Jefferson (1985) addresses this method of transcribing laughter and illustrates why an approach to laughter which confines it double parentheses may be problematic and may "obscure interesting features of interaction" (p.28). To illustrate, consider the following extracts taken from Jefferson (1985).

Extract 3.3

(GTS:I: 1: 14, 1965, cited in Jefferson, 1985, p.28)

Louise: ((through bubbling laughter)) Playing with his organ yeah I thought the same thing!

Here the analyst has utilized "through bubbling laughter" to describe the type of laughter produced by Louise and also make the reader aware of how it features sequentially with the ongoing talk (it is 'bubbling' throughout it). However, the reader of this orthographic rendering of laughter is left with little information about how it was performed and what ways in which it 'bubbled' through the talk. Her revised version of this passage, shown below in extract 4, captures the sequential placement of the laughter in relation to the ongoing interaction.

Extract 3.4

(GTS:I 1: 14, 1965, cited in Jefferson, 1985, p.29)

Louise: heh huh hh PLAYN(h)W(h)IZ O(h)R'N

Ya:h I thought the same

In this revised extract, it is clear to the reader exactly where in which Louise's laughter appears in regards to her talk. A reader of this transcript can see exactly where the laugh particles are sequentially placed and punctuate Louise's talk. More specifically, by moving beyond the 'bubbling' description, Jefferson is able to demonstrate that it is only one part of Louise's talk that appears to be 'bubbling with laughter' and that is when Louise is talking about 'playing with his organ', (a mishearing of 'playing with his orchid', delivered earlier by another speaker). Therefore, by paying careful attention to the placement of laughter particles in relation to the broader sequence of talk in which it occurs, we can track exactly its appearance exactly and also avoid relying on analyst descriptions and/or categorisation (as Potter, 1997 and Edwards, 1991, 1994, 1997, warned us against). In this way, an analyst can simply make visible to the reader of their transcript where the laughter occurred, what it sounded like, and how it was attended to by those involved in interaction. As such, this approach better addresses broader CA/DP concerns about analyses based on a "data-based argument" (tenHave, 2010, p.120).

However, as I have discussed in my work with Alexa Hepburn, (Hepburn & Varney, 2013), is that double parentheses can be used to accompany the detailed transcription of laughter to help the reader distinguish it from other sounds. In particular, laughter contains differing degrees of aspiration and in some cases is almost entirely composed of breathy aspirated sounds (as we shall see later in this chapter). Therefore, our suggestion in this earlier work was that analysts could include a brief description in parentheses where necessary to help the reader differentiate between other aspirated sounds such as crying or coughing (see Hepburn, 2004 for discussion on laughter and crying). Therefore, a piece of laughter which is transcribed as "khn hhhuh hhh" for example, could be accompanied by ((breathy laughter)) in double parentheses.

The numerous instances of heavily aspirated laughter in the sitcom watching data collected for this thesis has since made me reconsider the way in which this type of laughter is transcribed. Therefore, in the following section of this chapter I want to outline some ways in which laughter can

be transcribed for analysis in a manner that better captures the performative qualities which have hitherto not been fully translated from the recorded video/audio to the written transcripts. Whilst it may be difficult to remove interpretation completely, it will be argued make available aspects of laughter that are hearable in audio recordings without relying on their descriptions, or at the very least, provide them with a basis for any classification they make which can be seen by any reader of the transcripts. For example, instead of discussing an instance of laughter being a 'dirty laugh', relying solely on the analyst's interpretation, we can demonstrate to readers how a piece of laughter was performed and what qualities are noticeable in the audio recording that could reasonably lead one to classify it as being 'dirty'. But more than this, a detailed rendering of the laughter heard in audio recordings also satisfies more general concerns about details being important (i.e. Sacks' notion of "order at all points", 1984, p.22). By capturing more of the performative or audible qualities of laughter, analysts are opening up new potential avenues for analysis, (an argument that will be continued in Chapter 4 of this present thesis), which can allow for us to better understand the orderliness that underpins interaction and gives us the ability to further scrutinise the interactional significance of laughter. Given that "a person's laughter is probably as distinctive as his speaking voice" (Provine, 2000, p.63) it would be a worthwhile endeavour to capture this in the transcripts that we use for research.

3.3 - Getting Our Hands on Laughter

Gail Jefferson's posited that transcription is about us trying to "get our hands on" actual occurrences to study the particularities of social order (1985, p.26). When I began transcribing the sitcom watching data for this thesis, I was faced with a number of instances of laughter. Following Jefferson (1985; 2010) and Jefferson et al. (1977), the use of 'h' with either the inclusion of an 'a' for open position laughter (e.g. hah) or an 'e', 'i', 'u' or 'n' for closed position laughter (e.g. heh, hih, huh, or hnh) was utilised to capture the laughter produced. Similarly, the number of laugh particles, or 'N-part laugh units' as Jefferson et al. (1977) refer to them, could be established and transcribed and the

sequential placement of the laughter, relative to the surrounding talk could also be represented in the transcripts. For some instances of laughter, Jefferson's "gold standard" transcription conventions (Lerner, 2004, p.3) were able to fully capture the ways in which it was deployed by the sitcom viewers. To illustrate, consider extract 3.5 below, which features Graham and Norma watching an episode of *One Foot in the Grave*. On-screen, the lead character, Victor, is describing the repairs which were recently carried out on his car.

Extract 3.5 - Victor's Car

```
1        Victor:    They had to fit a new clutch, a complete new gearbox and four new ty:res.
2                        (0.6)
3        Victor:    I don't know why they didn't stick a new car on to the wing mirror and be with it.
4 →      Graham:  Uh hah hah [hah hah] hah.
5 →      Norma:                [ Ha::h ]
```

In this extract, we see that both Graham and Norma laugh. Graham produces a bout of laughter that is comprised of six laugh particles, (line 4, a 6-part laugh unit), and Norma produces just one laugh particle in partial overlap with Graham, (line 5). Both instances of laughter could be described as open position laughter, that is, it is laughter that has been produced relatively open-mouthed (a detail which can be verified by the supporting image), with each particle having a recognizable 'hah' type sound, with a noticeable voiced vowel 'a'. Also, both Norma and Graham are visibly smiling during

the production of this laughter. As such, it is difficult to dispute that this instance is in fact laughter, as opposed to some other non-speech sound and, using Jefferson's detailed conventions, the particularities of this laughter can be captured for the reader.

Yet, this type of open-mouthed laughter was not found regularly in the sitcom watching data. Certainly, it was not the most common type of laughter that was produced by the sitcom viewers across the data collected for this thesis. Instead, what was striking was just how varied the laughter produced by viewers was. This variation was not just evident between viewers, it was also evident between instances. That is, the variety of laughter found was not just a product of the fact that the recordings featured people of different ages, genders, accents etc. but it was also evident that a single participant laughed in a number of ways during the course of a recording, insofar as it would not be possible to establish how a person usually laughs. Instead, what was clear was that people laugh in many different ways, and these variations can be seen to be orienting to the material that is playing out on-screen (an issue that will be pursued in further detail in Chapter 4). For example, it was common that in the space of any given recording, an individual would produce bouts of laughter that differed in terms of the duration, pitch, and audible vowel sound but also in regards to whether it was produced with a relatively open mouth or a closed mouth. Similarly, some instances of laughter contained clear voiced vowel sounds (e.g. hah/heh/hih/hoh/huh) whilst others relied much more on the use nose or throat (and as such were usually produced with a closed mouth). Elsewhere, laughter was found to be produced within spoken words (concurrent with Potter & Hepburn, 2010, and their work on interpolated laughter particles), which modified the production of the spoken words and the laughter present there.

In sum, in order to accurately represent the laughter recorded in the sitcom watching data and, by doing so, allow for me to make analytic claims about the occurrence and uses of laughter by individuals, then it was clear that some modification to the conventions set out and established by Jefferson (1979, 1984, 1985, 2004, 2010) and Jefferson et al. (1977), by drawing upon work by

others, such as Hepburn (2004) and Potter and Hepburn (2010) who have further scrutinised how laughter and other aspiration-based phenomena, and developing a way of better 'getting my hands on' laughter, whilst at the same time remaining sensitive to Edwards (1991, 1994, 1997) and Potter's (1997) concerns about categorisation and description.

The remainder of this chapter then, is dedicated to demonstrating how some of the performative and audible features of laughter which have hitherto not been subject to close inspection can be transcribed for analysis. Developing on from my earlier work with Alexa Hepburn, (Hepburn & Varney, 2013), it is argued here that with a closer inspection of laughter and a more detailed transcription can enable analysts to better 'get their hands on' their recorded data, upholding the tradition of using fine-grained transcription that feature prominently in CA work. In doing so, the varied and multifaceted nature of laughter will be made visible to the reader, showing how it is far from a unitary, homogenous, non-verbal production. This will provide not only a better understanding of the ways in which laughter can be utilised by individuals more generally but will also give an insight into how individuals who are watching TV sitcoms together interact with and respond to the on-screen show.

3.4 – Laugher Tracked

Contained in this chapter are a number of instances of laughter which were captured within the sitcom watching data. The purpose here is to illustrate further the arguments made about how we can better 'get our hands on' laughter and how the performative qualities can be captured for analysis. In doing so, some common features of laughter will be highlighted and guidance for transcription of these components of laughter will be given. Whilst the laughter contained herein is somewhat collected together by these features, this is not intended as a typology of laughter, in that I'm not arguing that laughter can be constrained to broad classifications (this, as discussed earlier in the chapter, presents problems for analysts). However, what I am arguing here is that there are certain

qualities of laughter that can be identified in the recordings we collect and these can be mapped out in transcripts in the manner that other performative aspects of talk are.

To begin let us revisit Graham and Norma, who are watching One Foot in the Grave on TV. In extract 3.5 we observed Graham laughing, producing a 6-part laugh unit "Uh hah hah hah hah hah" (line 4). If we examine a still image of Graham whilst he is producing this laughter we can see that this bout of laughter has been produced with an open-mouth and is accompanied by a smile (FIG.3.1 – below).

FIG.3.1

Graham at line 4, extract 3.5

In terms of the length and audible construction of this laughter, it resembles the sort of laughter that would be heard on a laugh track. It is then, rather unambiguously an instance of laughter. However, if we compare Graham as shown in FIG. 3.2 below, taken from a different occasion where he laughs, we can see that this laughter has been produced without an accompanying smile, indeed this is a laugh produced with a relatively close-mouthed, and, if we examine the transcript from which this is taken (extract 3.6, below), we can see that the laughter one consists of one laugh particle (line 5).

FIG. 3.2

Graham at line 5, extract 3.6

Extract 3.6 – Car Keys

```
01 Victor:        Margaret where the hell di you put my ca::r keys?
02                     (0.5)
03                     ((V puts his hand in his pocket and finds keys))
04 Victor:        How did they get in there, I never put them there.
05 Graham:     →  [ Hnh   ]
06 Victor:        [You know ] (.) that Derek Gibson .
```

Extract 3.6 here has been produced using the guidelines outlined by Jefferson (1985, 2010) and Jefferson et al. (1977), with this single-unit laugh particle being transcribed as ‘hnh’ to denote the closed mouth position with which it was produced. Yet, if one listens to the audio recording of this laughter, the sound produced is much more aspirated and does not contain an audible ‘n’ but something more akin to an exhaled ‘ff’. In addition, this brief laughter is also combined with an audible ‘m’, which when combined with the ‘f’ and the voiced ‘h’ which usually is used to represent laughter, we end up with “hmfh”. Therefore, extract 3.6 could be re-transcribed as extract 3.7 below, given the reader a more detailed account of the laughter that was produced.

Extract 3.7 – Car Keys - Revised

```
01 Victor:        Margaret where the hell di you put my ca::r keys?
02                     (0.5)
03                     ((V puts his hand in his pocket and finds keys))
04 Victor:        How did they get in there, I never put them there.
05 Graham:     → [Hhmfh ]
06 Victor:        [You know ] (.) that Derek Gibson.
```

As I have argued in my work with Alexa Hepburn, (Hepburn & Varney, 2013), and as argued by Hepburn (2004) in her work on the transcription of crying, the richness of audible phenomena can be captured in transcripts and we can begin to move away from relying solely on unitary categories of 'laughing' or 'crying' and, as I argue here, can begin to get our hands on the performative qualities which provides a wealth of variation in laughter without relying solely on analyst's interpretation or categorization (e.g. referring to a laugh as being 'dirty' or a 'belly laugh'). As extract 3.7 demonstrates, there are issues of aspiration and the voicing of different consonants which modify the sound of laughter. In anatomical terms, an instance of laughter is the combined product of the larynx, the nose, and differing levels of tension and/or shaping of the mouth, the relative role of each of these varies from instance to instance, resulting in different sounding laughter. Similarly, there are occasions where we attempt to stifle or supress laughter, either by manipulating the machinery involved in laughter (e.g. biting one's lip) or by the introduction of a hand over the mouth in the hopes of 'catching' the laugh. Again, these interventions will change the sound of the resulting laughter. Also, there are occasions where we try to talk through laughter, producing something that is a combination of spoken components of talk with sniffs, snorts or other sorts of guttural type sounds. In short, there are many ways in which the sound of laughter can be modified and what follows in this chapter is some illustrations of how the fine details of laughter can be captured by analysts. In doing so, we will see that sitcom viewers produce a diverse range of laughter in response

to the on-screen comedy which, as we shall further discuss in Chapter 4 of this thesis, is deployed in interaction as a member's method to accomplish different interactional business. For now though, let us examine some of the ways in which laughter can be performed and transcribed for research. Whilst what follows are examples loosely grouped together because they share common laugh features, this is by no means a clear-cut taxonomy of different types of laugher. Instead, what is commonly found is that elements are combined and aspects of the different performative qualities can be found in the course of an instance of laughter. Therefore, it is quite possible to have a bout of laughter which has a number of the qualities discussed in the forthcoming sections.

3.5 – Performing Laughter

3.5.1 – Nasal Qualities

In this section I will present a number of examples that feature laughter which has been produced with a closed mouth and with a heavy involvement of the nose. As such, the laughter is similar to a sniff but is produced as an exhalation rather than an inhalation. As such, this aspect of the laughter is captured using 'f's (we saw an example of this usage in Graham's laughter in the previous section of this chapter). In the extract below, (extract 3.8), Jim is responding to a comical sequence from the show Come Fly with Me. On-screen, immigration officer Ian is talking the (fake) documentary crew through his investigations surrounding a man who he suspects of using a fake passport. It is clear to viewers at home that the image on the passport is of a female child whereby the man using the passport is an elderly man. It is this which Jim responds to as a laughable.

Extract 3.8 – Photo of Our Friend

1 Ian: Well what I've done i:s, I've taken a photo of our friend he:re.

2 (0.3)

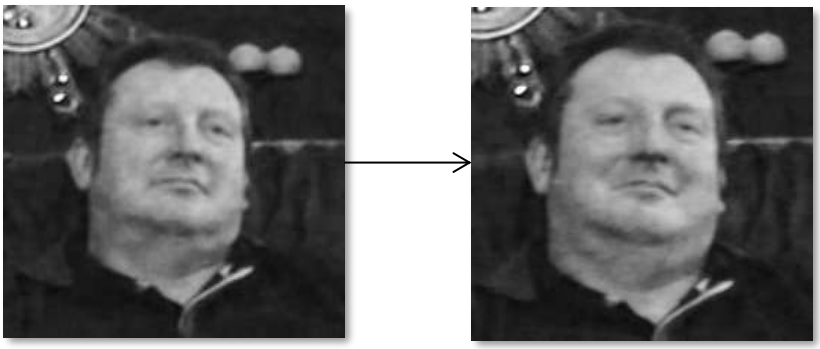
3 Ian: Err::mh, [and I've noticed] there are a number of differences.

4 Jim: [Hnffh.]

As shown in the image accompanying Jim's laughter on line 4, this single part laugh unit is produced with a closed mouth, but with a slight smile. As such, Jim's laughter here relies heavily on his nose and has a supressed or stifled quality to it. In order to capture these in a written transcript the consonants 'n' and 'f' have been used here to whilst the 'h' at the beginning and end of the particle give an indication that this is laughter (a modification of the standard 'hah' but without the voiced 'a' sound). Whilst audibly this is identifiable as a piece of laughter, if we compare Jim's facial expression on line 4 with his facial expression moments before he laughs, we see only very slight changes (FIG. 3.3.)

FIG.3.3

Comparison of Jim at line 3 and line 4



Jim at line 3 (not laughing) Jim at line 4 (laughing)

As shown in FIG. 3.3 the difference between Jim's face on line 3 when he is not laughing to his face whilst laughing on line 4 are subtle and slight. Therefore, we can go some way in communicating this to readers of the transcript by using the 'f' to denote a stifled, nasal exhalation quality. To further illustrate this quality, consider the following extract, (extract 3.9), featuring Annette and Beverley who are responding to a 'joke' from the sitcom *Outnumbered*.

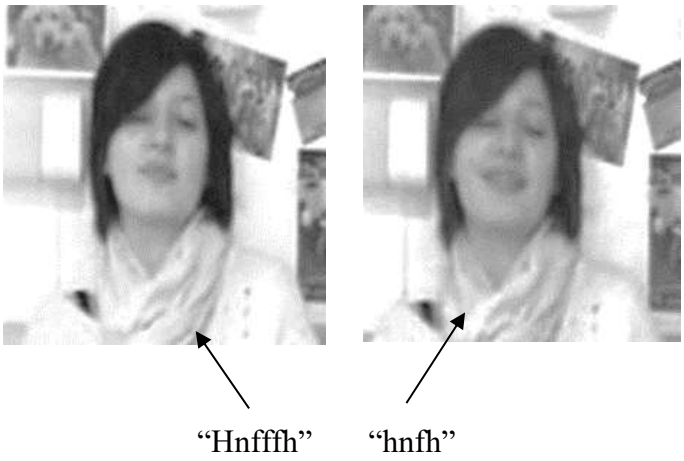
Extract 3.9 - What is Wrong With You?

1	Jake:	What is wro:ng with you?
2	Karen:	Yes what is wrong with you?
3	Pete:	Karen-
4	Ann:	Hnfffh [hnfh]
5	Bev:	[hkuh]

In this extract we see Annette and Beverley both laughing in response to a sequence of talk whereby Jake is in the middle of an argument with his parents. At which point, Karen sarcastically repeats Jake's turn with "Yes what is wrong with you?" on line 2. This is followed by the Dad, Pete, admonishing Karen. Off-screen, Annette produces a 2-part laugh unit; "Hnfffh hnfh" (line 4) which is in partial overlap with Beverley's single part laugh unit, "hkuh" (line 5). Again, the transcript here illustrates that the laughter produced by Annette has been done so with a closed mouth and contains an exhaled nasal quality (as denoted by the 'f's), and as such is stifled by these. If we examine the still images of Annette at this time, FIG. 3.4, below, we can see that the nasal exhalation quality to this instance of laughter changes slightly as she smiles (producing a shorter nasal laugh "hnfh").

FIG. 3.4

Comparison of Annette at the start and end of line 4



Beverley's laugh in extract 3.9 is also interesting here as this too features a stifled type quality but rather than being a nasal type production, her laughter is modified by a back of the throat type quality. Here, this feature is captured by using the consonant 'k' which represents the guttural, almost clicking sound made here. We shall discuss these type of guttural or back of the throat modifications which produce laughter like Beverley's "hkuh" (line 5) shortly. However, for the time being, let us consider another example of laughter which has a distinct nasal quality to it. Here, in extract 3.10, Paul and Barry are watching an episode of Phoenix Nights. On-screen, in the midst of a funeral wake for one of the characters in the show, somebody at the back of the room wins the jackpot on the fruit machine located in the room. As such, it starts making lots of noise as the coins are released to the player. In addition, this particular fruit machine is themed around the film 'Das Boot' and as such starts shouting German phrases to indicate the jackpot has been won (line 2).

Extract 3.10 - Das Boot

```
1                    ((Music plays from fruit machine as money cascades out))
2      Machine:  WUNDERBAR (.) DAS [ JACKPOT.]
3      Paul:                       [ Hnnh ]Hnnh=
4      Machine:  WUNDER[ BAR.  SCHNELL SCHNELL, DIVE DIVE  ]
5      Paul:           [=Eh hnh hnffh hnh hmh hmh] hmh
```

On lines 3 and 5 Paul produces a course of laughter that consists of nine laugh particles in total; a two part laugh unit (line 3) and a 7 part laugh unit (line 5). As shown in FIG 3.5 below, this bout of laughter has been produced with a closed mouth and therefore the sound is expelled with breath from Paul's nose, stifling the laugh sound. As such, we see the 'f' notation in the transcript to capture this. However, we also see the use of a combination of 'm' and 'n' used here. These consonants represent a closed-mouth sound which is almost voiced. There is a hum like quality to this sound and, as such, it occupies some middle ground between a purely aspirated laugh sound and voiced vowel open-mouthed laughter (i.e. hah/heh/huh/hih/hoh). Further to this, as FIG. 3.5 shows, Paul's laughter that contains these 'm' and 'n' type sounds is performed with a smile and raised eyebrows, features which are commonly found with open-mouthed laughter. As such, this is a further suggestion that this type of stifled laughter is moving towards the voiced vowel type of laughter.

FIG. 3.5

Comparison of Paul on lines 3 and 5

Paul at line 3

Paul at line 5

There was a further nasal type quality that was found in the sitcom watching data which gave laughter a stifled quality which differed from the previous examples in that, where that laughter was transcribed as ‘f’ to represent a breathy nasal exhalation, this laughter quality has a wet, almost snotty, sound to it. As such, the notion ‘sn’ has been used to represent this in the transcripts. To illustrate, let us examine another instance of Paul and Barry watching *Phoenix Nights* (extract 3.11, below).

Extract 3.11 – Colon Care

1 ((Jerry is reading a leaflet on colon care whilst sitting on the toilet))

2 ((Jerry turns the leaflet over))

```
3      Barry:   Hgh huh hnh
4                  (.)
5 →    Paul:     Snh snkh hgh
```

In this sequence, the ‘humour’ on-screen is constructed non-verbally. Here, one of the main characters, Jerry, is looking at a leaflet labelled ‘colon care’ (line 1) whilst sitting on the toilet. On line 2, Jerry turns over the leaflet to reveal a picture of British children’s TV presenter Bob Carolgees who is famous for having a dog puppet called spit the dog. The presentation of Bob’s picture is followed by laughter from both Barry and Paul, each producing a 3 part laugh unit. Barry’s laughter, “Hgh huh hnh” (line 3), contains guttural or back of the throat qualities, as represented by the ‘g’ and

‘n’ here. However, Paul’s laughter on line 5, “Snh snkh hgh”, is of most interest here because it embodies a wet nasal quality. Again, we can see by examining the supporting still image that this bout of laughter has been performed by Paul with a closed mouth and a smile on his face. The audible wet or snotty sound that accompanies his nasal laugh is transcribed here as “sn” and in this example, we can see this quality in two of the three laugh parts of this laugh unit.

What we have seen in these examples is some of the ways in which nasal qualities can be found in instances of laughter. Moreover, we have seen how sitcom viewers deploy these varying formulations of laughter in response to humorous content on-screen. These nasal qualities have hitherto not been fully captured in the way that laughter is transcribed. Therefore, not only have we seen these performative qualities of laughter in action, I have also demonstrated how these aspects of laughter can be captured in the transcripts that we make. Further to this, I will now outline another quality of laughter which we have already seem some examples of in conjunction with nasal elements but will be more fully unpacked here; guttural or back of the throat qualities.

3.5.2 – Guttural Qualities

Guttural laughter was identified by Jefferson in her work on laughter, (e.g. Jefferson, 2010), therefore this aspect of laughter is something which has had some prior attention. However, what will be demonstrated here is that there are additional ways in which we can ‘get our hands on’ these type of qualities in our transcripts. To illustrate, let us first examine extract 3.12, below, which features Jim, Barbara and Chuck watching an episode of *Benidorm*. On-screen, Kenneth burps after eating a large breakfast and then rubs his stomach in discomfort.

Extract 3.12– That's Better

1	Ken:	((Burps))
2		(0.7)
3	Ken:	Ooowh
4		(0.5)
5	Ken:	Ooffh
6		(0.8)
7	Barb:	Hgh hgmh
8		(1.0)
9	Ken:	Ooh that's better.

In this extract, Barbara responds to Kenneth's exaggerated belching and moans of discomfort with a two part laugh unit. As shown in the still image above, Barbara performs this with a closed mouth but with a smile. As a result, her laughter here is somewhat restrained and the has a back of the throat or guttural quality to it. Therefore, this is represented in the transcript by using the consonant 'g'. However, in the second part of Barbara's laughter there is also the audible 'm' sound which we have seen in previous instances of laughter. Here, when used in conjunction with the 'g' as seen on line 7, it captures a sound which is almost hum but produced at the back of the throat.

A further guttural type sound which resembles a click but is more supressed. As such, the consonant 'k' is used to capture this quality, as illustrated in extract 3.13 below. Here, Beverley produces this single part laugh unit whilst watching the sitcom *Outnumbered*. On-screen, Frank is

watching the TV and has just been joined by his daughter Sue, for who he provides a commentary of what is happening on his TV.

Extract 3.13 – Eisenhower

```
1        Frank:   Here comes Eisenhower.
2                          (1.5)
3        Frank:   I think that driver was the bird he was knocking off.
4                          (0.7)
5 →      Bev: Hkugh
```

On line 1 here, Frank performs a noticing of Dwight Eisenhower (34th US President) who has appeared on his TV set; “Here comes Eisenhower”. This commentary is produced for Sue’s benefit who has just entered the room and is produced with a point towards the TV. After a 1.5 second silence, Frank performs another noticing and it is this which is the source of the ‘humour’ here. On line 3 Frank, whilst pointing at the TV, remarks “I think that driver was the bird he was knocking off.” Here Frank’s use of colloquial language; ‘bird’ meaning lady, and ‘knocking off’ to refer to having sex with someone, is what Beverley treats as laughable and produces a single part laugh unit; “Hkugh” (line 5).

Beverley’s single laugh particle contains two of the aspects which we have seen associated with guttural or back of the throat production of laughter. The first is the “k” representing the click like sound and the second is the “gh” which captures the throaty quality of this laughter. Again, if we

examine the still image which accompanies the transcript, we can see that this laughter was produced with a closed mouth and therefore it is somewhat stifled or restrained and is hearable as such. As with the previous examples in this chapter, had we not adopted a fine-grained approach to the transcription of, these performative qualities would not have been fully captured and therefore potentially missing something of interactional significance (remembering Sack's concern about 'order at all points' - 1984, p.22).

So far in this section of this chapter we have seen a number of instances of laughter which have tended to be composed of minimal laugh particles and contain just one or two audible qualities . However, a feature that was fond in the laughter from the sitcom watching data was that there were occasions where the laughter contained a number of, for example, the nasal and guttural aspects discussed thus far. To illustrate, extract 3.14 below, demonstrates how a number of the performative qualities of laughter can combine together within one course of laughter. Here, Paul and Barry are watching Phoenix Nights together. On-screen, Brain is in the process of telling his employee, 'Holy Mary', off for decorating the room in balloons that have a religious message printed on them.

Extract 3.14 - God Loves You Brian

1 Mary: ((Inhales helium from a balloon)) ↑↑God loves ya Brian.

2 (.)

3 Barry: [Hgnhh,]

```
4   Brian:    [  Does he?  ]
5   Barry:    >hnh hnh [hnh<]
6   Paul:              [Hmh  ]
7   Brian:    He's a funny way oh [   showin' it.   ]
8   Barry:                   [hHgh Hunh]
9   Paul:     °hgh-hgh°
10  Barry:    Hmguh
11  Paul:     snhh hnh hmh snh
12  Barry:    Hguh.
```

On line 1, Holy Mary inhales helium from one of the balloons she had been inflating, as such this makes her voice go high pitched. This is followed by a series of laughs produced off-screen by Paul and Barry. Firstly, on line 3 Barry produces a guttural "hgnhh" in response to Mary's high-pitched "↑↑God loves ya Brian" on line 1. As the sequence progresses, we can see how the laughter produced by Paul and Barry changes to include other audible aspects. Starting on line 5, Barry produces a quick 3 unit laugh part (denoted here by> and <). Also evident here is the audible 'n' sound in amongst the aspirated elements. In partial overlap, Paul produces a single "hmh" on line 6. Here the closed mouth 'hum' type sound is represented using the consonant 'm'.

On line 8, Barry produces a further 2 particles of laughter; "hHgh Hunh" here we can see signs that the production of his laughter is corresponding with a change in facial expression as we see the noticeably louder 'H' here, but also get a vocalised 'hun' sound which corresponds with him visibly smiling and his mouth opening. Paul follows with two particles which are produced gutturally and quieter than the surrounding laughter. As such, his "°hgh-hgh°" (line 9), almost resembles a pulsing sound. The laughs continue with Barry producing another guttural laugh with elements of a partially open mouth ("hmguh") which is proceeded by Paul, smiling but still with a closed mouth,

producing a nasal with wet nasal components, 4 unit laugh part; “snhh hnh hmh snh” (line 11). Barry then closes the sequence with a final “hguh”, produced with a smiley, partially open mouth but with back of the throat qualities.

What has been illustrated here is that in the course of a sequence of interaction, laughter can change its shape as the person laughing changes the positioning of their mouth and as such, relies more or less heavily on their nose and throat. This sequence, highlighting a range of different laugh particles, is representative of the sequences of laughter that span a number of spoken turns. In minimal courses, the qualities of laughter tend to stay fairly constant (as we have seen in previous extracts here). However, when the laughter stretches over a longer sequence of talk, we find the shape of laughter can change mid-production. As a result, when a detailed transcription of the fine-grained particulars of laughter is used, such as the one described here, we can track those changes more comprehensively and therefore, we can track whether changes in the sound are related to the broader sequence of interaction in which it is occurring.

3.5.3 – Other Laugh Sounds

In the final analytic section of this chapter, I want to draw your attention to some laughter which is produced in such a way that it contains other sorts of non-speech sounds which, elsewhere in talk would be used to accomplish other specific interactional business such as displaying disgust or surprise. To illustrate this consider extract 3.15 below which again sees Erin and Lenny watching *Friday Night Dinner*.

Extract 3.15 – A Good Life

1 Jackie: Oh we:::ll she did have a good life I >‘spo:se<?

2 Gran: Not rhe:ally,

3 (0.8)

4 Gran: Her ~lungs were riddled with ho:les and she had an ulcerated ↑colon~.

5 (.)

6 Erin: Hheurgh hhurgh

7 (2.5)

8 Jackie: Sti::ll.

9 Lenny: Hmhmph

This particular sequence occurs shortly after the family have discovered that Grandma's dog has died. In this scene, the family are watching on as Martin carries the dog out to the car. Jackie, standing in the doorway with Grandma tries to console her mother-in-law with " Oh we:::ll she did have a good life I >'spo:se<?" (line 1). This is not received by Grandma as an attempt to comfort her and she replies "Not rhe:ally," (line 2) and after a 0.8 second pause, "Her ~lungs were riddled with ho:les and she had an ulcerated ↑colon~.". It is this vivid description of the dog's health issues that Erin treats as a laughable, producing a 2 part laugh unit on line 6 "Hheurgh hhurgh". Here the laugh is produced in conjunction with a voiced 'eurgh' sound and orients to the graphic description of the dead dog's medical issues. What we see here then, is laughter being used not just as laughter but also a display of disgust. This is further demonstrated in the still image which depicts Erin at line 6; her teeth are gritted, her eyes are closed and her mouth is angled down. If one looked at the image alone then you would be forgiven for thinking this was just a display of disgust, however, if we use the transcription conventions which I detail in this thesis, then we can see that this display of display has

been produced through the laughter (the relevance for these type of mixed-laughter displays will be discussed in detail in chapter 4).

3.6 – Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a detail account of how the performative qualities that are associated with laughter can be transcribed for analysis. As such, it has been demonstrated that laughter is a multifaceted and highly diverse phenomena that is produced in different ways. As such, it is important to consider the wider sequential context within which an instance of laughter is produced. The guidance for transcription here, with illustrative examples from the sitcom watching data provide a framework for which laughter can be captured in other settings and, crucially, instances of laughter can be represented as the variable phenomena that it is. In short, what this chapter has shown is that 'laughter' is not a unitary phenomena but this variation can be tracked in transcripts. The take home message here is that not all laughs are equal.

Chapter 4

The Business of Laughter:

Laughter, Accountability, Stance and Social Action

4.0 – Chapter Overview

In chapter 3 of this thesis, a detailed inspection of the laughter found in the sitcom watching data was provided and illustrated with specific examples from this dataset. This chapter can be seen as building upon that work and demonstrating how laughter is instrumental in the ways in which people negotiate and manage the CA/DP notion of accountability. The observations contained here are only possible because of the meticulous transcription that I have advocated in chapter 3 and, as such, this chapter can be seen as a further justification as to why taking the time to transcribe laughter carefully can be a fruitful exercise as it opens up further avenues of analysis.

To begin with in section 4.1, the existing CA/DP literature which has demonstrated that laughter is a highly organized and sequentially important phenomena will be discussed. In particular, we will see how previous work of this nature has revealed the presence of laughter in a number of 'serious' settings to accomplish a range of interactional business, such as delivering complaints or dealing with delicate issues. Following on from this in section 4.2, the CA/DP notion of accountability will be examined, showing how this aspect of interaction is displayed and negotiated within talk. We will also examine the reasons why speakers engage in the management of accountability, how this is accomplished and how this is tied to social action.

In section 4.3 of this chapter, readers will be introduced to the principle of stance and how it has been previously shown to be something which interlocutors will display a positioning on in their talk. The notions of alignment and affiliation are teased apart and the ways in which they underpin turn-by-turn cooperation will also be discussed. Both stance and accountability will then by utilised

to examine the ways in which sitcom viewers produce laughter which is responsive to on-screen content. In particular, it will be demonstrated how laughter is carefully designed to display an orientation to improper or offensive material and in doing so, manage accountability but also negotiate the shared stance taken by co-viewers. This line of argument will be further developed in section 4.4 in relation to an instance from the data that shares a similar sequential trajectory to the extracts in section 4.3 but includes some additional practices which are shown to be linked to the concepts of accountability and stance. All of these key issues in the chapter are then converged on in section 4.5, drawing together the key arguments made within this chapter and underlining the role that laughter plays in the management of interaction.

4.1 – Laughter as a Resource in Interaction

As discussed in Chapter 1 and 2, CA/DP have tended to avoid the concept of 'humour' as this type of abstract "typifciation" (Heritage, 1984) is in opposition to the realist stance that is taken by CA/DP analysts. Instead, as Glenn and Holt (2017) argue, the focus has been on laughter and how this is deployed by interaction by speakers. Indeed, it is only through the work that has adopted CA methodology that has shown that laughter, like other aspects of human interaction, is "a systematically produced, socially organised activity" (Jefferson, 1987, p.152). Correspondingly, laughter has been demonstrated to play a role in how a range of social actions are accomplished (e.g. Glenn, 2003, Glenn & Holt, 2013). As shall be shown here, many occasions where laughter is found would not be considered 'humorous' (e.g. complaining or dealing with delicate subjects) and instead laughing is being utilised to achieve some serious interactional business. The ways in which this has been shown to operate and the contexts where laughter has been shown to be doing non-humorous work will now be discussed.

In his lectures on conversation, Harvey Sacks (1992) made observations about laughter in interaction on a number of occasions. The first, in Fall 1964 (lecture 2), came out of his observations that callers to a suicide helpline often reported that, when they tell people they are going to kill

themselves, those people respond with laughter. Sacks' suggestion here was that this was down to the idea of "ceremonials" (p.14), that is, the general class of things which, when produced by one speaker, there is corresponding ceremonial response. For example, if one person says 'how are you feeling?', (a ceremonial), the response would probably be 'fine' (a corresponding ceremonial). This ceremonial sequence functions as a greeting, not actually an inquiry about how a person was feeling. However, if the first ceremonial is responded to as an inquiry about one's health, rather than as a ceremonial greeting, then that person is reframing what business the first speaker was doing with their talk. Now returning to the laughter in response to declarations of 'I'm going to kill myself', Sacks' argues that the laughing of a recipient here is working to "cast" the interaction into a particular ceremonial form; a joke. Jokes have a telling component and a laughing response (or similar which orients to the non-serious nature of the prior utterance). Therefore, laughter here is reframing an instance of talk from something serious into something non-serious (a joke). In doing so, the laughing party is "closing that thing off" (p.16) without putting themselves in a position where they would have to refuse help to someone that needed it. (As we shall see shortly, this type of transition from serious to non-serious is a common place where laughter can be found (Holt, 2017).

Building upon this observation about laughter, during his lectures delivered in Fall 1967, Sacks (1992) explored the role of laughter's placement in the course of a piece of talk-in-interaction. More specifically, Sacks identified the special qualities of laughter as a resource in interaction, in that it is "one prototypical thing" (p.745) which people can do together at the same time, unlike talk, which normatively follows a 'one party at a time' rule. In addition, and developing his earlier observations from 1964, Sacks argues how the placement of laughter in a sequence of talk serves a referential function, in that it is heard as being "tied to the last thing said" (p.745). That is, any talk that proceeds an instance of laughter will be treated as being something that was laughable at.

Finally, in lecture 6 of his Spring 1972 lecture series, Sacks (1992) further discusses the notion of 'laughing together' and how the this comes to fruition in interaction. The observation here

that the occurrence of a group of people laughing together is something which has been bought about through a sequence of prior actions in talk. Again, it is laughter that brings this about, whereby Sacks argues that one speaker's laughter sets in motion a sequence of events where a group of people are laughing together.

This work on laughter by Sacks represents early attempts to explore it as a conversational resource in its own right, rather than being simply some sort of reflexive action or response (e.g. as conceptualised by Koestler, 1964 – see Chapter 1). Subsequent work that has adopted CA/DP methods of analysis has developed this further and shown how the many ways in which laughter is used as a resource for accomplishing interactional business. For example, Jefferson (1984) demonstrated how laughter was deployed by speakers when sharing their troubles and how recipients do not join in with laughing but instead respond to the troubles-telling seriously. As such, recipients exhibit 'troubles-receptiveness' by responding in this way (as opposed to the troubles-resistive' position of the laughing troubles teller). Similarly, the role in which laughter can be used to position oneself in complaints has also been examined by Holt (2012) in relation to affiliation/disaffiliation, showing how laughter can help complaint recipients from fully affiliating or disaffiliating (which will be discussed in section 4.3 of this chapter).

Along the same lines, Edwards (2005), demonstrates how laughter is used in complaints as part of the "subjectivity work" (p.16) that is being undertaken in these scenarios. Here, laughter is carefully deployed by complainers as a "members' method" (p.9) for managing issues such as not wanting to be making too much of a fuss or establishing this complaining behaviour as not something they would usually do. Again, this work demonstrates that laughter as common part of 'serious' interaction, in this case complaining, utilised and carefully designed for the recipient to help accomplish particular social actions. Along the same lines, Osvaldsson's (2004) work on multiparty interactions in youth detention homes in Sweden showed that laughter was often used to manage

sensitive or tense situations. Again, we see laughter as being carefully placed in talk to deal with interactional issues.

Finally, Haakana (2001, 2002) examined the ways in which laughter was utilised in doctor-patient consultations. In these medical interactions, laughter was used by patients as a way of attending to problems in the interaction such as correcting the doctor's understanding or discussing delicate issues. Again, far from being an uncontrollable response to something humorous, the laughter was deployed purposively in the course of interaction as a way of orienting to and managing the delicate nature of the topic of talk.

With this in mind, what I demonstrate here in the forthcoming sections of this chapter is that if the careful transcription of laughter, as demonstrated in Chapter 3 of this thesis, is adopted, analysts can see additional ways in which laughter is being deployed by speakers to accomplish interactional business. More specifically, it will be argued in this chapter that it is not just the presence of laughter that is doing things, but the ways in which laughter is performed is also doing serious business. This business will be considered in relation to the CA/DP notion of accountability and the CA concept of stance, which will now be discussed in the following section.

4.2 – Accountability in Interaction

Before examining the data closely, it is worth taking some time to examine the CA/DP notion of accountability, as this will play a central role in the arguments outlined in this chapter. As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 1 this thesis, a central goal of CA and DP research is to identify and describe the competences that speakers use in order to produce and participate in intelligible social interaction. Intrinsic in this is the assumption that talk is accomplished and understood as "the accountable products of common sets of procedures" (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984, p.1). To this, Robinson (2016) argues that there are two broad senses in which accountability can be considered; 1) "the account-ability of conduct's action" (p.2), which is concerned with the general ways in which individuals "form and ascribe (i.e. recognize and understand) possible actions" (p.11) and 2)

“accounting for conduct in interaction” (p.11), which is concerned with the ways in which individuals will manage and account for their conduct in interaction. Put another way, Heritage (1988) suggests one dimension of accountability is concerned with intelligibility, that is, the “taken-for-granted level of reasoning” (p.128) through which a “running index” of what is happening is created and sustained by individuals, whilst the other is concern with “overt explanation” (p.128) whereby individuals will provide accounts for their actions. These two senses of accountability are “deeply interwoven” (p.139).

Edwards and Potter (1992) stress the importance of accountability in making sense of interaction and a key concern of DP is examining the ways in which accountability is “constructed and defended in specific contexts” (p.166). DP then, is concerned with the ways in which individuals will shape their contributions to interaction which attends to this accountability. This is related to DP’s more general position that discourse is both constructed and constructive (Hepburn & Wiggins, 2007; Wiggins, 2017). It is constructed in that it is the product of several resources (e.g. words, categories) but it is constructive in that builds a certain version of the world (e.g. versions of events or actions). As such, accountability is something which individuals manage in interaction by carefully shaping their discourse, i.e. talk, to create a certain version of the world, which in turn is used to accomplish a particular social action.

Accountability then, is something which underpins interaction and the ways in which action is accomplished by the participants involved in it. This is visible in the ways in which people construct their talk to be intelligible as doing a particular social action (e.g. blaming, requesting, complaining) but also in the ways in which people will offer accounts or explanations for their conduct in interaction. One place in interaction where accountability is particularly visible is in situations where individuals do not act in ways which is normatively expected. Heritage (1984) refers to "the basic theorem of accountable action” (p.291) whereby if individuals in interaction may or may not act in a way which is normatively expected but that any “deviant’ actions may ultimately be

recognizable, accountable and sanctionable as such." (p.291-292). For example, when a question is deployed in interaction, this "strongly projects an answer as a next positioned action" (Zimmerman & Boden, 1991). However, the recipient of a question can do a number of things in response to a question; for example they can evade it, they can challenge it, or ignore it. However, by pursuing one of these alternative actions, the recipient will be accountable and this will be used as "grounds for *drawing inferences* about the person who does not respond" Buttny (1993, p.39, Italics in original). Heritage (1988) describes how, in the case of situations where recipients remain silent to questions, the inferences drawn are "almost always negative" (p.140) and this may be the motivation for non-responding parties to provide some form of account to "forestall negative conclusions" (p.140).

The negative inferences that are drawn about a person are not a done deal and the non-answering recipient of a question can manage this accountable position. In such a scenario, the primary form of accountability management would be to offer some form of explanation (or, account), for why they did not answer the question (e.g. Heritage, 1988). However, Buttny (1993) also argues that there is another aspect of accountability management which is the nonverbal components, such as intonation, volume and eye contact which he suggests has received little attention. Despite being recognised as being important features of talk more generally, in both CA/DP, Buttny's claim raises an interesting point about the nonverbal management of accountability and how the performative aspects of talk are instrumental in this practice. To this, what follows in this chapter is a close analysis of how the ways in which laughter is performed are tied to issues of accountability.

The work discussed earlier in this chapter demonstrated that laughter was deployed in interaction to accomplish a range of discursive business. As such, we have already seen, laughter plays a key role in social action and, as such, is involved in the management of issues which are accountable (e.g. making complaints or dealing with delicate issues). In this way, laughter can be seen as a "members' method" (Edwards, 2005, p.9) for managing accountability in talk. Indeed,

Sacks (1992) has discussed the idea that laughing is an accountable issue, whereby if someone laughs after an utterance which "didn't have laughter as one of the alternative appropriate next actions" (p.746) then this will then become something which the laughing party will be held to account for. Conversely, in situations where laughter was normatively expected and relevant, for example at the completion of a joke, then this too will be something which becomes an accountable issue. This latter concern is taken up in Sacks' in his work on joke telling in interaction, which was discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis.

To recap, Sacks (1974, 1978) studied the 'artfulness' of the dirty joke and how it is a highly organized and sequentially ordered. As such, Sacks (1978) described how joke recipients undertake a "critical task" (p.258) upon joke completion to show they 'get' the joke that has been told. Likening jokes to puzzles that are solved "piece by piece" (p.258). in doing so, the recipient of a joke is placed in a position whereby they have to demonstrate to the joke teller that they have understood or 'got' the preceding joke and have recognised that it is now the appropriate time to provide that response. Crucially, failure to do so is "supposable as a failure to understand" (Sacks, 1974, p.346). In other words, if a recipient fails to demonstrate that they have 'got' a joke, then they are placed in an accountable position and an inference is made about why they didn't respond appropriately. Sacks suggests that one such inference is that they have failed to understand the joke presented to them because they are "lacking sophistication" (1974, p.346).

What shall be argued in the following sections of this thesis is that it is not just the presence of laughter that is important to the management of accountability but also the way in which laughter is performed can be seen to have a central role in this practice. This is a hitherto unexplored aspect of laughter's function in interaction and is afforded by the sort of detailed transcription which was outlined in Chapter 3 of this thesis. As we shall see, laughter is deployed by individuals in ways which are highly sensitive to the material to which it is responsive to and it is argued that this can be understood in terms of the management of accountability. As such, the ways in which laughter is

performed can be seen as a specific "member's method" (Edwards, 2005, p.9) for accomplishing interactional business.

In addition to accountability, the analyses presented in this chapter will also be made in relation to the CA concepts of affiliation and alignment. These concepts, which relate to the stance displayed by interactants, will now be examined.

4.3 – Stance in Interaction

Stance is something which is a pervasive feature of interaction, underpinning the ways in which we position ourselves in relation to others. As Stivers, Mondada, & Steensig (2011) observe, "in interaction we position ourselves vis-à-vis our interlocutors in a variety of ways, moment by moment, TCU by TCU" (p.20). This positioning is not some intra-psychic phenomenon but is something which speakers and listeners actively orient to in the way in which they design their turns at talk. Whether one chooses to accept or decline an offer, agree or disagree with an evaluation, or grant or deny permission, speakers in talk are actively engaged in a co-constructed and cooperative endeavour.

To this, Stivers et al. (2011) argue that there are two main forms of cooperation in interaction: alignment and affiliation. Whilst the two concepts are frequently used as synonyms, (Steensig & Drew, 2007), Stivers (2008) has demonstrated in her work on storytelling that alignment and affiliation are distinct practices. Therefore, "aligning responses cooperate by facilitating the proposed activity or sequence; accepting the presuppositions and terms of the proposed action or activity; and matching the formal design preference of the turn" (Stivers et al. 2011, p. 21). For example, in the context of storytelling, as examined by Stivers (2008), a recipient aligns with the telling by supporting the structural asymmetry of the activity (i.e. that the teller has the floor until the story is complete and accepts that storytelling is in progress). Conversely, a recipient disaligning with storytelling would undermine the structural asymmetry (i.e. by competing for the floor or not treating the story as in-progress or, when finished, over). Alignment then, is concerned with the business of

the activity which is being played out, “the structural level of cooperation” (Stivers et al. 2011, p.20), whereby if recipients support the activity in progress then they are aligned, whereas if they frustrate or undermine the activity in progress, they are disaligned.

On the other hand, “affiliative responses cooperate at the level of action and affective stance” and are “maximally pro-social when they match the prior speaker’s evaluative stance, display empathy and/or cooperate with the preference of the prior action” (ibid, p.21). Indeed, Heritage (1984) observes that preferred actions are usually affiliative, whereas dispreferred actions are often disaffiliative in nature. Again, in the context of storytelling, Stivers (2008) describes how a recipient affiliates by “taking a stance that matches the teller’s stance toward the event(s) being described as, for example, funny, sad, horrible, or exciting.” (p.35-36). Therefore, affiliation can be seen as being as being concerned with cooperation at the affective level, as opposed to alignment which orients to cooperation at the structural level.

Crucially though, Stivers et al. (2011) argue that whilst alignment can be considered in relation to any responsive action, affiliation is something which is “not necessarily always relevant” (p.21). To illustrate, the Stivers et al. use the example of the request for information ‘where is the elevator?’. In this case, they argue that it would be hard for a recipient to affiliate with such a request. Therefore, alignment is “omnirelevant” whilst affilition is “quite circumscribed” (Lindstrom & Sorjonen, 2013, p.353). By separating the concepts of affiliation and alignment then, Stivers has been able to demonstrate that how cooperation operates at the ‘micro-level’ of social interaction (Stivers et al. 2011, p.22).

Of particular relevance to the present thesis is the relationship that exists between affiliation and laughter. To this, Glenn (2003) argues that:

> "laughter proves important socially as a means to show affiliation with others. To laugh when someone else has done something humorous, laughed first, or otherwise indicated a nonserious orientation provides a way to display like mindedness"
>
> Glenn, (2003, p.29)

Therefore, Glenn suggests that laughter is a key resources with which interlocutors can share an affective stance on something prior and, as such, display a "coincidence of thought, attitude, sense of humor, and the like" (Schenkein, 1972, p.371). In their analysis of "heheh", Schenkein (1972) demonstrated the "conversational consequences" (p.346) of the positioning of laughter in interaction, arguing that 'heheh' is something which speakers can use to affiliate with something prior but, by withholding it, can also disaffiliate with some prior talk.

Jefferson, Sacks, and Schegloff (1987) examine sequences of interaction in which there is some sort of impropriety, by which they mean talk which "breaches conventional standards of courtesy, propriety, tact, ethics, commonality, etc." (p.160). These breaches therefore risk being offensive to other parties which are involved in the interaction. In this work, Jefferson et al. identified a continuum of responses to instances of improper talk, ranging from disaffiliation to affiliation followed by escalation. As such, the presence of laughter is shown to be instrumental in the process of displaying a stance towards some improper material.

Building on from of Jefferson et al. (1987), the work by Holt (2012), as briefly discussed in the prior section, offers a close examination of the ways in which later is utilised in the process of making complaints. Here we see that laughter is used by those who are receiving complaints to perform actions such as discouraging the complaint-in-progress continuing. Drawing upon the notions of affiliation/disaffiliation and alignment/non-alignment, this work demonstrates that laughter can be used by complaint recipients to somewhat disaffiliate and not fully align with a complaint without outright disaffiliation or non-alignment. Therefore, recipients utilize laughter to

subtly resist complaints in progress without producing a response through talk which would not be aligned or would fully disaffiliate with the complaint. On this basis, Holt highlights how on some occasions laughter can act as a midpoint between the extremes of affiliation and nonaffiliation (supporting the findings of Jefferson et al., 1987).

The analyses that follow in the next section investigate the ways in which laughter operates in terms of both accountability and stance in relation to watching sitcoms together on TV. What shall be shown here is that the ways in which laughter is performed in interaction is purposive and, building on the work by Holt (2012), we can see how these performative qualities are utilised to negotiate stance.

4.4 – Laughter at Work

Whilst reviewing the sitcom watching data collected for this thesis, as well as noticing the variation in laugh responses, (as illustrated in Chapter 3), there were a number of instances in which the laughter was particularly marked and, as such, appeared to be doing something beyond just laughing. When considered in relation to the broader sequence of interaction in which it was produced, it became clear that the distinct performative qualities of the laughter were sensitive to whatever prior event to which they oriented. To illustrate, let us revisit an example presented in Chapter 3, which is reproduced below (Extract 4.1). Here, Annette, Beverley, Caroline, and Denise are watching an episode of *Outnumbered*.

EXTRACT 4.1 – Real People

```
01 Pete:      =you take the phone for a bit and let me know if any re:al people come on.
02                  (.)
04 Jake:      Indians are real people dad.
05            ((Doorbell rings on-screen))
06 Barb:      Mphuh
07 Carol:     ↑Ehohh!
08 Den:       Ohkh=
09 Ann:       =↓Wohh>hoh hguh [hooh<]
10 Carol:                     [hhh  ] wh↑(h)howh! .hhh
```

In this extract, laughter can be found across lines 6-10, with all four members of the group producing at least one piece of laughter. However, whilst the specific design of that laughter varies across all parties, all of the instances of laughter can be seen to be having built into them some orientation to the material which they are responsive to. In this case, the humour is built around a collective mishearing of Jake's utterance on line 4, "Indians are real people dad.", as being "Indians *aren't* real people". Certainly, when I initially transcribed this data I had recorded Jake as saying "aren't", but

subsequent listening and the help of subtitles, reveals that Jake is actually saying “are”. Given the exaggerated way in which this utterance is attended to by the four co-viewers, (more on this in a minute), it would appear that they too have made misheard this line. Putting this in context, on line 1 Pete is talking to his son Jake and Jake’s friend whilst on hold waiting for an operative to answer his call. Just before this sequence begins, the fridge starts making a loud noise which Pete needs to attend to. He passes the phone to Jake on line 1, giving him the order “you take the phone for a bit and let me know if any re:al people come on” (line 1). Having previously been discussing call centres being based in India, Jake takes issue with Pete’s use of “re:al people” and replies, “Indians are real people dad.” (line 4).

Jake’s response to Pete’s order is immediately followed by laughter from the co-viewers and, as such, we can see therefore treat Jake’s turn as being, what Glenn (2003) refers to as the “laughable”, that is the “referent that draws laughter” (p.49). Jake’s remark here could possibly be interpreted as being a humorous rebuttal to his Dad’s order, deliberately misrepresenting his Dad’s choice of words. However, the way in which this is attended to by the co-viewers gives an indication that they heard this line as ‘Indians *aren’t* real people dad’, as such the laughable here is something different. The joke is transformed from being one involving a son talking back to his dad to be one where humour is derived from something much more offensive. In this light, the animated laughter found here can be seen as orienting to the potentially offensive material in a way which is ostensibly doing laughter, and thus demonstrating that they have ‘got’ the joke here, but also attending to the delicate nature of the subject matter. This laughter has been deployed to do two bits of interactional business simultaneously; 1) acknowledging that a joke has been told and 2) attending to the offensive content and distancing oneself from it. It is argued here that what this demonstrates is that laughter is used, in the way it is deployed by speakers, to manage accountability by laughing in ways which also attend to the potentially offensive or inappropriate or improper subject matter of the laughable to which it is responsive to.

To further this line of argument, let us look closely at the way in which laughter is produced by the co-viewers in this extract on a turn-by-turn basis. On line 6, Barbara's "Mphuh" is stifled somewhat, as indicated by the "mph" quality to this laugh particle. Caroline's laughing "↑Ehohh!" that follows on line 7 is particularly marked, as evidenced in the still image that compliments the transcript (FIG.4.1, below). In addition to her laughter having increased pitch, she also moves her body forward and raises her eyebrows. The audible qualities of the laugh itself also includes an audible "ohh" sound which, when paired with the non-verbal changes to posture and facial expression, presents a degree of disbelief or surprise at its content.

FIG.4.1 – Carol at Line 7

Similarly, the laughter that follows on lines 8 and 9, produced by Denise and Annette contains signs of restraint and an audible 'oh' type sound. Denise's single part laugh unit, "Ohkh" (line 8), is much more restrained than Annette's 4 part laugh unit "↓Wohh>hoh hguh h<u>ooh</u><" (line 9) but nonetheless, we see how it has been designed to include other qualities which modify the laughter. In particular Annette's "↓Wohh" is accompanied by raised eyebrows (see FIG. 4.2 below) and again, this can be heard as expressing a surprise or disbelief at the content of the laughable.

FIG.4.2 – Annette at Line 9

This sequence of laughter concludes on line 10 with Caroline's "hhh wh↑(h)howh! .hhh", which includes an audible "wow" type sound in the laughter here, again displaying shock or disbelief at the content of the prior laughable. As with her earlier laughter, this instance also includes non-verbal components which can be also seen as being involved in the design of this piece of laugher. As shown in FIG. 2.3, Caroline's "hhh wh↑(h)howh! .hhh" is accompanied by a turn towards Denise, directing this laughter towards her.

FIG. 4.3 – Caroline Turns to Denise at Line 10

The question then, is why was the laughter present here deployed in this way? Moreover, what is the social action that these instances of laughter are doing? The answer to both of these questions is the management of accountability and stance. Let us begin with accountability. As Sacks' (1974, 1978) work posits, jokes operate as understanding tests, and therefore there is a need to

demonstrate to your co-viewers that you have ‘got’ the joke here. Laughter, upon completion of the joke, is the primary vehicle for demonstrating that you have understood the joke. In situations like this where the laughable is based on something offensive, improper or inappropriate, this concern also has to be addressed. Whilst laughing at this point will satisfy concerns about understanding, when the content of the laughable is potentially problematic, unmitigated laughter would also lead to others making inferences about the laughing party. In this case, for example, where the content is heard as being racist, laughing in response to Jake’s utterance in a way similar to other non-offensive material, treats the racist aspect of the laughable as unproblematic. As such, inferences about why a laughing party did not treat this as problematic can be drawn, and in situations like this, one can see how that inference would be related to that person being tolerant of racism or being a person which finds racism funny. (This is especially salient here, given that Denise is herself Indian, and therefore she is the target of the racism upon which the ‘joke’ here is based.)

Therefore, what we can see here then is laughter deployed here in a manner that is being sensitive to the concerns about the potential inferences being made. This accountability management can be seen being played out here, when we focus our attention not just on the presence of laughter, but the way in which it is performed. The inclusions of the markers of surprise or shock, such as “oh” or “wow” within the laughter produced by Annette and Caroline, work to demonstrate an orientation to the potentially racist, and therefore problematic, nature of the material to which they are laughing at. This is done to satisfy two levels of accountability, firstly the accountability for understanding the joke, whilst secondly also attending to the accountability that laughing at material which is inappropriate, offensive or in some way improper. As such, laughter can be seen as being another “member’s method” (Edwards, 2005, p. 9) which can be carefully designed, (and evidenced in transcripts, if one follows the guidance outlined in Chapter 3), to satisfy the concerns here regarding accountability. Also, in this specific example, we also see an indication that participant’s concern is related to Denise and the fact that the laughable here is targeting her ethnicity. The change of gaze

which Caroline directs at Denise (as shown in FIG.2.3), is evidence that her "hhh wh↑(h)howh! .hhh" on line 10, is produced for Denise to. In doing so, Caroline is demonstrating that it is Denise to whom, as an Indian woman, she will be accountable.

The notion of stance is also useful here to help us understand what is happening in this sequence, in particular we can see the laughter here being deployed in such a way that it manages the stance that all four viewers take on the on-screen comedy. Given that all of the members of this group are allowing the show to play out uninterrupted and are directing their gaze at the TV, we can see no evidence of the co-viewers undermining the unfolding of the show. Therefore, in this instance all members are aligning with the joke-telling project. More interesting here is the notion of affiliation and how this is managed by the interactants here. We have demonstrated that the laughter produced by the speakers here is marked, in the sense that it contains stifled qualities (e.g. Barbara on line 6 – "Mphuh") and audible qualities of surprise or shock (e.g. Carol's "↑Ehohh!" on line 7). This has been shown to be orienting to the potentially offensive nature of the 'joke' here. In addition to managing accountability, by producing laughter which contains these audible qualities, we can see how participants are displaying and managing their stance towards the on-screen dialogue.

As Holt (2012) demonstrated in her work on complaints, laughter can serve as a midpoint between either full affiliation or disaffiliation. However, in the context of the telling of a joke, laughter alone upon the completion of the joke's telling would be indicative of an affiliative responsive action, (Sacks, 1974), and helps recipients display a shared perspective on the joke (i.e. that it was 'funny') (Stivers et al. 2011). If the laughter present in extract 4.1 had been transcribed as "((laughs))" or even something broadly resembling a Jeffersonian transcription, such as "huh huh huh", there would be grounds to argue that the laughter here is affiliating to the on-screen humour. What we see here is that, when a fine-grained analysis of the performative qualities of laughter is carried out and transcribed, there is other interactional business taking place here. It is not just the presence of laughter that matters, but also the way in which that laughter is performed. In this

instance, we can see how participants are laughing in response to the on-screen joke but are modifying their laughter to be sensitive to the content which it is responsive to, resulting in a sequence of laughter that is neither fully affiliative or disaffiliative but something that occupies a space somewhere in between these positions.

There is another dimension to affiliation that needs to be considered here and that relates to the unique joke-telling environment of the sitcom. In instances where the speaker and recipient are co-present, either face to face or via some other means, such as the telephone, the negotiating and displaying of stance is one which is done between the recipient and teller. However, as discussed earlier in this thesis, the viewers watching at home have no direct access to the people generating the humour on-screen. As such, the stance that they take on the on-screen comedy is not one which concerns the performers, as it would if the interaction was 'live'. Instead, what we see in sequences like extract 4.1 is how stance is something which is negotiated between co-recipients of the 'joke' whereby they are cooperating to display a shared stance on the on-screen material. Thus, by all members producing laughter that is marked with orientations to the improper nature of the humour, the co-viewers can establish a group or collective stance towards the potentially problematic content of the 'joke'.

Extract 4.1 provides a clear example of how laughter is utilised by speakers to manage accountability, but also demonstrates how the issue of affiliation is intertwined with this process. Indeed, if we look elsewhere in the sitcom watching data, we find a number of occasions whereby the performative qualities of laughter are particularly marked. In these instances, when examined in the broader sequential context within which they are produced we find evidence that laughter is being deployed in purposeful ways. That is, we can see this laughter as being deployed to demonstrate that speakers have 'got' the joke but are also laughing in a way which orients to the potentially offensive or improper nature of the material. To further illustrate this, let us examine a sequence featuring Paul and Barry watching an episode of *Phoenix Nights* (Extract 4.2). Unlike the previous extract, the

laughter here is not dealing with material that is potentially racist, but instead orients to a moment from the show whereby a Psychic, Clinton Baptiste, is performing a live psychic reading for the patrons of the working men's club. Clinton's messages from the spirit world have been offending the assembled audience and, in this sequence, we see him give one person a particularly insulting 'message'.

Extract 4.2 – The Psychic

1 Clinton: Now,

2 (0.9)

3 Clinton: I:m geddin <the wo::rd,>

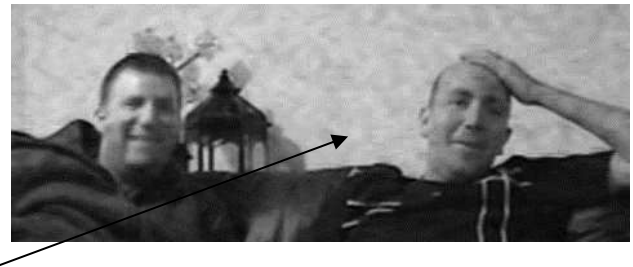
4 (3.4)

5 Clinton: ↑NO::NCE. ((pointing at man))

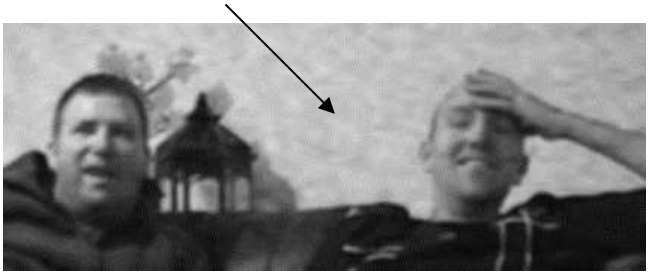
6 ((Crowd gasp))

7 Paul: [Kkhh] huwh .hh=

8 Barry: [.hkh]



```
9    Paul:     =↑GHHOOWH HWOH-WUH-WUH uhkh hhh hguh hh hguh
```



This extract comes at the tail end of a larger sequence which has been playing out on-screen, whereby the psychic medium, Clinton Baptiste, has been giving inaccurate and/or offensive readings to the audience gathered in the Phoenix Club. Beginning on line 1, Clinton stands in front of one of the audience members and starts to receive a message from his spirit guide, offering a commentary of this on line 3, with "I:m geddin <the wo::rd,>". There is a 3.4 second silence as Clinton focuses his attention on obtaining the message for this man from his spirit guide, after which the word in which Clinton was 'getting' for the audience member becomes clear and he reveals it to be "↑NO::NCE." (line 5). The word 'nonce' is slang, originating in prisons, and used refer to someone who has been convicted of child sex offences (i.e. a paedophile). In this instance then, Clinton has singled out a man from the audience and, thanks to the intervention of his spirit guide, has revelaed that this man is a paedophile. Unsuprisingly, the on-screen crowd assembled to witness this psychic reading gasp in shock at the revelation.

Off-screen, Clinton's behaviour and the offence caused by his psychic reading, is attended to by Paul and Barry as being a laughable. On line 6 as there are audible gasps from the audience of the Phoenix Club, and this is accompanied off-screen by Paul biting his lip (as shown in FIG. 4.4,

below). As such, even before the laughter that follows is produced, we see that Paul is already orienting to the shocking nature of the material playing out on-screen.

FIG. 4.4 – Paul Bites His Lip (line 6)

On lines 7,8, and continued on 9, we see Paul and Barry both produce laughter in response to Clinton's "↑NO::NCE." on line 5. Barry's single part laugh unit, ".hkh" is accompanied by an open mouth (FIG. 4.5, left image) and a turn towards Paul. This is followed immediately by Barry biting his lip (FIG. 4.5, right image).

FIG.4.5 – Barry Laughs, Turns to Paul and Bites Lip

The manner in which Barry's laughter, and accompanying change of gaze to look at Paul, are deployed here, again show us how laughter is shaped to be sensitive to the material to which it orients. In this case, Barry's minimal laughter is aspirated and produced with an open mouth,

displaying shock, and is followed by a biting of his lip. These performative qualities can again be seen as firstly managing accountability, in that Barry's laughter demonstrates that he has passed the understanding test but the specific manner in which this laugh is deployed, orients to the shocking nature, and therefore the impropriety, of Clinton describing the man in the audience as a 'nonce'. As such, Barry's laughter simultaneous does 'laughing' but also indicates to Paul that the laughable here is one which he also finds shocking or inappropriate.

We can see similar accountability management playing out in the way in which Paul laughs at Clinton's psychic reading. His laughter, which spans lines 7 and 9, is made up of 12 laugh units; "Kkhh huwh.hh ↑GHHOOWH HWOH-WUH-WUH uhkh hhh hguh hh hguh". There are a couple of things to note here. Firstly, the first laugh particle is an example of laughter "stepping up" (Jefferson, Sacks, & Schegloff, 1977, p.9), in that we see a shift in the pitch and volume of the laugher. This change in Paul's laughter occurs directly following Barry's single laugh unit and turn to look at Paul on line 8. Therefore, Barry's laugh and change of gaze can be seen as being providing Paul with the 'go-ahead' to step up his laughter. As such, we can see how Paul's laughter is somewhat negotiated and sensitive to his co-viewers orientation to the comedy playing out on-screen.

A second notable feature of Paul's laugh is that the laughter contains sounds, such as "oowh" but also shows signs of restraint with the "kkhh" type sounds found here, both orienting to the shocking or inappropriate manner in which Clinton referred to the audience member as a 'nonce'. Again, as with Barry, these performative qualities can be seen as being part of the practice of accountability management, whereby the laughter being produced is done in such a way as to be sensitive to the material which it is responsive to. As such, this laughter is signalling to co-viewers two things; firstly, that they have 'got' the joke here (and thus satisfying the Sacks' (1974) 'understanding test'), secondly, and crucially, this laughter is also demonstrating that they acknowledge that there is something shocking and/or inappropriate about the material upon which

this ‘joke’ is based. In this sense, the laughter is designed to be multipurpose; ‘doing’ both laughing at the joke whilst simultaneously being shocked or surprised at the laughable.

Again, there are a number of observations that can be made about how stance is negotiated by Paul and Barry. As with extract 4.1, alignment is not particularly helpful here because at this time in the recording both parties are allowing the TV show to play out and as such, are accepting of the asymmetry that exists between them and the characters on-screen. What is more revealing here is how affiliation is negotiated between the co-viewers. The laughter produced by both parties is, as discussed above, marked by a stifled/restrained quality and also, in Paul’s case, punctuated with ‘oowh’ type sounds which display shock or surprise. As such, we can see how this laughter as demonstrating a stance on the on-screen psychic’s impropriety.

Once more we can see in this extract that laughter is utilised by the co-viewers to demonstrate a positioning to the ‘joke’ telling which is neither fully affiliative or disaffiliative. They are affiliating in the sense that they are laughing at the joke and by doing so displaying an orientation to the fact that they have a) understood this to be designed to be ‘funny’ and b) recognised that laughter is normatively expected in this position. However, the marked qualities of the laughter produced serves to distance themselves from the improprieties within the ‘joke’ and take a stance which is not fully affiliative to it by positioning themselves as being shocked by it. As such, whilst not fully disaffiliative, these qualities display attempts by Paul and Barry to display an orientation to the improper nature of the material upon which this ‘joke’ is built (i.e. accusing someone of being a nonce).

However, as we saw in extract 4.1, there is another dimension where we can see the sort of cooperation which is afforded by affiliation playing out *between* Paul and Barry. Whilst both parties are working to demonstrate an orientation to the problematic nature of the ‘joke’, in doing so, they are once more affiliating with the stance that each other has taken. As such they are negotiating and displaying a collective stance towards the sitcom that they are viewing. Further evidence of the

attempts at cooperating in this regard can be seen on line 8 where Barry changes his gaze to look at Paul. This functions as a way of monitoring Paul's response and, upon seeing that Paul is adopting a similar mitigated stance, Barry positions himself in a similar way by biting his lip and thus demonstrating that they share a similar stance on this 'joke' and are 'on the same page'.

To further develop these lines of argument, consider the following extract featuring Erin and Lenny watching an episode of *Friday Night Dinner*. On-screen, Jonny has noticed that his Grandma's dog has died and reveals this to her in a matter-of-fact way.

Extract 4.3 – Dead Dog

1 Erin: ↑Ohhmh

2 Jonny: Er:m? (.)Granma::h?

3 (2.3)

4 Jonny: I think your dogs just die:d.

5 (1.9)

6 Erin: [Hfofh]

7 Gran: [↑↑OWH]-AHH!!

8 (1.1)

9 Erin: Offh-hguh ↑UKH-HOHH-HGH [↑HMMFH] HAWH HAWH HGUH

10 Lenny: [↑ohfh]

11 Adam: [Good Christmas.]

11 Lenny: [O(h)h my G(h)o(h)d] [hgkh]

12 Erin: [hHoffh] hguh

13 Jonny: [Wonderful]

14 (1.7)

15 Erin: BKWAHUH

This sequence begins immediately after a scene in which a Christmas tree has fallen over and landed on a dog. Erin's single part laugh unit, "↑Ohhmh" (line 1) is responsive to this. Even at this early stage in the sequence, we can see Erin producing laughter which is sensitive to the delicate nature of what is playing out on-screen. Here there are two noticeable features of the laughter, firstly Erin has raised her hand to her mouth. This accompanying action serves to stifle her laugh also is 'doing' a performative, exaggerated display of shock. The second noticeable feature is the audible qualities of this laugh which is produced with a gasp type sound "↑Oh", as well as a stifled "hmh" component. Already then, Erin is already establishing that she has 'got' that this has been designed to be funny but also that there is something inappropriate or shocking about the source of this humour. As such, we are seeing the beginning of Erin managing accountability with her laughter.

Following this, on-screen Jonny performs the FPP of a summons-answer sequence "Er:m? (.)Granma::h?" (line 2), which after a 2.3 second silence, he adds "I think your dogs just die:d." (line 4). Maynard (2003) has demonstrated how turns at talk which are delivering bad news are often done indirectly with features such as preannouncements or apologies, as a way of letting the recipient know that 'somethings up' before the bad news is given. In this light, we can see how Jonny's "Er:m? (.)Granma::h?" is delaying the announcement that her dog is dead. This is followed by a 1.9 second silence before Erin produces another single part laugh unit on line 6; "Hfofh". Again, this laughter contains a audience gasp-like quality, ("ofh") but its also breathy, as indicated by the inclusion of the 'f's here. As such, we can see these as features of stifling, whereby Erin is somewhat restrained with her laughter. Again, this demonstrates that Erin is showing an orientation to the material as being shocking or inappropriate and as such, it is something that she will be accountable for laughing at. Therefore, her attempts to stifle the laughter here demonstrates to Lenny an acknowledgement of the improper nature of the subject matter as a topic for humour, which can be seen again as laughter being utilised as a tool for manging accountability.

After a short pause, Erin produces another bout of laughter on line 9; “Offh-hguh ↑UKH-HOHH-HGH [↑HMMFH] HAWH HAWH HGUH”. Here, Erin’s laughter ‘steps up’ her laughter which becomes louder at the third laugh particle, ‘↑UKH-HOHH-HGH’, and is sustained for a greater duration than her previous laughter instances (constituting a 10 part laugh unit). As with the minimal laugh particles she produced earlier in the sequence, when the detailed transcription which was proposed in chapter 3 of this thesis is used, we can see how the way in which this laughter is performed is accomplishing some interactional business. A closer look at Erin’s laugh on line 9 shows how even though this laughter is produced with an open mouth and has elements of the ‘hoh’ ‘hah’ voiced vowel production, usually found in this type of laughter, we can see that these sounds are stifled or modified which changes the audible quality of the laughter. What we see here then, is the deployment of other consonant sounds, represented in the transcript as ‘ukh’ and ‘hawh’ laugh particles, are altering the ‘pure’ laugh sounds that are frequently made when laughter is produced with an open mouth (i.e. hah, heh, huh, hoh, hih). The introduction of breathy and guttural qualities, as well as other consonant sounds, all operate in a way which marks the laughter as being produced with some resistance from Erin. Again, further evidence for this can be found in the accompanying still image which shows how Erin has produced the latter part of this laughter with her hand over her mouth. In doing so, Erin can be seen to be trying to control the production of her laughter but this also works as a performative display of shock or surprise for Lenny.

As with her previous laughter, we can see here how the way in which Erin performs this laughter is done so with a sensitivity to the content to which it is responding. In particular, the audible restrained or stifled qualities of the laughter modify the sound that is produced, leading to nasal and guttural aspects appearing in its production. Again, these performative aspects are utilised to communicate a to Lenny that Erin recognises that some aspect of the material is improper and thus, not necessarily something which makes laughter an appropriate response. However, given that this sequence of events is happening in the context of a sitcom, which has been produced with the

intention to be funny, there are issues surrounding the need to demonstrate that the 'joke' has been understood or 'got' here. As such, Erin's laugh can be seen here to be managing these two positions; acknowledging that she has 'got' the joke here but also recognising that the subject matter, (a dog dying), is also shocking and/or an improper topic for humour to be constructed around. In this light, we see further evidence of laughter operating as member's method or tool for dealing with issues of accountability in interaction.

It is not just Erin whose laughter here displays an orientation to the improper or surprising nature of the 'joke' here, as Lenny's response of "O(h)h my G(h)o(h)d hgkh", (line 11), voicing the words 'oh my god' through the laugh sounds. These are examples of what Potter and Hepburn (2010) refer to as 'interpolated laugh particles' (IPAs) which are laugh particles that are deployed within lexical items that modulate certain actions. Lenny's laughed 'oh my god' serves a way of demonstrating an orientation to the improper or shocking nature of the material, whilst simultaneously displaying an indication that he has successfully managed to fulfil the requirements of the "critical task" (Sacks, 1978, p.258) that joke recipients must complete at the end of a joke's telling. Furthermore, Lenny's single laugh particle which follows his interpolated 'oh my god' further assists him in this process.

Once more we can also consider this sequence of interaction in relation to how stance is negotiated by the viewers watching this sitcom at home. In terms of affiliation, we again can see the performative qualities of Erin's and Lenny's laughter as positioning them as neither fully affiliative or fully disaffiliative of the 'joke', instead positioning them in such a way which orients to the impropriety of laughing at something related to the death of a dog. Here, the inclusion of 'oh' type sounds (e.g. Erin on line 6), aspirated sounds (e.g. Lenny's 'ohfh' on line 10) and the stifled qualities that are produced as a result of Erin's hand on her mouth, all work to modify the laughter that is produced. Similar to extracts 4.1 and 4.2, what we can see here is that it is not just the presence of laughter which plays an important role in negotiating stance in interaction but also how that laughter

is performed in particular contexts. As these examples have shown, individuals can laugh but also simultaneously attend to other interactional business, (which would not have been captured for analysis without careful consideration to transcription, as argued in Chapter 3), demonstrating how laughter is utilised as a multi-faceted member's method in interaction.

As with previous extracts in this chapter, we see another 'use' for laughter in negotiating the stance of sitcom viewers. This concerns the way in which audience members coordinate their laughing responses to position themselves in relation to the people who are co-viewing the show with them. In this instance, we can see how Erin and Lenny display a similar stance on the 'joke' by producing laughter which contains similar performative qualities (e.g. the "offh" type sounds found in the laughs on lines 9 and 10). Once again, this laughter demonstrates a level of coordination and cooperative between both parties which sees them sharing an affective stance on this part of the sitcom and thus affiliating with each other.

In this final analytic section of the chapter, we will examine a different way in which co-viewers cooperate and manage accountability in their responses to the comedy that is playing out on-screen. Whilst similar to the previous three extracts, the following instance includes a spoken assessment which is not present in extracts 4.1-4.3. This will now be discussed.

4.5 – Accounting for Laughter

So far, we have seen the ways in which laughter is deployed by speakers in which don't just orient to the humour which is generated by a laughable, but also attends to issues relating to offense, impropriety or disgust. The careful transcription of laughter advocated in this thesis, have made these performative qualities observable and, as such it has been shown how laughter is used as a "member's method" for manging accountability and negotiating stance. In this section of the chapter, I want to illustrate another way in which accountability is managed and mitigated in relation to a laughable, and this is through the deployment of an assessment within a sequence of laughter. As

shall be demonstrated here, these assessments are used in conjunction with laughter to attend to some problematic aspect of the material which they are laughing at. We have seen how this operates within the production of laughter, whereby laughter itself has communicated shock or disgust, but in these instances we see these issues attended to directly with assessments in conjunction with the ways in which laughter is performed. To illustrate consider the following extract featuring Paul and Barry watching an episode of *Phoenix Nights*. On-screen, it is the grand re-opening of the Phoenix Club, a working men's club in Bolton. As such, the club is busy and there is a live performance from the folk band 'Half A Shilling'. This extract begins as the lead singer introduces the next song, titled 'Send the Buggers Back'.

Extract 4.4 – Send the Buggers Back

1 Lead: This next song is abaat a ti:me ah asked I asked me mum en dad fur a pair ah ↑whi:te oley

2 ↓communion sho:es.

3 (0.5)

4 Lead: Ti:mes wuh aard in arr ha:ss,

5 Back: A:ye.

6 Lead: Me dad use to have ↑wuk shifts ↓tah buy us those shoes. ↑Any road, (.) eeh arh they do en

7 when they come back, (.), ↑they weren't white at ↑a:ll!,

8 Back: °No:h°

9 Lead: Theh were ↑BLA:CK!, ↓so weh sed, (.) SEND THA BUGGERS BA:CK!=

10 Back: =°Aye°

11 Lead: Ah one, (.) two:, three.

12 ((Band starts to play))

13 Band: ((singing)) *Send the buggers back*,

14 [*o:h=*]

15 Barry: [hh Hmpfh]

16 Band: [*=send=*]

17 Barry: [hmpfh]

18 Paul: [Hmgh hgih=]

19 Band: [=the buggers] back

20 Paul: [=Hukgh hguh hguh hgh]

21 (0.5)

22 Band: *These aren't the ones I wanted son, I'm sending them straight*

23 Barry: Hmmh

24 Band: *I only wanted white ones you've sent us bloody black.*

25 (0.5)

26 Band: *I'm* [*gonna stick*] *the lid back on and send them buggers back.*

27 Paul: [Hsnh]

28 (1.8)

29 Paul: Hguhh

30 (1.7)

31 Band: *Me father worked hard all his life, down t'pit an tannery. (.) He laboured every hour god sent to*

32 *June to January (.) He saved his pennies in a jar,* [*to buy me sunday shoes.*]

33 Brian: [See! Nothin offensive, nothin ↑blu:e!]

34 Band: *But they sent him black* [*instead of white,*] *he blew a bloody fuse.=*

35 Rep: [No, just ra:cist!]

36 Band: *=HE SHOUTED send the buggers back, o:h* [*send the buggers back*]

37 Brian: [GET EM OFF!] GET EM OFF THE [STA:GE!]

38 Band: [*These*]

39 [*aren't the ones=*]

40 Brian: [KENNY GET EM O:FF!!]

41 Band: [*=I wanted son*]

42 Brian: [Brian, Brian get em=]

43 Barry: [£Shocking isn't it?£]

44 Band: [*=I'm sending* [*them-*

45 Brian: [off the [↑~stage~]

```
46 Barry:          [((Shakes head))]
47 Paul:           [ Hguuh hhh hh  ]
48 Kenny:    SECURITY!
49                 (0.9)
50 Paddy:    Max!
51 Paul:     Hkkuh
52 Paddy:    [Max! Get back ere quick,] its kickin off!
53 Barry:    [  ((Bites lip)) ]
```

Here the humour is constructed around the notion that club manager Brian has inadvertently booked a racist folk band to perform at the grand opening of his club. However, this doesn't become clear until nearer the end of this particular sequence. As such, what we see here is laughter punctuate the sequence in a number of places. As with the previous examples in this chapter we can see evidence of stifling and restraint which are produced in response to the offensive song lyrics by the group (e.g. lines 15-20).

However, where this extract differs is that, not only do we see evidence of accountability management with the deployment of the laughter but we also see Barry produce a post-laughter assessment "£Shocking isn't it?£" (line 43). This assessment serves as part of Barry's accountability management here given the nature of the material which he has been laughing at is racist. As such, this assessment makes it clear to Paul that whilst he acknowledges that this is 'funny', he is also making it clear that it is also shocking. Therefore, we can see this working as a way of demonstrating that the 'understanding test' has been passed but also making it clear that they recognise that the nature of this material is problematic (i.e. racist in this case).

In terms of the affiliation, what this instance shows us is that, as with the extracts examined in the previous section, upon the presence of a 'joke' which is built upon some impropriety, recipients will produce laughter in such a way as to display their affective stance on the on-screen material. Here we can see performative features such as signs of stifling or restraint (e.g. the 'mpfh' sound in Barry and Paul's laughter on lines 15 and 17, capturing a closed mouth 'mm' and 'pfh' produced by escaping aspiration) , which work to display an orientation to the problematic nature of the humour that is playing out in the sitcom. What we also see here, and something which is unique to this extract, is that after the initial sequence of laughter comes to an end (line 29), Barry produces an assessment, formatted as a question, on line 43 ("£Shocking isn't it?£"). We have discussed the role this plays in accountability management, but this utterance is also working to negotiate stance between the co-viewers. In addition to the performative qualities of the laughter produced which accomplish a less than complete affiliation, due to the improper nature of the 'joke' here, the assessment that is produced by Barry is doing further stance management. Firstly, Barry's utterance can be seen as adding emphasis or restating his positioning on this material (i.e. that it is shocking). Secondly though, Barry's assessment can also be seen to be checking with Paul that the stance he has taken is one that Paul is also taking. As such, this utterance functions as a checking of consensus between the co-viewers. This is further exemplified in Paul's change of gaze towards Barry on line 47, which again sees him monitoring or checking on Barry's positioning. The laughter produced in juxtaposition with the change of gaze, again marked by the sort of performative qualities we have seen elsewhere in this chapter, serves as a return display of positioning from Paul (i.e. one that is not fully affiliative or disaffiliative). This is followed by an additional laugh, "hkkuh" from Paul on line 51, followed by Barry biting his lip, both reiterating the collective stance on the on-screen material.

What we see here then is laughter being deployed by speakers, alongside other interactional resources, as a way of negotiating stance and also managing accountability in ways which have hitherto not been examined. Let us now bring all these threads together.

4.6 – Chapter Summary

This chapter has demonstrated how a fine-grained transcription of the particularities of laughter, as advocated and illustrated in chapter 3 of this thesis, can reveal a range of performative qualities which have hitherto not been fully captured in CA/DP transcripts of laughter. Crucially though, this chapter has provided the ways in which the performative features of laughter are instrumental in accomplishing interactional business. More specifically, what we have seen here is how laughter plays a key role in the management and negotiation of accountability and stance. As such, it was shown how people would laugh in ways which demonstrates an orientation to the material which they were responding to. As such, they were able to satisfy concerns, as proposed by Sacks (1974, 1978), about solving the 'understanding test' component of joking but also display a sensitivity to the material to which their laughter was responsive to. It was argued here, that this latter concern was linked to the CA/DP notion of accountability and it was shown how laughter was produced in ways which oriented to whatever on-screen material it was responding to.

Furthermore, this chapter has also demonstrated the ways in which laughter is instrumental in the negotiation and presentation of stance. In modifying the way in which their laughter is performed, individuals can position themselves in relation to whatever material they are responding to. This compliments the work of Holt (2012) by demonstrating the link between laughter and affiliation/disaffiliation but also adds an additional consideration in regards to the hitherto underexamined performative qualities of laughter. It is then, not just the presence of laughter that is important as a member's method for accomplishing interactional business but also the ways in which instances of laughter are performed also plays a part in bringing about social actions. To this, we have seen here how laughter can be used by 'joke' recipients to position themselves as neither fully affiliative nor fully disaffiliative, whilst also producing a responsive action which affiliates with the affective response of their co-viewers.

In short, we have seen how these non-verbal and verbal aspects to laughter modify its production in purposeful ways which have hitherto not fully been addressed in the way in which laughter is transcribed and analysed in talk. Laughter is not just a member's method, it may be the swiss army knife of member's methods!

Chapter 5
Doing Sitcom Watching:
Requesting, Explaining, and Understanding Sitcoms as a Joint Accomplishment

5.0 – Chapter Overview

Previous chapters of this thesis have focused on the laughter found in the recordings of the sitcom watching data. Whilst laughter will nonetheless play an important role in this chapter, especially in section 5.4, the emphasis here will be on other forms of spoken interaction that participants engage in whilst watching sitcoms. Moreover, the interactional business that is being accomplished by these interactions will be illustrated and discussed. In doing so, this analytic chapter will address each of the general aims of this thesis by closely inspecting sequences of talk which see participants working together to accomplish some form of business which is focused on the task of watching sitcoms together. Before we move on to the specific business which is addressed in this chapter, it is worthwhile explaining how the instances that follow can be collected together and situate these in the broader context of the thesis.

Sitcoms are by their very nature, designed to be humorous. From the way in which the scripts are written, the show is produced and presented to audiences, "its humour is always of paramount concern" (Mills, 2009, p.6). Given that there is a "close, though complicated, relationship" between humour and laughter (Glenn and Holt, 2013, p.2), laughter often plays a key part in sitcoms. As a consequence, when reviewing the sitcom watching data, my first interest was in the production of laughter by participants and how it was utilised by those watching sitcoms, the results of which are discussed in chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis. These chapters have demonstrated how laughter is a highly diverse phenomena which is produced by people in a number of ways which are sensitive the

material to which they orient. Similarly, laughter has also been demonstrated to be a 'member's method' for dealing with issues of accountability.

However, it was clear from the data collected for this research project that laughter was not the only way in which the audiences interacted with the sitcoms they were watching on-screen and there were a number of instances involving sequences of talk. These instances offered a chance to engage with two of the research aims of this current thesis, which are firstly '*to explore how people watch, engage with, and understand sitcoms together in a domestic setting'* and also '*to explore the ways in which people interact with each other whilst watching TV'*. The focus of this chapter then, will be on some of these sequences of talk and, as demonstrated in previous chapters, it will be shown how the practice of sitcom watching is something which participants are actively involved in doing. More specifically here, the ways in which varied question-answer (hereafter Q-A) sequences are deployed as the primary method for problem-solving and requesting will be examined and detailed.

To begin this chapter, a discussion and summary of the existing literature about requesting and questioning will be outlined in section 5.1. This will provide readers with the chance to familiarise themselves with what analysts using CA methods have discovered about how these practices operate in interaction. As such, this work will act as the starting point for the analysis that follows in the forthcoming sections of this thesis. Following this is section 5.2, the first close inspection of the interaction that takes place between participants watching sitcoms together is presented. This analysis will reveal the ways in which talk is utilised by sitcom viewers to problematize, negotiate, and solve certain practical issues which relate to all parties being able to physically 'do' the watching of sitcoms, such as selecting an episode to watch or making sure everybody can see and hear the show. Continuing in a similar vein, section 5.3 of this chapter will demonstrate how issues of understanding the show that is playing out on-screen is something which is accomplished collaboratively through interaction. In doing so, it will be made clear how

understanding is not a purely cognitive process but is a discursive and collaborative achievement between co-viewers that can be observed and is negotiated through interaction.

The next analytic section of this chapter, section 5.4, draws together some of the central features of the preceding two chapters of this thesis, in that it deals with sequences of talk whereby laughter is deployed to achieve some interactional business and is also concerned with the CA/DP notion of accountability and how this is managed by co-viewers through talk. The ways in which these two issues are involved with the understanding or 'getting' of the humour that is playing out in the sitcom they are watching will be illustrated and discussed. As such, the importance of interaction to the way in which humour will be revealed, demonstrating how notions of humour appreciation or comprehension are accomplished discursively, not just cognitively.

In section 5.5, some instances where the problems raised by one of the viewers is not solved are discussed. These are in contrast to the other extracts discussed in this chapter and the reasons for why these sequences do not play out in the same manner as the others is discussed. In doing so, these 'failed' cases reveal something about the requirements for a Q-A sequence to be sufficiently addressed. The implications of the issues emerging from this data, and indeed the data covered in the rest of the chapter, will be discussed in section 5.6., demonstrating how sitcom watching is a highly organized social practice which is underpinned by collaboration and coordination, as mobilised through interaction. But first, let us consider how previous CA/DP work has examined the ways in which questions and requests are utilised to achieve a range of interactional business as this will underpin much of the analysis presented in this chapter.

5.1 – Requesting and Questioning

The analyses that are presented in this chapter all deal with participants solving some sort of problem with the sitcom watching in which they are engaged. As such, we shall see a number of extracts which illustrate how one viewer problematises some aspect of the ongoing TV watching, how co-

viewers respond to this, and how the problem is dealt with. This business is all accomplished through talk and what is shown in this chapter is how this unfolds over a number of spoken turns. In order to set the stage for this analysis, we shall first look at the CA work that has examined requests and questions, as these play a key role in the ways in which the problem solving is achieved by co-viewers (this is especially true for sections 5.3 and 5.4).

As "a basic and ubiquitous activity in human interaction" (Curl and Drew, 2008, p.130), requests for objects, information, or assistance are found in numerous social settings. For example, Kent (2012) examined the ways in which requests were deployed by parents to get their children to do something. This work on family mealtimes revealed that children often demonstrate "incipient compliance" by deploying some non-verbal behaviour that orients to the request and buys themselves time to resist them. Similarly, by analysing the talk of parents and children in everyday interaction, Craven and Potter (2010) demonstrated how requests are designed in a way that is sensitive to the recipient's willingness or ability to reply. In particular, their focus here is on 'directives' which are actions "where one participant *tells* another to do something" (p.420), separating them from requests which involve one party *asking* another to so something.

Central to the work by both Kent and Craven and Potter are the notions of entitlement and contingency which were shown to be instrumental in request formulation by Curl and Drew (2008). The type of request made by individuals will be shaped by the entitlement that the request issuer has to make such a demand but also the ability or willingness of the recipient to answer the request, otherwise known as contingency. In short, the notion of entitlement relates to the person making the request whilst contingency relates to the request recipient. In their analysis of phone calls, Curl and Drew showed how individuals considered entitlement and contingency and deployed either modal verb formulations of requests (e.g. "Can you…") or requests that were prefaced by "I wonder if". The modal verb constructions were utilised in situations where individuals believed they were entitled to make a request (high entitlement) and that there were no barriers to their request being fulfilled (low contingency). Conversely, "I wonder" constructions were used in instances where the

requesting party believes they are less entitled to make the request (low entitlement) or that the fulfilment of the request is contingent on other things (high contingency).

If we now revisit Craven and Potter's work on parent-child requests, we can understand them in terms of contingency and entitlement. Their findings suggest that parents use directives (telling someone to do something) more frequently than requests (asking someone to do something) because, as parents, they have higher entitlement claims and, when seeking compliance from their child, they are not encumbered by concerns for their children's contingencies. It is this lack of concern for the child's contingency that Craven and Potter believe differentiate the 'telling' of directives and 'asking' of requests. Along similar lines, Antaki and Kent (2012) identified how support staff of adults with intellectual impairments favoured requests that assumed "complete entitlement to do so" (p.886) in the form of 'bald imperatives' (e.g. "turn it around"). These requests make little provision for the sort of contingencies which may hamper the request being fulfilled (i.e. the impairments of the individual), instead focusing on 'getting the job done'.

The work on requests is underpinned by the conversation analytic notion of adjacency pairs. Put forward by Schegloff and Sacks (1973), this is the idea that certain bits of talk "cluster together" in meaningful ways (Liddicoat, 2007, p.105). To understand this 'clustering' in relation to requests let us consider the paired utterances found in a question-answer sequence (of which requests are an example of). Questions and the corresponding answers are commonly found in interaction and are often "tied" or "paired together" (Sacks, 1992). These paired utterances are described as being first pair-parts (FPP) and second pair-part (SPP) and are ordered in sequence with an FPP preceding an SPP. When one speaker produces a FPP in the form of a question they are making relevant the production of an answer following its completion. This answer, representing the SPP in this exchange, is "constrained" by the FPP in that it is expected that the SPP will be of the same pair type (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974, p.710). In producing a corresponding second part, in this case an answer, that speaker is displaying that they have understood the prior utterance as being a question and that an answer was appropriate here (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974; Sacks, 1992; Atkinson

& Drew, 1979). Heritage (1988) demonstrates how accounts or explanations are often deployed by speakers when a corresponding answer (SPP) is not produced after a question (FPP) (e.g. if the second party remains silent). Failure to produce an SPP is noticeable and requires some explanation as there are a number of negative inferences made about a non-answering party (e.g. they are rude or unwilling to answer because doing so would incriminate them).

These types of accounts and explanations will be examined in greater detail in forthcoming sections of this chapter, however, I want to first illustrate how viewers problematize some aspect of the viewing experience and how a solution to this problem is negotiated with their co-viewers. The extracts that follow in section 5.2 then, are grouped together as illustrations of how interaction is utilised to make relevant and address issues which may impact viewers ability to 'do' sitcom watching. As such, we can begin to see how watching sitcoms together is a collaborative and organised social activity.

5.2 – Collaborative Problem Solving

This first analytic section collects together instances from the sitcom watching data which deal with individuals working together to solve a problem which has been made relevant by one member of the group. These problems don't relate to the content of the sitcom, unlike those covered in subsequent sections of this chapter, but instead are related to doing the practice of sitcom watching itself. In that sense, these problems are not sitcom-centric but are instead concerned with the more general practice of watching TV and the sort of orderliness or organization that underpins it. The following extracts then, demonstrate the ways in which something in the immediate environment is problematized by one viewer which could be seen as a barrier to all members being able to 'do' sitcom watching.

To begin, let us consider the first extract (extract 5.1) featuring Maude and Greg watching an episode of the sitcom *Only Fools and Horses*. In this sequence, Greg raises an issue with the lighting in the room and what follows is a negotiation and an eventual solution to this issue.

Extract 5.1 – Open That Blind

```
1  Greg:    Shall I open that blind a little bit?
2                 (.)
3  Greg:    Let more li:ght in dya think?
4                 (0.4)
5  Greg:    Or-=
6  Maude:   =I don't know rea:lly.
7  Greg:    >It'd be< better if the su:ns err,
8                 (0.6)
9  Greg:    Gone down a bit.
10                (3.3)
11 Greg:    See what it's li:ke.
12                (5.2)
13 Greg:    Is that alright?
14 Maude:   That's alri:ght, yeah.
```

On line 1 of this sequence, Greg raises a problem with the lighting in the room, asking the question "Shall I open that blind a little bit?". This is accompanied by Greg pointing towards the blinds situated behind the TV. Greg's utterance here is performing two roles; 1) it is problematizing the lighting in the room, whilst 2) it is simultaneously designed to offer a solution to the problem "Shall I open..". Curl (2006), in her work on offers, argues that they can be constructed in a way which either makes the offerer the "agents of the problem-resolving activity, or the ones who desire such activity" (p.1259). Here, Greg's offer to open the blind places him as the 'agent' to address the issue with the lighting. However, before following through with actually resolving the issue with the blind, Greg

clarifies his offer, by asking a further question “Let more li:ght in dya think?” (line 3). This follow-up question offers Maude an account for why he made the offer to open the blinds, which in this case is to let some more light into the room because it is too dark. Maude does not respond to Greg’s intial offer, (line 1), or indeed his follow-up question on line 3. The delaying of a response by not talking is a common feature of disagreements and is frequently deployed in talk by second speakers as a way of postponing having to give the disagreeing next action (Pomerantz, 1984a; Pomerantz, 1984b). After two attempts to get an answer out of Maude, Greg again pursues a response with another utterance beginning with “Or-” (line 4). This turn orients to the absence of Maude’s response and pusues a response but can also be seen as modifying the initial offer by suggesting an alternative course of action. Greg does not get to complete his utterance as Maude interupts with her answer to his original question from line 1; “=I don’t know rea:lly” (line 6).

Up to this point, Greg’s questioning was formulated in a way that displayed low entitlement. After all, it would have been possible for Greg to simply open the blinds however, the decision to do this was made public and was contingent on the go-ahead being granted by Maude. Yet, he doesn’t and instead we see the process of this relatively minor activity of opening the blind, as being something which is negotiated and collaboratively accomplished. However in this case, Maude demonstrates reluctance to make the decision that Greg seeks and instead expresses her uncertainty; “=I don’t know rea:lly” (line 6). At this juncture, Greg gets up out of his chair and walks over to the window which is located off-camera. As he is moving out of shot, he says to Maude “>It’d be< better if the su:ns err,” (line 7) and, after a short pause of 0.6 seconds (line 8), “Gone down a bit.” (line 9). What follows is 3.3 seconds of silence (line 10) whilst Greg finishes his walk over to the window. On line 11 Greg accompanies opening the blinds with “See what it’s li:ke.”, giving Maude the opportunity to ask him to close them again. There is 5.2 seconds of silence as the room gets brighter thanks to the opening of the blinds, Greg then follows this by asking another question “Is that

alright?" (line 13). Maude's response and the second pair part to this question-answer sequence comes on line 14, "That's alri:ght, yeah." at which point Greg returns to his seat.

In this brief sequence of interaction, and indeed the ones that follow this, we are seeing a level of collalaboration and negotiation between co-viewers which is utilised to solve some problem. Here, that problem is the lighting and it is made relevant by Greg who offers to be the 'agent' to attempt to solve this problem. In this instance, Greg and Maude are working together to ensure that both can see the TV clearly and thus 'do' sitcom watching. Greg's question to Maude is deployed just prior to the beginning of the sitcom and it is not until he has asked her that he gets up out of his seat to open the blinds. Indeed, even when he opens the blinds, Greg still checks with Maude that the opening of the blinds is not detrimental to her viewing experience ("Is that alright?" [line 13]) before returning to his seat. In opening the blinds to make the room brighter Greg is ensuring that both his and Maude's ability to watch *Only Fools and Horses* is not impaired by the how dark the room is.

What follows are some examples of other instances whereby co-viewers engage in sequences of problem solving. Like the issue with the lighting in extract 5.1, the problems that are made relevant by one member of the audience orient to issues which may hamper the groups ability to 'do' watching the sitcom. As such, it is argued that what we are seeing here is a hitherto unexplored level of social organization and collaboration to sitcom watching on TV. To further illustrate this, consider the following extract (5.2), which sees Annette, Beverley, Carol, and Denise watching the sitcom *Outnumbered*. Here it is not being able to see the TV that is the issue but whether all audience members can hear the show that they are watching. As with Greg and Maude it is the use of question-answer sequences through which problem-solving action is contingent upon.

Extract 5.2 – Turn it Up

1 Karen: ↑Can I go: to [Dai:sy's] slee::p=

2 Carol: [Can we hear it?] →

3 Karen: [=O::ver?]

4 Bev: [Can you turn it up] a bit?

5 Pete: No::.

6 (0.3)

7 Karen: ↑Bu:t ↑why::?

8 Carol: [((Gets and attempts to adjust the laptop volume))]

10 Pete: [Be:cause sh:leepovers::, (1.9) are the invention of the=]

11 Pete: [=Devil.]

12 Carol: [↑This] might be as loud [as it go::es.]

13 Karen: [↑ But you let me go to] Ale:xa's=

14 Karen: [=Slee::p] over.

15 Carol: [Is that a problem?]

16 Pete: Yep, and you watched the hills [have eyes,]

17 Ann: [Bring it close.]

18 (0.6)

19 Pete: [And you didn't sleep for six months.]

20 Carol: [((Pulls chair with laptop on towards group))]

In extract 5.2, the problem-solving sequence begins on line 2 when Carol asks the question “Can we hear it?”. By asking this question Carol is identifying the volume of the sitcom as being a potential problem that may need to be addressed here. At this point Carol does not direct this question at any particular co-viewer; her gaze still remains fixed on the sitcom and her turn design does not specify a particular recipient, instead addressing the collective “we”. Beverley self-selects immediately with “Can you turn it up a bit?” (line 4). Here, Beverley is treating Carol’s prior turn as containing an offer to do something about the issue which she identified as being potentially problematic, and as such, replies to her question with a request “can you turn it up a bit?” (line 4). In this way, Beverley is selecting Carol as the ‘agent’ who will address this issue which she problematized and, by using the modal verb formulation, exhibits high entitlement to ask Carol to turn the volume up (Curl & Drew, 2008).

Carol acts upon this request on line 8, getting up from where she is sitting and adjusting the volume on the laptop which they are watching the sitcom on. However, on line 12, after some pressing of the buttons on the laptop, she remarks “↑This might be as loud as it go::es.”. This response by Carol provides an account for why she cannot complete the request but is also designed to not completely close off any future directions for solving the problem. That is, she is saying this ‘might’ be as loud as it goes, but she is keeping open the possibility that her co-viewers may know otherwise. Also, Carol’s turn is designed to account for the fact that the solution to the problem cannot be reached, not because of her unwillingness to do so, but because she is unable to do so because of the limitations of the laptop. This is followed by a further clarifying question from Carol to Beverley, “Is that a problem?” (line 14). This turn is embodied within a change of gaze, with Carol turning from the looking at the laptop and looking directly at Beverley. Whilst her gaze is focused on Beverley, Carol’s question does not identify a specific recipient or select a particular co-viewer as the next speaker.

In response to this on line 17, it is Annette who offers a solution to the problem with the volume of the show, using the imperative formatted “Bring it close” which resembles the sorts of directive which Craven and Potter (2010) found in their work (discussed earlier in this chapter). In this case, Annette’s directive maintains Carol’s role as the ‘agent’ for problem solving, (i.e. bringing the laptop closer to the co-viewers), which we see happen on line 20.

As we saw in extract 5.1 with Greg and Maude, in extract 5.2 we see another example of how co-viewers will negotiate and collaborate to ensure that all parties are able to ‘do’ sitcom watching. In both cases we see one member of the group identify an issue that is potentially problematic and then put themselves forward to be the ‘agent’ to bring about that change. However, before action is taken there is a sequence of negotiation and collaboration which allows the ‘agent’ to, firstly, establish whether the co-viewers believe the issue to be problematic, and secondly, if so, provide a go-ahead for the agent to attempt to solve this problem for the group. A further aspect here in both extract 5.1 and 5.2 is that there is a further checking by the ‘agent’ with their co-viewers to assess the changes attempted, for example Greg’s “Is that alright?” on line 13 in extract 1 or Carol’s “Is that a problem” on line 15 in extract 2.

As such, what we are seeing here is a hitherto previously unseen practice of collaborative problem solving by sitcom viewers which involves a sequence of negotiation, using requests or questions, which is accomplished discursively by co-viewers. Consequently, we are seeing here how watching sitcoms together is a socially organized and jointly accomplished endeavour. To further illustrate this, let us consider the following extract (5.3) which features consider extract 3 which sees Estelle, Russ and Harry watching a DVD of *Friday Night Dinner.* In this sequence, we see another example of negotiated problem-solving taking place but in this case the role of ‘agent’ is bought about by a co-viewer’s inability to start the sitcom on-screen using the remote control.

Extract 5.3 – Press Play

```
1     Est:  Dya wanna press pla:y?
2                 (1.4)
3     Est:  [Ooh give] me tha:t.
4     Har:  [  Ffh   ]
5     Har:  I've forgotten completely how that one works.
6                 (1.0)
7     Har:  It's been a long time.
8                 (0.9)
9     Est:  Which ep-, du-, dya just want the first one?
10                (.)
11    Har:  Er:m, (.) No go fuh, [go fuh ↑any.   ]
12    Rus:                       [Have I actually] see:n the first one?
13                (0.5)
14    Har:  Yea::h, (.) [      er::m,     ]
15    Rus:              [It's the only one] I have seen.
16    Est:  Ok which one dya want?
17                (0.5)
18    Har:  Don't mind.
19    Rus:  Two.
20                (0.4)
21    Est:  Two?
```

When this sequence begins Harry has the remote control in his hand and is studying the buttons on it. In response to this, Estelle asks the question "Dya wanna press pla:y?" (line 1). In her work on requests between senior citizens and caregivers, Lindström (2005), examined requests using question formats like Estelle's here and illustrated how requests that are formatted as a question are used to deal with something that should be done but isn't. Here, Estelle and Russ are waiting for Harry to begin the show and Estelle's "Dya wanna press pla:y?" can be seen in a similar way to the question

formatted requests identified by Lindström, in that it is problematizing something that should have been done by now (i.e. the show should have been started).

Harry does not respond to Estelle's request and he contiues to look at the buttons on the remote. As such, on line 3 she produces the directive "Ooh give me tha:t", which is accompanyied by her reaching over and taking the remote control from Harry's hands. What follows is a series of accounts by Harry as to why he didn't press play to start the show; "I've forgotten completely how that one works." (line 5), followed by "It's been a long time." (line 7). Having taken the remote from Harry, Estelle has placed herself in the position of 'agent' and from line 9 onwards we see a sequence of interaction which takes a similar trajectory as they did with Greg and Carol in extracts 5.1 and 5.2. As such, Estelle asks her co-viewers "Which ep-, du-, dya just want the first one?" (line 9) which offers a possible solution to the problem (picking the first episode) but also makes the decision on which episode to watch public and therefore something which can be negotiated through interaction.

As such, in response to Estelle's question on line 9, Harry self-selects to answer "Er:m, (.) No go fuh, go fuh ↑any." (line 11). In overlap with this, Russ also responds with a question; "Have I actually see:n the first one?" (line 12). The corresponding answer to Russ' question is produced on line 14, "Yea::h,". The Q-A insert sequence is then concluded with Russ remarking "It's the only one I have seen." (line 15). At this point Estelle, as the prospective 'agent' for solving this problem, reformulates her original question in light of the new information provided by Harry and Russ and resumes with the negotiation of which episode she should be starting to play here. After 0.5 seconds, Harry answers "Don't mind." on line 18, followed by Russ answering "Two" (line 19). To close this sequence, Estelle repeats back "Two?" as a final check before proceeding to play episode 2.

Again, as we saw with Greg in extract 5.1 and Carol in extract 5.2, Estelle took it upon herself to problematize some aspect of the sitcom watching process, in this case selecting an episode from the DVD menu, and as such, became the 'agent' for solving this particular problem which was interrupting the group's ability to 'do' sitcom watching together. Moreover, we also saw here how

the particular course of action to be taken by the ‘agent’ was something which was discussed and negotiated with between co-viewers. As such, we can see how ‘doing’ watching the sitcom together is something which is underpinned by interaction. More specifically, we have seen here how, far from being a passive practice of ‘just watching’, I have demonstrated how there is a discursive component to watching sitcoms which has hitherto not been identified and explored in the sort of fine-grained analysis which CA/DP offers. In addition, the extracts featured in this section also reveal a level of collaboration or cooperation that underpins the practice of ‘doing’ watching sitcoms together, whereby members will monitor what is going on and, when faced with something which they regard as problematic to all members being able to watch the sitcom, will problematize this publicly through discursive means. In doing so, the person who raises the problem usually first ascertains whether the issue they identify represents a problem shared by other members and then set in motion a negotiation about how to solve this problem, placing themselves in the role of ‘agent’ to solve the problem. These sequences conclude with some further checking or ratification that the action taking has been addressed, where possible, from the other members of the viewing party.

In the proceeding section of this chapter, I will illustrate further ways in which sequences of interaction are used by co-viewers to solve some sort of problem. More specifically, it will be illustrated how requests for information are made by one viewer in relation to some aspect of the sitcom they are watching. As such, it is demonstrated how understanding of issues related to sitcoms is something which is accomplished collaboratively and discursively. These sequences have been grouped together as examples of ‘contingent requests’ and these will be discussed in the following section of this chapter.

5.3 – Contingent Requests

In this section, another type of Q-A sequence will be explored that deals with requests for information. More specifically, these sequences are initiated by one sitcom viewer to request some information about the show they are watching. The focus of these questions is some aspect of the on-screen content that isn't directly linked to the humorous aspects of the show (these will be covered in section 5.5). Unlike the procedural requests, these information seeking exercises are not dealing with the practicalities of sitcom watching; instead they are tied to the co-watchers trying to understand something about the show they are watching. Grossberg (1987) argues that audiences engage in a "mobile game of trivia" (p.29) when watching a show on TV. In the space of an episode, viewers are presented with a range of references or nods to other shows, world events or even previous episodes of the same show and the 'game' involves audience members making sense of these references. Audience members must draw upon prior knowledge or experiences to play the trivia game, making it "the most salient form of sitcom appreciation" (Marc, 1984, p.12). What is unclear however, is how these sense-making 'games' actually operate during the watching of a sitcom.

Requests for information or explanations are specific examples of Q-A sequences and the ways in which the business of explaining is done has been examined by Antaki (1994) who identified "explanation slots" (p.75). These 'slots' are spaces in talk that are opened up to "explain, justify or warrant a puzzle which has arisen then and there" (1994, p.75) in the course of talk. Explanation slots can take two forms, the first is opened by a speaker for somebody else whereby a person can "dragoon" another into giving an explanation. The second, highlighted by Heritage (1988), concern explanation slots that are produced and filled by the same speaker. The focus here in this chapter will be on the first type of explanation slot; the explanations that are made relevant by other parties. To illustrate this, consider the following extract of Barry and Paul watching *Phoenix Nights* together.

Extract 5.4 – First One

```
1      Barry:     Is this the fi:rst one?
2                       (.)
3      Paul:      (Nodding head) Mmm=
4      Barry:     [=Of series one?]
5      Paul:      [(Nodding head) ] Mmm.
```

The Q-A sequence begins here on line 1 when Barry asks “Is this the fi:rst one?”, utilising a YNI format. After a brief pause (line 2), Paul faces Barry and, whilst nodding, adds “Mmm” (line 3). Barry responds by asking a further question, “Of series one?” (line 4), seeking further information about the episode they are watching. Again, the corresponding response, “Mmm” from Paul is accompanied by nodding (line 5).

In this extract we see Barry opening up an explanation slot for Paul when he seeks further information about the sitcom they are watching. More specifically, Barry is looking for Paul to confirm that the episode they are watching is the first in the series. In order to answer this question, Paul would require knowledge of the show they are watching that extends beyond what is being shown on-screen. After all, when a show is playing there is not necessarily any indications of which episode and series it is, especially as sitcoms are renowned for their formulaic structure (Mills,

2005). Therefore, in order to work this out a viewer would have to have prior knowledge of the show, including its storylines, characters, relative ordering of episodes etc. An answer to this type of question then is contingent on a viewer having this prior knowledge and in extract 4, by asking Paul the question, Barry is demonstrating that he believes Paul does indeed have access to the information he seeks.

What differentiates this type of Q-A sequence from the procedural requests in section 4.3 is that they are concerned with the exchange of knowledge, instead of being underpinned by some form of action modulation. Contingent requests are not deployed to ensure that viewers can 'do' sitcom watching but are utilised to help co-watchers 'get' what is playing out on-screen. But more than that, these Q-A sequences are seeking information that is not available on-screen. Instead, the information that is being pursued relies on the answering party to know something more about the show playing on-screen that is not readily available on-screen. To further explore this consider extract 5 which features Jim and Barbara watching an episode of *Come Fly with Me*. In this extract we see Barbara initiating a Q-A sequence in order to identify something which has appeared on-screen in an advertisement just prior to the beginning of the show.

Extract 5.5 – Doctor Who

```
1 Barb:     What's that on the:re do ya think?

2                 (2.0)

3  Jim:     Doctor who.

4                 (1.8)

5 Barb:     Owh.
```

This sequence of talk consists of just three turns, beginning on line 1 with Barbara opening up an explanation slot and posing the question “What’s that on the:re do ya think?”. The responsive turn and answer to this question is delivered by Jim after a 2 second pause; “Doctor who” (line 3). Closing the sequence with a recognition token of “owh” (line 5), Barbara acknowledges Jim’s answer and accepts his solution to the puzzle that she posed.

Once again then, we see a situation where there was something about the content playing on-screen that was problematic. More specifically, this was a problem with recognizing something on-screen as being from the sci-fi show *Doctor Who*. By launching into the Q-A sequence, Barbara demonstrates that she believes that Jim will have access to the sort of information that eludes her, namely what “that” is on the TV. In order to know what “that” is, Jim will have to have prior knowledge of Doctor Who to know that the thing on-screen is from that show. Similar to Paul’s answer to Barry’s request in extract 4 then, Jim’s answer to Barbara’s question is contingent on having some knowledge of something which cannot be obtained from the show that is playing at that given time. However, it is the watching of a sitcom which has made relevant the Q-A sequences by bringing about something that is problematic to one of the viewers.

In this final extract, we see Estelle, Russ and Harry watching an episode of *Friday Night Dinner* together. Here Russ begins a Q-A sequence which is occasioned by the appearance of an actor on-screen who also starred in another sitcom called *The Inbetweeners*.

Extract 5.6 – The Inbetweeners

```
1   Russ:   What came fi:rst, this or the inbetweeners?
2                 (0.5)
3   Harry:  The in[betweeners]
4   Est:           [ Inbetween]ers
5                 (1.3)
```

```
6   Est:    ↑Thi:s is pretty ne:w?
7                 (1.2)
8   Russ:   Hskuh
9   Est:    >Like< last yea:r?
```

Russ opens up an explanation slot for Harry and Estelle on line 1 with the question "What came fi:rst, this or the inbetweeners?". This question was bought about by the fact that actor Simon Bird plays a central role in both *Friday Night Dinner* and *The Inbetweeners*. The corresponding SPP and answer to this question is produced by Harry who self-selects on line 3 after a 0.5 second gap with Estelle also answering in overlap with the same answer (line 4). Upon completion of the Q-A sequence there is a 1.3 second gap before Estelle adds further information about her answer, saying that "↑Thi:s is pretty ne:w?" (line 6). After 1.2 seconds of silence Russ produces a single laugh particle "Hskuh" (line 8) in response to the sitcom on-screen, shortly followed by further information about the shows broadcast from Estelle ">Like< last yea:r?" (line 9).

Once again we can see a Q-A sequence occasioned by something that is playing out on-screen, in this case it's the presence of a particular actor that brings this sequence into being. In addition, this Q-A sequence again relies on the answering party having information outside of that which is visible in the on-screen content. By asking the question of his co-viewers, Russ is demonstrating that he believes that they will have access to the information he seeks. It is for this reason that Russ' turn at talk can be classified as being a contingent request as it is made relevant by the on-screen sitcom but contingent on the co-viewers having knowledge related to, yet but outside of, what is currently playing on the TV.

In sum then, extracts 4, 5 and 6 all featured a particular Q-A sequence that was bought about by an individual who was seeking information about the sitcom they were watching. But more than that, these contingent requests relied on answering parties to have knowledge of the on-screen content that went beyond what was available at that time. In extract 4 it was knowledge of the

relative ordering of the episode in a series of episodes that was being called upon, whilst extract 5 it was an issue of recognition that prompted the Q-A sequence as one party was unable to identify something on-screen. Finally, in extract 6 the presence of an actor in a number of sitcoms prompted a question which compared the broadcast history of the two and required individuals to draw upon knowledge of both shows. Put another way, these contingent requests are reliant upon some 'outside knowledge' of the sitcom which is in addition to whatever is playing out on-screen.

What we see here then is a process of understanding that is played out discursively over a series of spoken turns and, as such, is collaboratively accomplished by speakers who are active participants in bringing this about. As with the sequences of talk explored in section 4.3, the contingent requests examined here demonstrate how individuals work together to ensure that everyone can 'do' sitcom watching. However, procedural and contingent requests are different in that they are utilised by speakers to deal with different issues that may impact on watching the sitcom. Whilst procedural requests are grounded in things that can be changed or altered (e.g. volume or choice of episode), contingent requests are concerned with making sense of the sitcom. The final type of Q-A sequence to be examined in this chapter are similarly interested in sitcom understanding and sense-making practices of individuals. However, they are unique in that they orient specifically to the humorous content and the jokes that are playing out on-screen.

5.4 – "Getting" the Joke

In this section of the chapter, we will be dealing with a specific type of problem solving sequence which sees the co-viewers engaged in sequences of interaction which are related to issues with understanding the jokes that are playing out on-screen. A close examination of how these turns at talk are designed, deployed and responded to reveals how individuals work collaboratively to 'get' the jokes that are performed in sitcoms. What emerges from this is that the notion of understanding or

‘getting’ a joke is sometimes accomplished discursively over a number of spoken turns and is observable as such.

Relevant again to this section of the chapter is the CA/DP notion of accountability that was discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis. To recap, the principle of accountability is grounded in Schegloff and Sacks’ (1973) notion of adjacency pairs which was discussed in section 5.1. In short, this refers to the ways in which turns at talk “cluster together” (Liddicoat, 2007, p.105) into sequences that are adjacently organised (as FPPs and SPPs). As such, there is a conditional relevance of the production of a SPP when a FPP has been produced (Drew, 2005). If the relevant SPP is not produced, it will be “*noticeably* and *relevantly absent*” (Buttny, 1993, p.39, italics in original).

Heritage (1984) describes this as the “basic theorem of accountable action” (p.291) highlighting that in situations where an individual does not produce the response which is normatively expected to be produced, that person will be held accountable for it and “’deviant’ actions may ultimately be recognizable, accountable, and sanctionable as such” (p.291-292). In short, where a relevant ‘next action’ is not produced by the recipient of an instance of talk, that recipient will be placed in a position of accountability for failing to show any orientation to what the relevant response to the preceding talk was.

Again, the work of Sacks (1974, 1978, 1992) on the sequential design of jokes is important here and demonstrates how accountability is linked to the responding to jokes. Sacks described jokes as being “understanding tests” (1974, p.346) with which individuals must ensure they produce a relevant ‘next’ action to demonstrate that they have ‘got’ the joke. Furthermore, Sacks (1974) argued that a joke is made up of three adjacently placed sequence types; the preface, the telling, and the response sequence (as discussed previously). Of interest here is the response sequence, whereby the presentation of the punchline marks the end of the telling sequence and occasions a response sequence. “In minimal courses this consists wholly of laughing” (1974, p.347) but during the response sequence recipients can also produce other responses which are made relevant by the jokes

telling such as silence and delayed laughter which are both “systematic possibilities” (1974, p.348). However, Sacks suggested that laughter does have a “priority claim on a jokes completion” (1974, p.348).

As such, the recipient of a joke is placed in a position whereby they have to demonstrate to the joke teller that they have understood or ‘got’ the preceding joke and have recognised that it is now the appropriate time to provide that response. Crucially, failure to do so is “supposable as a failure to understand” (Sacks, 1974, p.346). In other words, if a recipient fails to demonstrate that they have ‘got’ a joke, then they are placed in an accountable position and an inference is made about why they didn’t respond appropriately. Sacks suggests that one such inference is that they have failed to understand the joke presented to them because they are “lacking sophistication” (1974, p.346).

In chapter 3 it was shown how, when faced with material that could be considered transgressive in some way (e.g. inappropriate or racist), individuals produced laughter that was sensitive to the nature of the content but also oriented to the fact that laughing at such material would lead to inferences being made about them (e.g. that they were racist). In doing so, individuals are firstly showing that they had ‘got’ the joke, passing the “understanding test” but crucially they were also managing this accountable position. With this in mind, in this section I want to illustrate how these issues of accountability are managed and negotiated through interaction. In particular, what will be shown here is how Q-A sequences are deployed as a key resource for dealing with the issue of accountability related to ‘getting’ jokes. As such, what will be illustrated here how these sequences are occasioned and how the “understanding test” that jokes pose is played out over a number of spoken turns and is collaboratively accomplished. The first extract features Annette, Beverley, and Caroline watching an episode of *Outnumbered*. On-screen, Frank is watching an episode of the quiz show The Weakest Link and is shouting out instructions to the contestants.

Extract 5.7 – Bank It

((‘The Weakest Link’ jingle plays on the TV))

Presenter: Ho:w many in a school?

(.)

Contestant 1: Twe:n[ty.]

Frank: [B-] Ba:nkh.

Presenter: Sa::ndra, (.) who wrote wa:r and pea:ce?

Contestant 2: Tolstoy.

Frank: BA:nk[h.]

Presenter: [T]im, (.) what is the [ca:pital of Italy?]

Bev: [Hsnhh, (.) ukh hmh]

(.)

Contestant 3: Ro:me.

Ann: What’s he [sa:y?]

Frank: [BA:N::K]hh.

Presenter: [((Good job.))] (.) [Who: captained Engla:nd=]

Bev: [Bank, Weakest Link.]

Presenter: [=To victory in the=]

Ann: [£Ow:uh£]

Car: [↑Owu:h-huh] [snh hhh]

Presenter: [=Ni:neteen] [seventy two] world cup?

Frank: [↑↑BA::NK I::T.]

Bev: Eck hguh ↑hgh [huh °ukh] >kgh ukh ukh<° ↑hukh hhh

Car: [°hukh hgh°]

Ann: £I do tha:t£

To understand this sequence it would first be helpful to provide some background on the quiz show ‘The Weakest Link’ which Frank is watching on-screen. The Weakest Link sees a group of

individuals answering questions one after another in quick succession over a number of rounds against the clock. Each correct answer is worth an increasing sum of money. Therefore, the more correct answers produced, the higher the prize money available. However, contestants can only win money that they have 'banked', if the time expires before they 'bank it' or they get an answer wrong, any money that has been accumulated is lost. To 'bank' any money won, contestants must say 'bank' prior to a question being asked to them.

With this in mind, what we see in this extract is Frank responding to the show by using the show's signature 'bank' catchphrase. This begins on line 5 with "B- Ba:nkh" and is repeated on line 8 ("BA:nkh.") and also 14 ("BA:N::K hh."), concluding on line 21 with "↑↑BA::NK I::T." Each time that Frank repeats the phrase he is becoming increasingly animated, raising the volume, pitch and emphasis. It is Frank's overly enthusiastic response to the TV that forms the basis of the humour in this scene.

On line 10, Beverley laughs at Frank's response, producing three laugh particles ("Hsnhh,(.) ukh hmh"). After a brief pause, this is followed by Annette opening up an explanation slot in line 13 with a question; "What's he sa:y?". The corresponding answer to this is provided by Beverley on line 16, "Bank, Weakest Link". In response to this, Annette and Caroline produce laughter which includes an audible "oh" in overlap on lines 18 ("£Ow:uh£") and 19 ("↑Owu:h-huh snh hhh"). When Frank produces his most animated "↑↑BA::NK I::T." on line 21, Beverley and Caroline both laugh upon its completion whilst Annette comments "£I do tha:t£" in a 'smiley voice' (line 24).

There are a few observations that one can make about the explanation sequence that occurs in the above extract. Firstly, some consideration should be given to the sequential positioning of the explanation slot that is opened by Annette on line 13. Her request for a clarification with "What's he sa:y?" occurs after Beverley laughs on line 10. In doing so, Beverley is marking Frank's prior utterance as being 'laughable' (Glenn, 2003), that is, something to which the production of laughter is relevant. As Jefferson, Sacks and Schegloff (1977) demonstrate, laughter is 'indexical' in that, when it is produced by one individual, others will seek to find exactly to what it refers. In this

instance, Beverley's laughter prompts Annette to attempt to locate exactly what it is that Beverley has deemed 'laughable' by opening up an explanation slot. To understand why this Q-A sequence was launched by Annette, the work of Sacks (1974, 1978) is important here.

In face-to-face encounters, Sacks (1974, 1978) put forward the notion that jokes were 'understanding tests', whereby failure by recipients to produce an appropriate response upon the completion of a joke will be seen as being a failure to 'get' the joke. In these situations, recipients will be accountable and inferences will be made about them and their "sophistication" (1978, p.259) because of the lack of response. This work by Sacks however, is concerned with joke tellers and recipients being co-present and telling what Martin (2007) refers to as 'canned' jokes. As discussed in chapter 1, section 1.7, the jokes in sitcoms are different in that they are co-constructed by the actors on-screen over a number of spoken turns; there is not one joke teller. The relationship with the recipient of the jokes also differs in that the sitcom actors are performing to an audience who, aside from those sitcoms that utilise a studio audience, is not co-present and is watching at home on TV. As such, there is no way in which recipients can be held accountable for their responses by the joke teller. However, what extract 7 demonstrates, and indeed what subsequent extracts in this chapter show, is that accountability is something that is relevant to sitcom joke recipients. More specifically, what we see here is that co-viewers hold each other to account for their responses but at the same time they are also managing their own accountability.

Annette's question on line 13, "Whats he sa:y?", is occasioned by Beverley's solo laughter on line 10. By laughing at Frank's animated response on-screen, Beverley has demonstrated to her co-viewers that she has noticed a joke and that she has 'got' it here. By not laughing, her co-viewers have not shown that they have passed the 'understanding test' and, as such they are in an accountable position. In one sense Annette's initiation of a Q-A sequence can be seen as an exercise in gathering the information required to 'get' the joke. In doing so, this operates as an account for her non-laughter (i.e. she doesn't have all the information required to understand the joke) but in another sense this also serves as a way of holding Beverley to account for the production of her laughter.

More specifically, by asking Beverley to explain what Frank said she is also asking Annette to explain what she is laughing at. In this sense, laughing in response to on-screen content is accountable in that individuals are tasked with accounting for why they laughed by their co-viewers.

The design of both Annette and Beverley's turns is further testament to the fact sitcom viewers are actively managing accountability. Annette's question of "Whats he sa:y?" accounts for her not responding by framing the problem as being one of hearing, not understanding, demonstrating an awareness of the inferences that can be made for failing to demonstrate she has 'got' the joke. Beverley's response of "Bank, Weakest Link" however, does not treat Annette's question as being just an issue of hearing as she doesn't just repeat what was said but also includes an explanation of what the humour here was based on – the quiz show, The Weakest Link. To further explore these issues, consider the following extract which sees Eric and Linda watching a Christmas themed episode of *Benidorm*. On-screen the Garvey family (Mick, Janice, Michael and Madge) are sitting in the audience of the Benidorm Palace theatre, of which Madge is the owner and responsible for booking the acts for the Christmas performance that is underway. A special guest is expected but nobody knows exactly who it will be.

Extract 5.8 – Roy Wood

1 Mick: Looks like we're gonna need them bowler hats after al:[l.]

2 Madge: [O::h] sod the bowler hats,

3 (0.7)

4 Madge: This is supposed to be a Chri:stmas show.

5 (0.9)

6 ((Loud music and cheering. Guitar player enters on stage))

7 Eric: Hguh hmh [hmh hgh snh]

```
8    Linda:            [Who is i:t?] Roy [Wood?     ]
9    Eric:                               [Hguh huh=]
10   Jan:                                [   <Oh my   ] [     go:d> (.)     ]
11   Eric:                                                [=yeah Whizzard.]
12   Jan:      Look who it ↑i:s.
13                (1.6)
14   Madge:    ↑Its Ca:tweazle
15   Eric:     Pgkuh c(h)atw(h) [ hakh hkh   ]
16   Linda:                     [Hguh heh heh] heh
```

The ‘joke’ here is based on the fact that the family on-screen are expecting the special guest to be a disappointment, an issue that has been building throughout the episode. When the performer is revealed as Roy Wood from the band Wizzard on line 6, this is the first time that both the Garvey family on-screen and the audience at home have seen who the special guest performer is. Eric marks the appearance of the rock star with laughter comprised of five laugh particles, “Hguh hmh hmh hgh snh” (line 7). Linda initiates a Q-A sequence in partial overlap with Eric’s laughter with the question “Who is i:t? Roy Wood?” on line 8. The confirmatory response from Eric is delivered on line 11 with “yeah Whizzard.”. This is followed by another on-screen ‘joke’ in which Madge mistakenly believes that Roy Wood is the children’s TV character Catweazle, (“↑Its Ca:tweazle,” line 14), to which both Eric and Linda respond to with laughter (lines 15-16).

As with extract 7, the Q-A sequence that appears here in extract 8 is occasioned by Eric’s laughter on line 7. In terms of Sacks’ (1974, 1978) idea that jokes are understanding tests, Eric’s laughter is demonstrating that he has ‘got’ the joke. By the same token, by not laughing, Linda is in an accountable position (i.e. she hasn’t ‘got’ the joke). By initiating a Q-A sequence however, Linda is managing this accountability by reframing the issue here as being one of not knowing who the person is, not an issue with understanding the joke. This is supported by the way in which Linda

designs her turn as a ‘best guess’; “Roy Wood?” (line 8). Linda’s question on line 8 not only serves as a request for information but is also a way of holding Eric to account for the fact that he has produced laughter. In requiring him to explain what he was laughing at, Linda is shifting the accountability from herself for not laughing to Eric for laughing. Eric’s answer to Linda’s question of “yeah Whizzard.”, (line 11), simultaneously answers Linda’s question and manages the accountable position he is placed in, (operating in the same way as Beverley’s answer did in extract 7).

The Q-A sequence that was deployed in extract 8 serves another function in that it ensures that both Linda and Eric have access to the information needed to ‘get’ the joke that follows on line 14 whereby Madge misidentifies Roy Wood as being the children’s TV character Catweazle (“↑Its Ca:tweazle,”). Madge’s mistake is responded to by both Eric and Linda with laughter (lines 15 and 16), demonstrating that they both ‘get’ the joke that has played out on-screen.

Extracts 5.7 and 5.8 have highlighted how audience members work collaboratively to make sense of the jokes that are being performing in the sitcoms they are watching. This sense-making is discursive and relies upon viewers deploying Q-A explanation sequences to facilitate their understanding of the show. But more than that, these sequences of talk can be understood in terms of the CA/DP notion of accountability, whereby viewers manage and mitigate their own accountability for a lack of response whilst also holding others to account for responding to something on-screen. In extracts 5.7 and 5.8 the explanation sequences were occasioned by one party laughing and were initiated by a non-laughing party. In the following example however, the laughing party offers an explanation for their laughter without one being requested by their co-viewer, offering further insight into how responding to the sitcom is an accountable issue. Here Paul and Barry are watching an episode of *Phoenix Nights* in which the characters Max, Paddy, Les and Alan are taking part in a singles night event. Paddy has noticed a woman serving at the bar and is asking his friends for more information about her.

Extract 5.9 – Mary and Joseph

01 Paddy: ↑Who is ↑tha:t behind t' bar?

02 (0.7)

03 Les: That's Ma:ry that,

04 (0.5)

05 Les: 'Oly Ma:ry's youngest.

06 (0.4)

07 Paddy: Din't know she 'ad ki:ds?

08 (.)

09 Les: Yeah she's two:,

10 (.)

11 Les: She's got Ma:ry, an' u::h Jo:seph.

12 (0.6)

13 Les: ↑Jo:'s doin' a bee-tec in joinery down at the colleg

14 (0.4)

15 Paddy: ↑Ehh.

16 (.)

17 Paul: Snh hmh.

18 (0.8)

19 Paddy: D'ya wan' a ↑drink?

20 Les: [He:y.]

21 Max: [I'll 'av] a [lemona:de.]

22 Paul: [She called=]

23 Paddy: [Lemonade,=]

24 Paul: [them Mary and Joseph.]

25 Paddy: =↑You?

26 (0.4)

```
27 Barry:   Hnfh
28 Paul:    Huh heh heh [huh.]
29 Les:                 [She's  ] too young f' ↑yo:u.
30 Barry:   [£Jo::]seph£=
31 Paddy:   [  Hey, ]
32 Barry:   [ =£Or Jo:sie?£]
33 Paddy:   [If there's grass on the] pi::tch,
34 Paul:    Jo:seph.
35 Barry:   £Jo:sie?£
```

In this extract, the humour is derived from the fact that the character 'Holy Mary', a devout Christian who often preaches to the other characters, has named her children after the biblical figures Mary and Joseph. In addition to this, Mary's son is studying joinery at college which is a nod to Joseph from the Bible being a carpenter. On-screen, Les delivers this joke on lines 11 and 13, to which Paul responds with laughter comprised of two laugh particles on line 17 ("Snh hmh."). It is noticeable here that a response from Barry is not forthcoming. In extracts 7 and 8 the laughter of a co-viewer occasioned a Q-A sequence which was deployed by a non-laughing party as a way to account for their lack of response to something on-screen. But these Q-A sequences served another function which was to hold the laughing co-viewer to account for their response, tasking them with explaining what they were laughing at and demonstrating that their laughter was appropriate at that time (i.e. that a joke had been told on-screen). In extract 9 however, there is no request made by the non-laughing Barry, yet Paul still provides an explanation for what he was laughing at.

Paul's explanation on lines 22 and 24, ("She called them Mary and Joseph"), serves as an account for his laughter on line 17 but also shows Barry what his laughter was referring to. By doing this, Paul has given Barry an indication that a joke has been told and has also provided a summary of the information required to 'get' this joke. In terms of accountability related to the joke's

‘understanding test’, Paul has placed Barry in a position whereby his lack of laughter is noticeable and accountable, in that it can be treated as a failure to ‘get’ the joke. Barry manages this accountability by producing a single laugh particle on line 27 (“Hnfh”), demonstrating that he now ‘gets’ the joke. Paul’s laughter on line 28, consisting of four laugh particles, reciprocates Barry’s laughter, (“Huh heh heh huh.”), and serves to close the explanation sequence, both parties demonstrating that they have ‘got’ the joke.

However, on lines 30 and 32 Barry initiates another Q-A sequence which seeks to clarify the name of the Holy Mary’s child, “Jo::seph or Jo:sie?”. Turning to look at Barry, Paul provides the answer, “Jo:seph”, on line 34. Despite this, Barry’s confirmatory response to Paul’s answer, “£Jo:sie?” (line 35), incorrectly repeats the name provided by Paul. This mistake by Barry is interesting because it illustrates that whilst his laughing response on line 27 suggests he has ‘got’ the joke, there is an aspect of the joke that he hasn’t fully understood. By initiating the Q-A sequence on lines 30 and 32, Barry is placing himself in an accountable position, (i.e. that he hasn’t ‘got’ the joke). His turn design can be seen as managing this accountability in two ways; firstly he phrases his request for clarification in the form of a ‘best guess’ of the answer that he is seeking, and secondly, he gives his turns at talk using a smiley voice quality. More specifically, the ‘best guess’ serves as a way of framing the request for clarification as being related to a failure of hearing, not understanding, as he is able to demonstrate that he has the correct answer, ‘Joseph’, but is checking it isn’t the similar sounding ‘Josie’. In addition, the use of smiley voice here orients to the fact that the request is joke-related and serves as a way of highlighting that he still ‘gets’ that there was something humorous about what Paul had said.

Extract 5.9 has further illustrated the ways in which sitcom watchers engage in sequences of talk to facilitate ‘getting’ the jokes that are performed on-screen. In particular, the above extract has demonstrated that “explanation slots” can be opened by individuals who have laughed to a prior joke as a way of accounting for their laughter. In doing so, they are managing their own accountability by putting a case forward that their response was appropriate at that time but also shifting accountability

to the non-laughing party, requiring them to now demonstrate they have ‘got’ the joke. It was also shown in extract 9 how laughter could be deployed by individuals to demonstrate that they have understood a joke, even when subsequent talk highlights this is not necessarily the case. This notion will be further explored in the following extracts. In the first one, extract 10, Jim, Barbara and Chuck are watching an episode of *Benidorm*. At this point in the episode, Jacqueline is completing a crossword puzzle with the help of her husband Donald. An answer that Donald proffers here of ‘spunk’ becomes the basis of the joke in this extract.

Extract 5.10 - Spunk

```
1   Don:   ↑↑We::ll there’s certainly never a dull moment ↑he:re.
2   Jac:   ↑ I: wouldn’t mi::nd doin’ a bit a lap dancin’.
3   Don:   Well [we definitely could ] do with the mo:ney,
4   Jim:       [ Hfuh hfh hh ]
5   Don:   Two holidays in the last six months has left us ↑↑pretty bro:khe.
6   Jac:   >Appa:rently<, you need a stro::ng ba:ck. (.) That’s the ke:y to it?
7   Don:   ↑We:ll you pa:ss in that department with fly:ing colours, you’ve certainly had a lot of weight on
8          your back in £your t(h)i:me£.
9                  (0.6)
10  Jac:   ↑↑That’s ↓tru::e.
11  Jim:   Hakh hguh hnh
12                 (0.4)
```

13 Jac: ↑Eighteen dow:n, (.) American sla:ng for courage or determination? .hhh Fi::ve letters:, (.) ends

14 in yoo enn ka::y?

15 (0.3)

16 Don: Uhh,

17 (0.4)

18 Don: S::phun::kh:.

19 (0.7)

20 Jac: ↑↑REAll:y?

21 Don: Oh:: ye:s.

22 (0.5)

23 Jac: ↑S::PUN::K::h?

24 Don: [↑Ye::p.]

25 Jim: [Huh huh] huh hah hh hsnh

26 Jac: ↑O:::hhh, <'int it (.) ↑TE:rrible?>

27 Jim: KiHHgh kgihh

28 Jac: I mean, ↑ki:ddies could be rea::ding this or anybo:dy

.

29 (2.7)

30 Jim: Phnffh

31 (0.5)

32 Chu: Hguh huh

33 (0.7)

34 ((Adverts begin))

```
35 Chu:  £What is it really?£

36                (0.8)

37 Barb: It i::s-

38 Jim:  It is [spu:nk.]

39 Barb:       [ Yea:h ]

40 Jim:  The [ Americans ] call it spu:nk.

41 Barb:     [Yeah, they-]

42 Chu:      [  Owh hgh  ]

43                (0.4

44 Jim:  Fulla spunk.
```

The ‘humour’ in this extract relies on the double meaning of the word ‘spunk’ and the confusion that this creates for Jacqueline on-screen. On lines 13 and Jacqueline asks Donald for help with the crossword puzzle she is completing, offering the clue “American sla:ng for courage or determination? .hhh Fi::ve letters:, (.) ends in yoo enn ka::y?”. Donald’s answer of “S::phun::kh:.” is delivered on line 18 with Jacqueline repling “↑↑REAll:y?” (line 20), occassioning a confirmatory “Oh:: ye:s.” from Donald on line 21. Jacqueline pursues this on line 23, repeating “↑S::PUN::K::h?” with raised pitch, volume and emphasis. In response to Jacqueline’s second ‘spunk’, Jim produces laughter comprised of six laugh particles, “Huh huh huh hah hh hsnh” (line 25), turning to look at his co-viewers whilst producing the final two laugh particles. Barbara and Chuck however, do not alter their gaze here and continue to watch the show.

On-screen, Jacqueline takes issue with the fact that ‘spunk’, which is a colloquial word for semen, is an answer to a crossword puzzle, “↑O:::hhh, <‘int it (.) ↑TE:rrible?>” (line 26), to which Jim produces a further two laugh particles, “KiHHgh kgihh”, (line 27) . The end of the joke sequence comes on line 28 when Jacqueline delivers the line “I mean, ↑ki:ddies could be rea::ding this or anybo:dy.”, further establishing the idea that she has taken ‘spunk’ to refer to the colloquial meaning

of the word. Both Jim and Chuck respond to this with laughter, Jim producing a single laugh particle on line 30, ("Phnffh") and Chuck following this with two laugh particles on line 32 ("Hguh huh"). By laughing here, Jim and Chuck have both demonstrated that they have 'got' the joke relating to Jacqueline's misunderstanding of the word 'spunk'. Noticeable here is that Barbara does not laugh upon the completion of Jacqueline's joke and, in terms of Sacks' work (1974, 1978), has failed to demonstrate that she has 'got' the joke.

In previous extracts in this chapter it was demonstrated how Q-A sequences were occassioned by laugher and deployed by non-laughing parties (extracts 5.7 and 5.8). However, in extract 10 it is Chuck who launches a Q-A sequence after producing laughter with the question "£What is it really?£" (line 35). The corresponding answer to this question is delivered by Barbara on line 37, ("It i::s-"), but is interrupted by Jim on line 38 with his own answer of "It is spu:nk", which Barbara agrees with in overlap ("Yea:h", line 39). Jim adds to his answer by offering further explanation, "The Americans call it spu:nk" (line 40), to which Barbara also agrees with in overlap with "yeah, they-" (line 41) and Chuck responds in overlap with two laugh particles that acknowledge the information provided, ("Owh hgh", Line 42). This laughter by Chuck includes an audible "Owh" type sound which combines together a laugh particle and 'oh' which is often deployed in conversation as a "moment at which understanding is reached" (Heritage, 2005, p.195).

In terms of the notion of accountability, the Q-A sequence initiated by Chuck, and indeed the responses from both Barbara and Jim, are interesting here. Chuck's laughter on line 32 indicates that he has 'got' the joke, the launching of the Q-A sequence however demonstrates that there were aspects of the joke which he didn't 'get', consequently placing himself in an accountable position. Chuck manages this by designing his question in a way which demonstrates he recognises that the humour in this sequence is derived from Jacqueline's misunderstanding of the word 'spunk' but is unsure about what the word she was "really" looking for was. The use of a smiley voice quality by Chuck for the delivery of the question further manages this, demonstrating that he has recognised

that the sequence on-screen was humorous and he has ‘got’ that the joke was based on the ‘real’ crossword solution. Chuck’s turn design here then, has allowed him to pursue the information he needs to fully ‘get’ the joke but has also managed the accountability that accompanies this.

Also noticeable here is that Chuck changes his gaze from the TV to Barbara when he initiates the Q-A sequence, as shown in FIG.5.1 below. In doing so, he is directing the question at Barbara who did not produce a response to the completion of Jacqueline’s joke on line 28. In not producing a response, Barbara has failed to show that she has passed the ‘understanding test’ here and, as such, is in an accountable position. Chuck’s question to Barbara is a way of offering her an opportunity to show that she ‘gets’ the joke and account for not producing laughter (i.e. she understood it but didn’t find it funny).

FIG. 5.1

Chuck at line 35

Barbara’s response of “It i::s-” on line 37 provides Chuck with the answer to his question but also demonstrates that she has ‘got’ the joke that played out on-screen. Her turn is interrupted by Jim who also provides the answer to Chuck’s question, to which Barbara also interrupts with a “yea:h” on line 39 in agreement. Similarly, on line 40 Jim adds “The Americans call it spu:nk” which Barbara again overlaps in agreement, “yeah, they-” (line 41). Barbara’s attempts at giving the answer to Chuck’s question in overlap with Jim’s turns on lines 39 and 41 can be seen as attempts at demonstrating that she ‘gets’ the joke and, consequently is managing the accountable position she finds herself in.

Extract 5.10 has highlighted how Q-A sequences can be launched by individuals who have previously laughed in response to an on-screen joke. In this case, Chuck initially produced a bout of

laughter then followed this with a question to his co-viewers. Extract 5.11 highlights another case whereby explanation sequences are deployed after laughter and, when considered alongside extract 5.10, will offer insight into other ways in which accountability is managed by joke recipients through Q-A sequences. In the following extract Paul and Barry are watching an episode of the sitcom *Phoenix Nights*. In this episode, Brian is talking to TV personality Roy Walker who has been invited to the opening of 'The Phoenix Club', a social club that Brian owns. Brian is apologising to Roy for the smell of paint in the club on account of the decoration that has recently taken place. It is this fresh paint upon which the joke in this sequence is based.

Extract 5.11 – Smell of Gloss

1 Brian: Sorry [about] the smell ah glo:ss,

2 Paul: [Hnfh]

3 (1.4)

4 Brian: [pai::nt.]

5 Roy: [↑↑Whe::h] it's alright [°it's alright°]

6 Brian: [We just 'ad] it a:ll, (.) tar:ted up an' all that, y'kno::[w.]

7 Roy: [↑N]ic::e,

8 its nice.

9 Brian: D'ya li:ke it?

10 Roy: ↑Yea:h >it's very ni:ce<.

11 (0.8)

12 Brian: An hows-, how's tv go:in', [↑alri:ght?]

13 Roy: [Alri:ght,] alri:ght y'know, (.) [Can't] complai:n.

14 Brian: [Cat-]

15 Brian: An is catchphra:se coming back?

16 Roy: No, ↑ I- I don't do that anymore.

17 (.)

18 Brian: ↑D'ya ↑↑no:t ?

19 Roy: No: °>no nah<°

20 (1.2

21 Brian: So yuh, yuhve pissed on yuh mister chi:ps!

22 (1.2)

23 Barry: Hm:gh

24 (0.7)

25 Paul: Hnh

26 (1.2)

27 Paul: Hgh

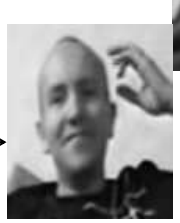
28 (2.3)

29 Paul: [Hmgh

30 Barry: [Ha:rrh

31 (2.1)

32 Paul: Hmfh (.) hnffh hnh



33 (0.9)

34 Max: Pa:trick, can ya 'ear me no:w.

```
35                  (.)
36  Paddy:    Ye:ah.
37                  (.)
38  Paul:     Wh(h)at wa(h)s tha:t?
39  Paddy:    Hang on
40  Barry:    Pai:n[t]
41  Max:            [Ca]n ya hear me [    no:w?    ]
42  Paul:                            [Ekkh hggh]=
43            [=euh hguh huh]
44  Paddy:    [   Hear ya?, I can   ] [      se::e ya, ya dick!     ]
45  Barry:                            [He said never mind] or, don't mind the gloss
46                  (0.6)
47  Paul:     [Humfh]
48  Max:      [ Can ya  ] hear me no: w?
```

On lines 1-10, Brian is apologising to Roy for the smell of paint in the room, explaining how the room has recently been renovated. Brian then proceeds to ask Roy about his TV work, with particular focus on the show Catchphrase for which Roy is most famous for, (lines 12-21). On line 21, Brian delivers the first joke of this sequence, "So yuh, yuhve pissed on yuh mister chi:ps!", bringing together the colloquial phrase 'you've pissed on your chips' and the mascot of Catchphrase, Mr Chips. Off-screen, Barry and Paul both respond to this with laughter; Barry producing a single laugh particle on line 23 ("Hm:gh"), followed by two laugh particles by Paul on lines 25, ("Hnh"), and 27, ("Hgh"), separated by a 1.2 second gap. In doing so, Paul and Barry have both demonstrated that they 'get' Brian's joke.

On-screen however, Roy does not respond to Brian's joke with laughter and instead turns his back to Brian. This reveals the next joke in the sequence; a stripe of paint on the back of Roy's

suit (line 28). Both Paul and Barry respond to the reveal of the paint stain with laughter together on lines 29 and 30, both producing a single laugh particle. Barry's laughter is marked here in that it includes an audible 'arh' type sound which orients to the surprising nature of the reveal of the paint on the back of Roy's jacket (see Chapter 3 for further examination of this laughter). Paul produces a further piece of laughter after 2.1 seconds, comprised of three laugh particles on line 32 ("Hnfh (.) hnffh hnh").

On line 34 there is a scene change on-screen, moving away from Brian and Roy inside the club to Max and Paddy, the bouncers, outside the club. Shortly after this, off-screen Paul averts his gaze away from the TV, looks at Barry and launches the question "Wh(h)at wa(h)s tha:t?", (line 38). In response, Barry turns to meet the gaze of Paul and provides the answer "Pai:nt" on line 40, to which Paul produces a burst of laughter comprised of five laugh particles, ("Ekkh hggh euh hguh huh", lines 42 and 43). Barry then supplements his prior answer with additional information about the 'paint', "He said never mind or, don't mind the gloss" (line 45). Paul produces a further laugh particle on line 47, "Humfh", acknowledging the further clarification that Barry has offered.

As with extract 5.10, extract 5.11 features a Q-A sequence that is deployed by an individual who has laughed in response to the on-screen joke. This is in contrast to the Q-A sequences that were deployed in extracts 5.7, 5.8, and 5.9 which were occasioned by one party not producing laughter. Extracts 5.10 and 5.11 are interesting when considered alongside Sacks' (1974, 1978) notion of jokes being 'understanding tests' and, as such, the response to them is an accountable issue. In extracts 5.7, 5.8, and 5.9, the Q-A sequences were shown to be deployed by individuals as a way of managing accountability. In extracts 5.10 and 5.11 however, laughter is produced by all parties watching the sitcom and, in line with Sacks' suggestion, these individuals have demonstrated that they have 'got' the joke that has just played out on-screen. Therefore, by raising a question about a joke they are placing themselves in a position whereby they can be seen as failing to understand or 'get' that joke. In extract 5.10, Chuck managed this accountable position by deploying his question with a smiley voice which served to maintain the position that he has understood that something was humorous but

was using his question to supplement his understanding. A similar occurrence can be seen in extract 5.11 whereby Paul's question on line 38, "Wh(h)at wa(h)s tha:t?", includes what Potter and Hepburn (2010) refer to as 'interpolated laugh particles' (IPAs) which are laugh particles that are deployed within lexical items that modulate certain actions. What we see here then, is Paul utilising IPAs in the asking of his question and, in doing so, he is orienting to the humorous nature of the material to which his question orients to. But more than that, Paul's question, and Chuck's before that in extract 5.10, can be seen as being designed the way that they are in order to manage accountability linked to the 'understanding test' element of jokes.

Extracts 5.10 and 5.11 then, have revealed how individuals will pursue explanations of on-screen jokes, post-laughter, in order to understand aspects of the very joke they were laughing at. In order to do this, individuals will design their Q-A initiating turn in a manner that is markedly different from the way in which it would be designed had it not been produced post-laughter. These turns that are produced by an individual who has previously laughed are designed to include certain features that are closely linked to laughter, namely smiley voice or IPAs. These elements can be seen as being deployed to manage the accountability that comes with the 'understanding test' element of jokes, in that they can continue to demonstrate that they have 'got' the joke, (as evidenced by their prior laughter) whilst still pursuing information from others that would indicates that they didn't fully 'get' the joke. Chuck's question of "£What is it really?£" (line 35) in extract 5.10 then, shows that he didn't fully understand the wordplay that was deployed in the on-screen joke but, by using the smiley voice he was able to get this aspect of the joke explained to him whilst still demonstrating that he 'got' that the confusion surrounding the word 'spunk' was funny. Similarly, in extract 5.11, the use of IPAs in Paul's question "Wh(h)at wa(h)s tha:t?" (line 38), helps to further demonstrate he has 'got' that Roy having a large white stain on his jacket is funny, whilst allowing him to pursue the particularities of what the stain actually was without completely undermining the notion that he has understood the joke.

In sum, extracts 5.10 and 5.11 have highlighted another way in which sitcom watching individuals will deploy Q-A sequences that deal with 'explaining the joke' but that are produced after laughter. It was shown that these turns are designed to include features which are laughter related, namely IPAs or smiley voice, in order to manage the accountability they would face for failing to 'get' the joke. The laughter that precedes these sequences can be seen then as satisfying the criteria required to demonstrate they have understood the joke whilst the laughter related features upholds the notion they have 'got' the joke, whilst allowing them to pursue more information about the exact reasons why it was funny. These elements of joke reception have hitherto been explored but offer insight into how individuals collaboratively make sense of the sitcom and the jokes contained within it. This is a sharp contrast to the view that understanding jokes is something that is purely cognitive, as we see here that 'getting' jokes is something that is a discursive accomplishment.

5.5 –Failed Requests for Information

Thus far, we have seen how participants work together to 'do' collaborative understanding, either of the jokes that play out on-screen or in relation to some other aspect of the show that they are watching together. We have also seen how individuals work together to solve issues which may present problems for them being able to watch the show together. The sequences presented to illustrate the ways in which this plays out in interaction follow a similar pattern in that whatever the issue is, be it understanding the show, 'getting' a joke, or turning up the volume, the sequence ends with some sort of solution. In the extracts that follow, the broad trajectory of the sequence is similar in that something is problematized by one of the sitcom viewers. However, unlike the cases discussed earlier in this chapter, a solution to the problem is not provided. The following then, are "deviant cases" (Schegloff, 1996, p.172; as also discussed by Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2008), the first of which, (Extract 5.12, below), features Annette, Beverley, and Carol watching an episode of *Outnumbered*.

Extract 5.12 – Babysitter

```
1     Carol:   [£.hhh]
2     Ben:     [   Is it   ] the ↑sa:me babysitter as la:st time?
3     Pete:    ↑No::.
4     Ben:     Wh::y not?
5                (1.3)
6     Pete:    ↓Yo::u ↓kno::w why not.
7                (.)
8     Bev:     [£hhh£.]
9     Sue:     [↑Pe::te,  ]
10               (.)
11    Ann:     [What did he do:? ]
12    Sue:     [     This is Draxi::?     ]
13               (0.8)
14    Sue:     And ↑err::, ↓this is Be:n.
```

The humour here rests on the fact that Ben is asking his Dad questions about the babysitter that are "questions with known answers" (Macbeth, 2004, p.703) but is asking them as if he doesn't know the answer to them. Pete's intonation and design of his responses to Ben's questioning establishes the fact that Ben's questions are in fact already ones which he knows the answers to, in particular Pete's answer of "↓Yo::u ↓kno::w why not." on line 6. The exact reason for the fact that a different babysitter will be looking after Ben is not revealed on the show but Pete's delivery and Ben's previous naughty behaviour suggest that the reason is related to Ben misbehaving.

In response to Pete's "↓Yo::u ↓kno::w why not." on line 6, Beverley produces a breathy single laugh particle, "£hhh£." (line 8), consisting entirely of aspirated elements (represented here as

‘hhh’). The smiley voice notation here (‘£’) is included to separate this aspiration from other breathy, non-speech sounds such as sighs. Upon the production of this laughter, Annette produces the FPP of a Q-A sequence which is formatted as a request for information (“what did he do:?”). Until this point, this sequence resembles those illustrated in the previous section of this thesis, in that we see one member of the TV watching group laugh and this then becomes an accountable issue for their co-viewers. As such, the non-laughing viewer then launches a Q-A sequence, formatted as a request for information, as a way problematizing this issue and, in this case, seeking an explanation as to what Ben did. In launching this Q-A sequence, Annette is managing the accountable position she finds herself as a non-laughing party. She is, in other words, demonstrating that she has recognised that a ‘joke’ has been told but didn’t laugh because there was some aspect of its telling that was not clear.

As I say, until this point (line 11), the sequence plays out like the others examined in section 5.4. However, what is absent here is the corresponding SPP that solves the problem raised by Annette; what did Ben do? Annette’s question is not addressed here at all by any of her co-viewers and equally, Annette does not pursue the absent SPP. As such, the problem here is just abandoned, and therefore this stands out as an exception to the extracts discussed previously.

There are a couple of observations which can be made here which may account for why this Q-A sequence was dropped and no further action by any of the co-viewers was taken. One possibility is that, given Beverley’s laugh is entirely aspirated and when questioned she is unable to give an account for why she laughed, it may be that Annette concluded that Beverley didn’t actually laugh in response to Pete’s utterance and the sound that she heard was some other aspirated non-speech sound (e.g. a sigh). If so, then this would account for why she does not pursue a response to her request.

Another possibility here is that the issue here is due to the formatting of Annette’s request of “what did he do:?”. This request is contingent on there being some ‘thing’ that Ben did, and this being communicated with the viewers. However, at no point in the episode or elsewhere in the series, is it revealed to viewers what Ben actually did. As such, the ‘humour’ that is produced here is not

based on what Ben actually did, but instead is based on the implication or suggestion by Pete that Ben did something unspeakable outside of the episode. Therefore, Beverley cannot tell Annette what Ben did because nobody, except Pete and Ben, know what Ben did. The reason then that this sequence is atypical is because the request made is unanswerable.

By exploring the reasons why this Q-A problem solving sequence failed, we can learn more about what is required for a sequence of this type to be completed successfully (i.e. the request made is 'solved'). Therefore, extract 5.13 suggests a key thing which will determine whether one of these requests is answered depends on whether the information needed to answer it, is actually available for the recipient. As such, if one of these unanswerable requests are made by one co-viewer then the recipient is not obligated to provide a response and does not need to account for their lack of a relevant response to the request. However, given that this is an isolated case in the data, it is not currently possible to establish whether these suggestions can be supported with other instances and as such, represent a larger phenomenon or are just a one off. Certainly, in the sitcom watching data collected for this thesis, this is the only sequence which plays out in this way.

Another example of a failed Q-A request sequence was discovered in the recording of Eric and Linda watching an episode of *Benidrom*. Here the identity of a special guest on-screen, (celebrity dancer, Louie Spence), is the source of the problem.

Extract 5.12 - "Louie Spence"

```
1  Eric:    £Wonder how he: got in it.£
2  Lin:     Who: is he.
3  Eric:    It's that flippin' da:ncer innit what's- I dunno what 'is
4           name is.
5                 (1.5)
6  Eric:    [Tea-]
7  Lin:     [↑DAN]CER.
```

```
8  Eric:    T-teaches da:nce, he's a ga:y teaches dance and does that
9           do:g thi:ng where he (.) craw:ls all over the ta:bles an-.
10                (1.2)
11 Lin:     No, [I can't remember him]
12 Eric:        [He's     bin      on] befor:e.
13                (1.2)
14 Eric:    Can't think what he's bin on, he ain't bin on 'ere before.
15                (0.5)
```

On line 1, in response to the first appearance of Louie Spence on-screen, Eric remarks, in a smiley voice "£Wonder how he: got in it.£". The use of the smiley voice demonstrates that Eric is orientating to the fact that the presence of Spence on-screen has been designed by the sitcom writer as being humorous. Yet the appearance of Louie Spence on-screen, playing a guest at the hotel as a representative of Middlesbrough Swingers Association, relies on the audience at home recognising who this person is. If they do then, seeing this celebrity playing this part in the show could be humorous. Therefore, Eric has demonstrated that he has recognised who 'he' is and regards this as being humorous. As such, his 'noticing' of this on line 1 prompts Linda to initiate an FPP of a problem-solving Q-A sequence, "Who: is he" (line 2). Linda's turn, formulated as a request for information, deals with a problem related to recognition (i.e. Linda, unlike Eric, has not recognised who this actor is). As such, Linda is demonstrating that she has not 'got' the joke here. Whereas in the examples illustrated in the previous section of this chapter, this type of request opened an 'explanation slot' which addressed this problem, here however, the sequence of talk that follows deviates from this trajectory. More specifically, the issue relates to Eric being unable to provide the information necessary to solve this problem.

On line 3, Eric launches a sequence in which he attempts to provide Linda with the information that she has requested. However, what soon becomes clear here is that he does not have the information which Linda requested (i.e. what this person is called). In the absence of this, Eric

launches a series of spoken turns which provide information which is related to Linda's request but does not deal directly 'solve' her problem. Starting on line 3, Eric describes him as "that flippin' da:ncer", adding "T-teaches da:nce, he's a ga:y teaches dance and does that do:g thi:ng where he (.) craw:ls all over the ta:bles an-." (lines 8-9). These 'clues' as to who the person on TV is are not helpful, leading Linda to reply No, I can't remember him (line 11).

What we see here then is another sequence of cooperation and negotiation which are designed to accomplish a shared understanding of something playing out on-screen. Even though this particular 'problem' is not solved, it nonetheless demonstrates the discursive nature of this problem solving and how there are certain contingencies which alter whether a problem will be solved. In this particular case, that thing is whether or not the recipient of the request actually has access to the information that is being requested.

5.6 – Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined 3 broad problem-solving sequences of talk which are utilised by sitcom viewers to either make sense of the show that they are watching or to deal with some problem in the immediate environment which may affect how the business of 'doing' sitcom watching is accomplished. These type of collaborative problem solving and understanding sequences have previously not been identified in studies of audiences, therefore they represent the discovery of a new context in which these sort of Q-A request sequences are utilised. Furthermore, what we have seen here is the machinery through which the social organization that underpins the practice of sitcom watching is constructed by the co-viewers. It has also been demonstrated how notions of 'understanding' or 'getting' are processes which are merely cognitive but instead are negotiated and have a discursive component. These findings will be discussed in relation to the overall scope of the thesis.

Chapter 6

The Punchline:

Conclusions and Discussion

6.0 – Chapter Overview

In this final chapter of the thesis I want to summarize the key arguments that have been made in this thesis. As such, I will provide an overview of the main findings from across the analytic chapters, demonstrate the implications that these findings have for existing literature presented in previous chapters, discuss some potential directions for future research, and finally, critically appraise the methodology used in this present study. First, let us consider the main findings from this thesis and how the research aims were addressed in the analytic chapters.

6.1 – Summary of Findings (or Inspection of the Innards)

There were three research aims that were outlined in chapter 1 and these were omnipresent throughout the vivisections of this particular species of sitcom 'frog' which are documented in this present thesis. These aims were: 1) *to explore how people watch, engage with, and understand sitcoms together in a domestic setting*, 2) *to examine the ways in which laughter is utilised by sitcom viewers,* and 3) *to explore the ways in which people interact with each other whilst watching TV*. The ways in which these aims were addressed in the previous chapters of this thesis will now be discussed.

6.1.1 – Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of this thesis was focused exclusively on laughter. More specifically, this chapter subjected the laughter that was produced by the sitcom viewers to a fine-grained inspection and considered it within the broader context of transcription and the ways in which it can be, but often isn't, captured in written transcripts of recorded data. As such, this chapter was directly dealing with research aim 2). Here it was shown how multifaceted and diverse laughter was as a phenomenon and how sitcom

viewers deployed a range of laugh responses to the shows that they were watching on-screen. Further to this, I demonstrated, with examples from the sitcom watching data, how the performative qualities of laughter are something that we can 'get our hands on' and by doing so, better address the CA and DP concern relating to "order at all points" (Sacks, 1984, p.22). Therefore, what we see is that laughter is not a unitary concept, where all laughs are alike. Instead, we see laughter as a highly variable and highly responsive interactive device which can be produced in a number of ways which are sensitive to the material which they are responding to (a thread which was pursued further in chapter 4).

6.1.2 – Chapter 4

Using the guidelines for detailed transcription of laughter and the acknowledgement that laughter can be produced by sitcom viewers in a number of ways. This chapter demonstrated how the highly sensitive nature of laughter to the broader situational context in which it is produced is linked to the notions of accountability and stance. As such, it was shown how laughter was utilised as a member's method for managing accountability and negotiating stance when presented with on-screen material which was potentially offensive or improper. Here the hitherto under-examined performative qualities of laughter were shown to be playing an instrumental role in these practices (which was afforded by the careful transcription which was advocated in chapter 3). In this way, Chapter 4 can be seen to be addressing all three of the research aims for this work, demonstrating that firstly, laughter is a common, yet multifaceted response to sitcoms playing on-screen (in line with aim number 1). Similarly, aim number 2 is also addressed here, demonstrating how laughter is a member's method for dealing with issues of accountability and stance arising from laughing at content which is considered improper or inappropriate in some way. Finally, we saw how the third aim, exploring the ways in which people interact with each other, is also addressed here in relation to how co-viewers cooperate, take positions on, and negotiate their stance towards on-screen material.

6.1.3 – Chapter 5

Finally, chapter 5 examined the importance of laughter as an active part in accountability management, highlighted in chapter 4, and the variability of laughter as indicated in chapter 3 and demonstrated how these were utilised in sequences of problem solving. Chapter three, whilst also addressing aims 2 and 3 somewhat, predominantly deal with the research aim number 1. In particular, this chapter examined a number of sequences involved in problem solving which had hitherto not been known to be produced as part of the practice of sitcom viewing. These three different types of problem-solving sequences were joint accomplished through talk and, as such, reveal the extent to which watching TV with others is a collaborative accomplishment.

Furthermore, this chapter also demonstrated how notions of understanding the shows playing on-screen are discursively based and as such, are made public and worked through using sequences of talk. This way of seeing understanding stands in contrast to the body of work on audiences which has examined audience effects as a result of their passivity and inaction with media messages (i.e. the 'effects' tradition in audience research). What this work has shown is that, not only are co-viewers active participants in sequences of interaction as they watch sitcoms on TV, but this interaction is not 'just talk'. It is instead purposive and integral the process of making sense of the TV sitcom.

Finally, chapter 5 also demonstrated how the notion of 'humour' is something which has a strong discursive component and as such, notions of 'getting' jokes, laughing at the appropriate time, and as demonstrated in chapter 4, laughing in the appropriate way to the sitcom are all interlinked and are jointly accomplished.

6.2 – Contributions to Existing Knowledge

In this section I will illustrate ways in which this present thesis can be seen to be contributing to the broad topic areas which were outlined in chapter 1 of this thesis. Firstly, let us consider the implications that this work has for the work within the fields of CA and DP.

6.2.1 – Implications for CA and DP

There are a number of aspects of this thesis which are relevant to CA/DP and are relevant to other work that utilises these analytic and methodological approaches for understand talk-in-interaction. Firstly, the modifications to existing transcription conventions which are detailed in chapter 3 of this thesis have widespread potential applications for analysts who have instances of laughter in their data. The guidelines that I put forward here are transferable and can be applied to any other situation where laughter is found. As such, analysts now have a newly sharpened tool to help them uncover the micro-organisation of interaction and how laughter is used as a resource for accomplishing interactional business.

Both CA and DP are built around the notion that everything matters and that there is 'order at all points' (Sacks, 1984). Therefore, this work furthers that claim and, like numerous other CA/DP that has explored mundane or everyday activities which have been taken for granted in academic work, this thesis goes to show that order can found in even the smallest detail of interaction. More specifically, we can see how laughter which is often dismissed in the study of interaction, can be instrumental in doing 'serious' interactional business.

In terms of DP's anti-cognitivist approach, this thesis also goes some way in demonstrating that the cognitive notions of understanding or appreciating humorous materials are not confined to internal neural pathways, but we have seen that they are, at least in some way, issues which are negotiated and accomplished discursive. Further to this, we can see that cognitivist ideas of 'brainwashing' or the influence/effect of media messages, are also not something which occurs without the involvement of interaction, as what we have seen in this thesis is how thoughts, feelings and orientations about the show are made public and discussed between co-viewers.

6.2.2 – Implications for Audience Studies

As we saw in chapter 1, much of the existing work on audiences is ethnographic in nature and has therefore relied on methods of participant observation or other forms of 'offline' approaches to data which could be grouped under the umbrella of 'ethnography'. Therefore, this present thesis is breaking away from traditional methods of audience analysis and adopted those which, as the work of Gerhardt (2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010), and Ergul (2016), have shown us, can reveal hitherto previously unseen practices and sequences of interaction which only a fine-grained analysis could reveal. By using video recordings which, after the work of Betchel et al. (1972), seem to have fallen out of favour with researchers concerned with audiences, we can capture audiences 'live' and in situ, satisfying concerns about the "dead social scientist test" which Potter (1997) has discussed and also have a record of the event that can be replayed numerous times.

6.2.3 – Implications for Studies of the Sitcom

As I discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis, there has previously been little academic interest in sitcom audiences. Indeed, as Mills (2009) acknowledged, work on sitcom audiences is "few and far between" (p.106). Therefore, there are sizable gaps in the literature about how audiences actually 'do' sitcom watching as part of their everyday lives. The small amount of previous work that purports to be examining the way sitcom audiences respond to and interpret the shows on TV have either relied on 'offline' methods of data collection (i.e. data not collected of actual audiences doing sitcom watching and instead based on retrospective reports or recollections of how people believe they do watching TV sitcoms) (e.g. or have utilised online methods (i.e. in situ, examining audiences as they are doing it) that don't offer a 'naturalistic' account of the phenomena and cannot be replayed, such as a video recording can, to explicate how these practices fit into a wider framework of interaction (e.g. Lull, 1980, 1990). What we see when we look closely at the a tremendous amount of negotiation and collaboration surrounding sitcom watching, and rather than just being passive 'receivers' of TV messages (as proposed by the hypodermic needle model, [Lacey, 2002]), audience

members are actively involved in making sense of the show that they are watching. Moreover, audiences are not only concerned about their own understanding and enjoyment of the show, but also their co-viewers, as demonstrated by the jointly accomplished problem solving that we saw in this data. These aspects of sitcom watching have only been made visible because of the affordances of CA/DP research. As such, this work has made a clear case for these approaches to be used for the study of audiences in future audience research.

Finally, this work has demonstrated that, far from being the homogenous, unitary phenomena that sitcom laugh tracks would have us believe, laughter is a much more diverse interactional resource which, even in relation to the sitcom, is deployed in a number of different ways. Therefore, this work goes to provide some empirical support for the claim made by researcher like Mills (2005, 2009), who have argued that sitcom audiences are much complex than given credit and therefore worthy of study in their own right.

6.2.4 – Implications for Humour Research

At the beginning of this thesis, I discuss White's claim about studying humour and how it is like dissecting a frog. Regardless of his concerns, this thesis did attempt the vivisection on one specific bread of 'frog' – the TV sitcom. What we have seen in this work is how the broad notion of 'humour' is actually made relevant in sitcoms and, crucially is responded to by the viewers watching at home. As I discussed in chapter 1, the joke-telling dynamics of the characters in the sitcom challenge the existing knowledge about how jokes are told in conversation (e.g. Sacks, 1974, 1978; Norrick, 2003). Consequently, the ways in which these jokes are responded to by viewers at home is also a distinct practice that diverges from the accepted knowledge about the ways in which joke recipients respond to the telling of jokes in interaction.

In chapter 1 I discussed the extent to which 'canned jokes' have come to dominate humour studies and are often used as the stimulus in work which is trying to understand humour and laughter (e.g. Martin & Ford, 2018). Therefore, what this present thesis represents is a step away from the

reliance on these sort of standardized jokes and instead has examined the ‘jokes’ produced in sitcoms which are accomplished over a number of spoken turns. As such, not only does this present work move away from the well-trodden paths of ‘canned jokes’ but also illustrates how in order to understand ‘humour’ it is imperative that the way in which it operates in sitcoms needs to also be considered. Specifically because of how much it differs from the canned joke in terms of joke-teller and recipient roles, in terms of turn design (i.e. there is no one setup and punchline), and also considering that it has a unique relationship with laughter (as demonstrated by the recorded laugh track which often accompany them). In sum, the sitcom offers a different opportunity to examine how ‘humour-work’ is accomplished in everyday life.

In particular, what we saw across the analytic chapters, but especially chapter 5, is how joke ‘understanding’ or comprehension are achieved by discursive means. As such, we can actually see these concepts play out over a number of spoken terms and negotiated between viewers. This dimension to humour research is sidelined or ignored entirely, instead focusing on abstract concepts such as incongruity, superiority or a release of some excess energy (as discussed in the macro theories of chapter 1). That’s not to say that these things don’t exist but I argue here that rather than focusing so heavily in researcher interpretation, we can instead examine humour in situ as accomplished by participants. We can then see ‘humour’ in action, and explore how it is bought to life through interaction, rather than stripped from the perceived messiness of interaction which has motivated the attempts to reduce humour down to its constituent elements (e.g. the linguistic approach to humour, such as the GTVH, which focus on internal properties as determinants of humour).

6.3 – Future Directions (or ‘To Be Continued’)

In this section I wish to outline some of the possible ways in which the work in this thesis could be developed in future projects. These issues were either outside of the scope for this current thesis or at present time, sufficient data was not available to develop the analysis of this phenomena. However, if

further data was collected of co-viewing of sitcoms, the issues that are outlined in the following subsections would be pursued further as I believe they can further demonstrate how sitcom watching is a highly organized social activity. As such, I will share examples of these practices that were observed and, where relevant, what sort of interactional business these practices were accomplishing.

6.3.1 – Joke Building

An interesting practice that was observed on a couple of occasions involved what I am going to refer to here as 'joke building'. These sequences involved one member of the group using the on-screen material to generate their own 'joke'. As such, it seems as if these secondary. As suggested in Lull's work on the social uses of TV (1980, 1990), TV can be used as a resource that structures and facilitates communication. The specifics of how this is accomplished is unknown however, because this work did not provide a fine-grained analysis of how these processes operated. However, it is possible that these 'joke building' sequences may operate in the manner that Lull suggested. As such, in future research this would be something that would be closely monitored to examine what intercational business these sequences are doing and how they are sequentially organized as part of the ongoing sequence of talk (i.e. are these secondary jokes delivered in overlap to the show that is playing out on-screen or do they occur at moments when there is relatively little going on on-screen?)

6.3.2 – Children and Sitcoms

As noted in Chapter 1 of this thesis, there has been a body of academic work which has examined the ways in which children watch TV which is concerned with 'co-viewing' which is situated within the broader context of the harmful 'effects' that TV messages have on children and how parents may mitigate the 'effects' of the TV messages. As a relatively new Dad who regularly watches (family friendly) sitcoms with my daughter, I have found myself drawing out particular aspects of the show and offering an explanation of what is happening on-screen, (albeit unrequested by my daughter). For

example, after a particular character performs a particular action, I have found myself saying things like “Oh dear, Teddy want be able to drive home without a steering wheel will he?”

In this present thesis, all participants were over the age of 18, and as such, what we saw was how adults ‘do’ sitcom watching together. Furthermore, in chapter 5 of this thesis, we saw how co-viewers would engage in sequences of interaction which were instrumental in ensuring that viewers understood or ‘got’ the jokes that were playing out on-screen. This understanding was accomplished by co-viewers collaboratively, and as such, we saw how viewers worked together to unpack and explain jokes, but also to understand other issues related to the sitcom, such as plots or episode ordering.

A future direction which I would like to explore then, is the ways in which children, either with other children or alongside adults, come to understand the sitcom and the jokes contained within them, using the findings from this present study as a comparison. There has hitherto been no academic work that has utilised a discursive approach to the study of children watching sitcoms on TV and therefore a CA/DP approach could offer a unique insight into how understanding is facilitated by adult co-watchers. Again, as discussed in the opening chapter of this thesis, work that has examined children and their responses to TV has been concerned with ‘effects’ of those programmes. As such, there is a gap in the literature which an approach that focuses closely on the interaction could begin to address. One of the concerns surrounding the ‘effects’ of TV on children is that they are in a state of development; cognitively, emotionally, and socially. As such, a fine-grained discursive analysis would offer insight into how, for example, parents account for their children’s development in the ways in which they facilitate understanding of the jokes that are playing out on-screen.

Similarly, previous work on children watching TV has been concerned with how the TV messages are ‘mediated’ by parents. Yet, this process has not been closely examined using a discursive approach which has explored how this actually operate in situ and how this is sequentially

designed. Therefore, if one uses the same sort of methodology utilised in this present thesis, gathering naturalistic data on unobtrusive recording equipment, the behaviour and interaction that naturally occurs in that setting could be analysed and documented. CA/DP therefore could give an insight into how interaction is oriented to, is made relevant by, and is fitted around the sitcom playing out on-screen.

In short, if the methodology that was utilised in this present thesis was modified to facilitate younger participants then this could provide an insight into not only how parents and children interact with and around the TV but we can also see how notions of comprehension and understanding of humour in children operate in everyday life.

6.4 – Reflections on Methodology

This thesis has utilised data which is naturally occurring, in that the recording made of individuals watching sitcoms have captured something which would have been happening regardless of whether the recording equipment was present. As such, this data passes what Potter (2009) refers to as the "dead social scientist test" (p.612), i.e. the things that were recorded would play out in exactly the same manner if I, the social scientist, had been run over on my way to the university that day. The use of video recording as a means of data collection is well established in CA/DP research (e.g.Heath, Hindmarsh & Luff, 2010; Knoblauch et al. 2012), and allows for data that satisfies Potter's concerns to be obtained. However, as Laurier and Philo (2012) report, there is always "that question" (p.181) which is asked of research that has utilised video cameras: "*Doesn't filming change how people behave?*" (p.181, italics in original). Indeed, when I speak about my research to people unfamiliar with the methodology, they often ask about whether participants 'play up' or 'act out' for the camera (either that or comment, "it's just like Googlebox!" [a popular UK entertainment show]).

The assumptions about the 'reactivity' of participants are particularly important to experimental studies whereby these could be seen as confounding variables in what is otherwise a carefully controlled and designed laboratory setup. However, as discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis,

such issues are also raised with work that, like this present research project, has been conducted 'in the wild'. Unlike the artificial environment of the laboratory, this present study changed nothing about the environment in which the recordings took place and every effort was taken to ensure that the recording equipment was as unobtrusive as possible (again, see Chapter 2 for details and illustrative diagrams about camera placement). Furthermore, if the opportunity was available, cameras were set up prior to the recording commencing, allowing participants to become familiar with its presence before data was collected.

Importantly though, the concerns about participant reactivity are highly speculative, we cannot directly gain access to what is going on in participant's heads during recording (which is also a more general concern of CA/DP, and therefore why a relativist approach is taken). Notwithstanding the fact that all participants must provide informed consent to take part in the study, there would be no way of (legally) gaining access to the participant's living room to set up recording equipment without their knowledge (and retrieving this data might be equally problematic). We can however, approach this issue in the same way that CA/DP approach making claims or inferences about the internal thoughts or cognitive world of the participants. That is, we can instead turn to the participants and, more specifically their talk, to look for actual occasions in which the presence of the camera is actually attended to by them. In this way, rather than speculating about some potential 'effect' of the camera, we can examine this concern with the help of the actual data. Therefore, it is not for the analyst to decide how problematic the recording equipment is or is not, instead we can see how it is problematized or oriented to in interaction by participants themselves as a "member's concern" (Edwards 2007, p.31).

This way of thinking about the influence of the camera has been discussed by Heath (1986) and Heath, Hindmarsh and Luff (2010). They argue that rather than assuming that recording equipment will influence the behaviour of participants, researchers should instead approach this issue empirically. Therefore, Heath (1986) suggests that in order to build "an empirical case" (p.176) that

the camera has had an effect on the interaction then an orientation to its presence needs to be made by the participants themselves. Therefore, rather than the intrusion of the camera being speculated, researchers can establish just how pervasive orientations to the camera are. When this method of tracking 'reactivity' is used, researchers tend to find very few instances of this happening (e.g. Heath, 1986; Laurier & Philo, 2012; Jirotk et al., 1993). The camera then, can be "omni-present" in the setting but not "omni-relevant" (Laurier & Philo, 2012, p.184).

In terms of the data covered in this thesis, nearing twelve hours of recordings, there were only a few specific orientations to the recording equipment. To illustrate, let us consider one such instance involving Maude and Greg making the presence of the camera relevant in their interaction (Extract 6.1). This exchange occurred very early in the recording, (a general feature of these 'reactive' moments') and happens just as the start credits of the sitcom they are watching begins.

Extract 6.1 – Nicholas Lyndhurst

```
1     Maude:      Is that,
2                       (0.5)
3     Greg:       Nicolas Lyndurst
4     Maude:      ↑That is workin innit ↓down belo:w?
5                       (0.8)
6     Greg:       Whell, I dhont know?
```

```
7                       (2.5)
```

8 Greg: He said it wu:z workin, didn’t ee?

In this instance, Maude makes the orientation to the camera on line 1, pointing directly at it and saying “Is that,”. Greg’s gaze is focused on the TV so he does not see Maude’s pointing and after a short silence with the name of one of the actor’s from the show they are watching “Nicolas Lyndurst” (Line 3). Maude’s utterance on line 1 offers no clues to Greg, (aside from the pointing which he doesn’t see), that she is referring to the camera. Instead, Greg treats Maude’s utterance as being a request for information about the identity of someone appearing during the opening credits of the show. Indeed, the sequential placement of Maude’s utterance immediately following the appearance of a picture of the actor Nicholas Lyndhurst on-screen, has understandably led Greg to believe Maude’s issue is a problem of recognition. However, it is clear that Maude is not orienting to the show and is instead referring to the camera when she reformulates her question, this time making it clearer what it is she is concerned with; the camera placed underneath the TV (↑That is workin innit ↓down belo:w? - Line 4). Further evidence that this sequence came about because of concerns about the camera can be found in the fact that Maude maintains her pointing from lines 1-4, only stopping this after her question on line 4. Greg’s “Whell, I dhont know?” (line 6) and the “He said it wu:z workin, didn’t ee?” (line 8), after a brief silence, finish this question-answer sequence.

Of interest here is that upon the completion of the sequence discussed above, there was no further orientation to the camera by either Greg or Maude until the very end of the recording. This was after the sitcom that they were watching together had finished and they were tasked with stopping the recording. This is one consistent feature of the brief moments of orientation to the

camera, whereby interaction that focuses on the recording equipment only occurs at the begin of the recording and/or at the end of the recording. As such, the business of watching the sitcom is not interrupted by the presence of the camera. This is something which again has been reported by others utilising similar methodologies (e.g. Drew, 1989; Heath 1986; Laurier & Philo, 2012), whereby when the business that is being examined begins, the 'playing up' to the camera ends. For example, Heath, Hindmarsh and Luff (2010) recall how in their work on financial dealing rooms, (published in Jirotk et al., 1993), participants would joke around in front of the camera when nothing else was going on. However, Heath, Hindmarsh and Luff, describe how as soon as there was market-related activity which needed attending to, the participants become re-engaged with what they were doing and ignored the camera.

There is another consistent feature, which may also be related to the sequencing of these moments of 'reactivity', relates to the ways in which the camera was topicalized. On the few occassions where the camera or microphone were oriented to by participants, the issues could be broadly considered to be concerns that the equipment was working properly. As shown with Maude and Greg in extract 6.1, the only reason the camera was mentioned was because Maude wanted to check that the camera was working (line 1). Other instances observed in the data fit this pattern, and involve participants expressing concerns about whether the equipment is working properly.

As such, to address this issue in future research, concerns about the camera from participants could be alleviated by spending a greater amount of time with participants during the process of setting up and testing the equipment. This way participants would feel reassured that the camera and microphone were operating as expected, removing the need to check that it is functioning correctly. Furthermore, given the advances in technology since this data was collected, (2009/10), there is increased access to smaller, and therefore less visible, video cameras. Consequently, it can be argued that this equipment woould pose even less of an intrusion to participants and may reduce participant's concerns because they are less noticable. However, this may also be more problematic

because participants cannot as easily see the camera working and this may increase concern. This would be something that would be closely monitored in subsequent research.

Regardless, the concerns about 'reactivity' in this section need to be considered alongside the alternative ways in which data of this nature could be collected and what additional problems these methodologies would present. For example, if methods which could be broadly referred to ethnographic were used (e.g. focus groups, interviews) then we wouldn't be recorded participants in situ, and as such, we wouldn't have access to them 'doing' sitcom watching. Indeed, the methodology used in this thesis was selected especially because of the access that it provided to participants who were actually involved in watching sitcoms together 'naturally'. Therefore, whilst concerns about reactivity may be valid, there is no other methodology that would provide the level of access to participant's everyday life.

6.4.1 – Changing Channels

A further methodological issue that I wish to discuss here relates to the changing nature of TV watching and the implications this has for research on sitcom watching at home. As mentioned previously, the data for this project was collected during 2009-2010. With every year that passes there are new ways in which individuals can access media content and this has been a concern with cultural studies and communication and media studies. Indeed, Evans (2011) argues that there has been "an explosion of changes within both the television industry and the daily lives of viewers" (p.1). As such, the ways in which people 'consume' TV continues to change. There are, for example, a growing number of streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Now TV, and Hulu which allow viewers to access video content on a range of devices such as tablets, phones or laptops. As such, the reliance on the TV as a medium for providing content has diminished, as individuals find themselves in "a multiplatform environment" (Cha, 2016). These developments pose challenges for any subsequent research on sitcom watching and it is worth thinking about how the changes in the way people watch TV could have implications for the findings from this present thesis.

However, there were some integration of these new technologies evident in this thesis. For example, some of the recordings made featured participants watching the sitcoms on DVD or from TV recordings, both offering an insight into how advances in technology are utilised for the purposes of sitcom watching. Similarly, one of the recordings, (recording number 2), saw participants watching their sitcom on a laptop as a substitute for a TV. At the time of recording, these technologies were still comparatively new ways of watching TV, yet the findings from this thesis demonstrate that the sort of interaction that occurs between participant was not drastically different from those who had watched the shows broadcast on live TV. A notable exception here was that the recordings which were made of live broadcasts, did feature additional sequences of interaction that occurred during the advert breaks which were not present on the DVDs, or could be skipped in the case of recorded TV. These sequences could broadly be seen to be dealing with issues not directly related to the sitcom that they were watching. For example, in one recording (recording 8 – Linda and Eric), whilst the adverts played on-screen, these co-viewers were discussing their plans for the next day. Therefore, in future research I would examine this 'off-topic' interaction more closely and examine the organization of this talk in relation to the adverts playing out on-screen. In this present thesis there was not enough scope for this to be developed into a substantive analysis due to the comparatively small number of recordings made of 'live' TV.

Another related issue which I would like to pursue in further research is the use of technology at the same time as watching TV and how this is integrated into the TV watching process. In one of the recordings, (number 11), there is a sequence of collaborative problem solving whereby Estelle uses her phone to facilitate her ability to provide an answer to the question of her co-viewer. In this particular instance then, what we see is technology being drawn into the situation as a way of facilitating understanding of the show playing out on-screen. As such, future work could monitor this closely to see how technology like this is utilised as part of participant's sense-making practices.

6.4.2 – Laugh Tracks

In this section I want to discuss the role of canned laughter in the data recorded for this project. A key concern of this present thesis was that data collected was naturally occurring. As such, participants were recruited on the basis that they would be watching a sitcom as part of their usual TV watching routine. Consequently, there was little scope for controlling which shows the participants were watching. Whilst a range of sitcoms were watched by participants, one aspect which varied was whether or not the show had a recorded laugh track. The majority of the recordings made here did not include this audible extradiegetic laughter in the shows. This isn't a problem per se, because it represents the broader trend within sitcoms as moving away from recorded laughter in the shows (Mills, 2005, 2009).

That being said, an interesting observation emerging from the recordings used for this present study is that there is a marked difference between the laugh track used within the sitcom and the laughing response produced by viewers at home. The methods of transcription detailed and proposed in this thesis offer analysts the opportunity to capture the performative aspects of laughter and these could then be used to record not just when laughter occurs but how it is performed by viewers. As such, analysts could even where the recorded on-screen laughter is fitted to the off-screen interaction, particularly in relation to laughter. Furthermore, it would be possible to directly compare the laugh track with the 'real' laughter of participants at home, using CA principles of overlap, adjacency and turn design to anchor the analysis here.

The laughter produced by audiences is largely taken for granted by sitcom producers, and it is assumed that audiences at home will be responding in a similar manner to the 'canned laughter'. Whilst the present thesis has provided an in-depth analysis of how laughter is utilised by sitcom viewers, future proposals could use my methods of transcription to more closely track the recorded on-screen laughter in relation to the laughter of viewers at home.

6.5 – Concluding Remarks

This thesis has demonstrated that sitcom watching is a highly organized activity that is rooted in social interaction. As such, it is a practice that is built on collaboration and doesn't just occur but is constructed by the participants involved in 'doing' it. Underpinning much of this is laughter which is used in many ways to deal with the demands of the sitcom material that is being responded to. Sitcom watching as a site of organisation and social order had hitherto not been considered, however this thesis has demonstrated that there is a lot of interactional work that goes into the practice of 'doing' sitcom watching and when we subject it to a close analysis we can reveal ways in which interaction plays such a key role in social life, even with activities that are considered mundane or trivial, like watching sitcoms together.

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Loughborough University
Leicestershire, UK, LE11 3TU
Tel: +44 (0) 1509 263171

Appendix 1 – Sample Participant Information and Consent Form

Loughborough University

Watching and Talking About Sitcoms on Television.

Researcher: Scott Varney, Department of Social Sciences. (s.varney@lboro.ac.uk)

This **research project** forms part of my PhD programme at Loughborough University. The broad aim of the research is to explore how individuals respond to and talk about the jokes delivered in situation comedies (sitcoms). Therefore, the purpose of **this form** is for research participants to give permission for video and audio recordings to be made of them watching sitcoms on television.

ALL PERSONAL INFORMATION COLLECTED WILL BE ANONYMIZED IN WRITTEN TRANSCRIPTS. IF YOU WISH FOR YOUR IDENTITY TO BE CONCEALED IN VIDEO CLIPS, PLEASE SPECIFY BELOW. YOU MAY WITHDRAW FROM THE PROJECT AT ANY TIME.

Please read the following statements and tick as applicable.

I hereby give my permission for myself to be filmed watching a sitcom on television. ☐

I understand that transcripts will be made of the data collected which will be used for academic papers and publications, presentations at academic events or applications for future funding. ☐

I understand that short video excerpts or still images may be taken from the data collected and used at academic or professional events/conferences. ☐

I understand that ANY INFORMATION USED FROM THE DATA COLLECTED WILL BE FULLY ANONYMIZED TO PROTECT EVERYONE'S CONFIDENTIALITY. ☐

[***OPTIONAL***] I wish for my identity to be concealed in video excerpts used at academic/professional events and in academic publications. ☐

I give my permission for anonymized transcripts of any data collected to used for academic/professional events, academic publications or future funding applications. ☐

I give my permission for still images and video excerpts to be used at academic/ professional events or conferences. ☐

I give my permission for still images and video excerpts to be used in academic publications. ☐

Name of Participant ……

Signature ……

Date ……

Appendix 2: Overview of the Sitcoms watched by participants.

Benidorm

Country of Origin: UK

Broadcast Date: 2007 - 2018

Overview:

"Set in the all-inclusive Solana Hotel on Spain's Costa Blanca, Benidorm follows the highs and lows of life round the pool for a group of fun loving British holiday makers. It's guaranteed sun, sea and surprises for anyone who's lucky enough to check in at The Solana and spend time with some of Britain's most memorable characters."

(Taken from the show's production company website - https://www.tigeraspect.co.uk/productions/comedy-entertainment/benidorm-2/)

Outnumbered

Country of Origin: UK

Broadcast Date: 2009 - Present

Overview:

"'Outnumbered' follows the battle of wills between two parents and their three young children, who are seemingly locked into a never-ending contest to see just whose patience will run out first.

Testing theories such as not buying broccoli to save money on the weekly shop, and whether or not Jesus should have used his superpowers to combat Herod, the kids ponder the imponderables in the part-improvised comedy that shows how living with kids can provide at turns the funniest and the most cringeworthy experiences available to us all. Many will recognise how the parents (Hugh Dennis and Claire Skinner) are just attempting to raise their kids with the minimum of emotional damage for all concerned..."

(Taken from the show's production company website - https://www.hattrick.co.uk/Show/Outnumbered)

American Dad

Country of Origin: USA

Broadcast Date: 2005 - Present

Overview:

"The series focuses on the eccentric upper middle class Smith family in the fictional community of Langley Falls, Virginia and their three housemates: Father, husband, CIA Agent, Republican, and breadwinner Stan; his wife and homemaker/housewife, Francine; their liberal, hippie, college-aged daughter, Hayley; and their dorky high-school-aged son, Steve. There are three additional main characters, including Hayley's boyfriend and later husband, Jeff Fischer; the family's unusual goldfish, Klaus, who has the brain of an East German athlete; and Roger, the alien, who is a deceitful, self-serving master of disguise. Stan's boss Avery Bullock, the Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, is a recurring character."

(Taken from the show's Wikipedia page - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Dad!)

Friday Night Dinner

Country of Origin: UK

Broadcast Date: 2011 - Present

Overview:

"FRIDAY NIGHT DINNER For the Goodman family, Friday Night Dinner is just like Sunday lunch: just take two days away, add on an extra course and you've pretty much got it…. Adam and his brother, Jonny, view Friday night dinner as a necessary annoyance; necessary because they get fed, and annoying because, well, they have to spend the evening with Mum and Dad. It's not that Mum and Dad aren't wonderful. They really are. But Dad slugs ketchup straight from the bottle, Mum is obsessed with Masterchef and even Grandma likes to wear her new bikini around the house."

(Taken from the show's production company website - https://www.bigtalkproductions.com/production/friday-night-dinner/)

Only Fools and Horses

Country of Origin: UK

Broadcast Date: 1981-2003

Overview:

“Derek "Del Boy" Trotter (played by David Jason), a fast-talking, archetypal South London 'fly' trader, lives in a council flat in a high-rise tower block, Nelson Mandela House, in Peckham, South London, with his much younger brother, Rodney Trotter (Nicholas Lyndhurst), and their elderly grandad (Lennard Pearce). Their mother, Joan, died when Rodney was young, and their father Reg absconded soon afterwards, so Del became Rodney's surrogate father and the family patriarch. Despite the difference in age, personality and outlook, the brothers share a constant bond throughout.

The situation focuses mainly on their attempts to become millionaires through questionable get rich quick schemes and by buying and selling poor-quality and illegal goods. They have a three-wheeled Reliant Regal van and trade under the name of Trotters Independent Traders, mainly on the black market.”

(Taken from the show’s Wikipedia page - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Only_Fools_and_Horses)

One Foot in the Grave

Country of Origin: UK

Broadcast Date: 1990 – 2000

Overview:

“The series features the exploits and mishaps of irascible early retiree Victor Meldrew, who after being made redundant from his job as a security guard, finds himself at war with the world and everything in it. Meldrew, cursed with misfortune and always complaining, is married to long-suffering wife Margaret, who is often left exasperated by his many misfortunes.

Amongst other witnesses to Victor's wrath are tactless family friend Jean Warboys and next-door couple Patrick (Victor's nemesis) and Pippa Trench. Patrick often discovers Victor in inexplicably bizarre or compromising situations, leading him to believe that he is insane. The Meldrews' neighbour on the other side, overly cheery charity worker Nick Swainey, also adds to Victor's frustration.”

(Taken from the show’s Wikipedia page - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_Foot_in_the_Grave)

Come Fly with Me

Country of Origin: UK

Broadcast Date: 2010 – 2011

Overview:

"Comedy series set in a busy airport and on the departing and arriving flights, featuring characters played by Matt Lucas and David Walliams."

(Taken from the show's production company website - https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00trc9v)

Mrs Brown's Boys

Country of Origin: UK

Date of Broadcast: 2011 - Present

Overview:

"Agnes Brown - a widow living in Ireland - runs her home with an iron fist as she manages her sons, daughter Kathy and best friend Winnie. Add elderly Grandad, various in-laws and grandchildren to the mix and Mrs Brown usually has her hands full.

Funny, outspoken and never at a loss for words (especially profanity), she gets through life and the daily grind with a caustic remark and a loving wink.

What makes the show different is that the "fourth wall" is broken. This could mean anything from Agnes interacting with the crew filming the show, allowing technical goofs and glitches to make their way into the story line or having the studio audience join in for an impomptu musical number."

(Taken from the show's IMDB page - https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1819022/plotsummary)

Miranda

Country of Origin: UK

Date of Broadcast: 2009 - 2015

Overview:

"Miranda works in her joke shop with her best friend Stevie. She struggles when in social environments and no matter how hard she tries, she is always making a fool of herself, especially in front of her crush Gary. Plus her pushy mother, Penny, is forever trying to find her a suitable husband and turn her into a respectable lady."

(Taken from the show's IMDB page - https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1533435/)

Phoenix Nights

Country of Origin: UK

Date of Broadcast: 2001-2002

Overview:

"Bad-tempered, wheelchair-bound Brian Potter runs a working mans club in Bolton called The Phoenix. The struggling club is staffed by an odd bunch, including licensee Jerry St Clair.

The club has had a troubled history, having been closed many times. Brian is now trying to bring it back to its former glory... but is often hampered by things really not going to plan."

(Taken from the show's page on British Comedy Guide - https://www.comedy.co.uk/tv/phoenix_nights/)

Hepburn, A., & Varney, S. (2013). Beyond ((laughter)): Some notes on transcription. In P. Glenn, & E. Holt (Eds.) *Studies of Laughter in interaction* (pp. 25-38). London: Bloomsbury.

Beyond ((laughter)): some notes on transcription

Alexa Hepburn and Scott Varney
Discourse and Rhetoric Group
Loughborough University

Before embarking on the painstaking and time consuming task of transcribing laughter, we have to be sure that it's worth the effort. And indeed sometimes it's not; for example, it's not clear what analytic benefit there would be in attempting to transcribe the wide range of sounds that make up audience laughter, so it is usually enough to simply describe its occurrence and indicate its duration, as below:

```
01  Aud:   [        ((laught[er))       ]
02         [   (10.5)       [    (1.5)  ]
03  Blair:                  [And the con]servatives…
```

In this (invented) example we can see a total of 12 seconds of audience laughter, overlapped at 10.5 seconds by the speaker on line 3. This clearly marks the onset and offset of audience laughter, in overlap with both talk and silence, and times its duration. Where individual laughter is not distinguishable, and therefore its placement and interactional role is not relevant, this is sufficient.

As Philip Glen (2003: 42) has noted, reproducing someone else's talk as if word for word is a common practice in everyday talk, and yet people make no attempt to reproduce all the 'ha ho heh' sounds when reporting laughter. To do so would sound odd (or maybe sarcastic). This may be because laughter doesn't do action in the way other elements of talk does. Laughter does not have propositional content - it cannot be unpacked into a set of discrete words or phrases; rather it is something that is treated as accompanying talk or even as 'flooding out' in response to 'humour'. Given this, when and why is it important to transcribe laughter?

Pioneering work by Gail Jefferson (1979, 1984, 1985, 2010; Jefferson et al., 1987) has shown how laughter can be approached as an ordered interactional phenomenon. Like other elements of talk, Gail argued that laughter is "a systematically produced, socially organized activity" (Jefferson, 1987: 152). Her meticulous transcription and analysis showed laughter to be typically more than an uncontrollable expression of amusement, and instead something which is closely interactionally coordinated and used to accomplish specific interactional tasks (e.g. see Glenn, 2003 for a summary, and chapters in the current volume). In her paper on laughter in troubles-telling, Jefferson notes that laughter may display the teller's "good spirits" and bravery, so is "troubles-resistive" (Jefferson, 1984: 367). Jefferson (1985) also discussed the value of transcribing laughter where it is interpolated within words (see below for examples) to manage delicate tasks, such as the saying of an obscenity. Even with shared laughter, Jefferson demonstrated that this is a highly ordered event which is co-ordinated by recipients in relation to rhythmic pulses of laughter (Jefferson et al., 1987). She also showed the value of attending to the exact placement of laughter in particular words, as well as its prosodic features.

Recent work (e.g. Jefferson, 2010) has further refined the way the fine placement of the kinds of particles of sounds and aspiration that are conventionally glossed as laughter can have interactional significance. Potter and Hepburn (2010) demonstrated how laughter can interlace speech so that *laughter particles* are produced simultaneously with talk. Further, Shaw et al (this volume) show that there may be a small number of particles (typically 1-3) in post-completion position. In these positions either within or immediately following talk, laughter particles may be one or more elements of 'plosive' aspiration (how 'explosive' the particles sound, indicated by in parentheses). Particles may also be simply *breathy*. Shaw et al (this volume) also show that it is also important to capture the quality of delivery in post-completion position, as sometimes laughter particles can be designed as either 'raucous' or minimal, depending on the interactional work being done. Once we are starting to realise the import of these subtle distinctions between different kinds of laughter delivery, we need to reliably capture them in transcript.

In this short chapter we will lay out some of the features of laughter, and explore some reasons why, even when laughter appears to be 'flooding out', it is still important to capture its often subtle interactional features. There will not be space here to cover all the possible features of laughter, nor the interactional significance of doing it one way rather than another. Nevertheless, we will attempt to provide some basic methods for hearing and transcribing that will draw on and develop the basic transcription conventions designed by Gail Jefferson (see Jefferson, 2004 and Hepburn and Bolden, 2012 for a recent overview).

Distinguishing different types of laughter

There are numerous English vernacular terms that describe different forms of laughter, e.g. giggle, chuckle, guffaw, snigger, hysterical or raucous, or fits of laughter. There are even different words for the facial contortions that might accompany amusement – smirk, grin, smile, simper and so on. These vernacular words for categorizing laughter often carry some positive and negative valence, for example describing someone as smirking or sniggering could be part of building a negative description or complaint. They also suggest that people may orient to, and find significant, different ways of laughing, and different ways of incorporating laughter into interaction. However, such mundane descriptions do not themselves specify the precise sounds that are made. Nor do they say much about the interactional relevancies of different forms of laughter in different positions in interaction. If we want to move beyond the vernacular and start to address these issues systematically then it will be important to work with an agreed set of conventions for transcribing the sounds involved. Here we set out some of the different ways to capture features of laughter that are potentially interactionally consequential. Where possible, audio clips will be available from the website: www.**** to allow sounds to be matched to transcription practices, so this chapter should be read in concord with them.

Transcribing laughter will seem difficult at first because of the unfamiliar sounds and forms of representation, and because, as Sacks' rule of 'not more than one party at a time' does not apply with laughter, overlap is a common feature (e.g. see extract 1 below). The only solution is practice. However, be assured that once that practice has bedded in, it is possible to reliably distinguish the different sounds of laughter and to

accurately represent them orthographically. As with transcription of other materials, especially of more complicated sequences of interaction, one useful device for capturing the diverse range of sounds is to incrementally add layers of detail, where you can go back to a clip and listen for each different feature (see Hepburn and Bolden, in prep). To facilitate this, examples of the different features of laughter are presented below.

Components of laughter

Laughter is typically made up of pulsed out-breaths, which can be delivered quite quickly, for example 'ahHAH HA ↑HA ↑HAH' from example 1 below. They may also occur as standalone particles, as the following extract, from a corpus of recordings of people watching comedy programmes, shows:

```
1. One Foot in the Grave
01 TV1:           Margaret where the hell di you put my ca::r keys?
02                (0.5)
03                ((TV1 puts his hand in his pocket and finds keys))
04 TV1:           How did they get in there, I never put them there.
05 Graham: → [ Hhuh  ]
06 TV2:           [You know] (.) that Derek Gibson.
```

Here a somewhat amusing turn on the TV elicits a single particle from Graham on line 5. While single laugh particles are common markers of action modulation in both interpolated and post completion positions, it may also be useful to track their occurrence as standalone particles, where they are in some way responsive to some prior turn.

Each pulse or particle of laughter should be transcribed, and their sheer speed of delivery can present the first major obstacle to the transcriber. One solution is to slow down the sound, which can be done with software such as QuickTime, Adobe Audition or Audacity, the latter of which is available to download for free[1]. This allows a more careful consideration of both the type and number of laughter particles present. Slowing the tempo also facilitates a clear sense of overlap onset and offset.

Voiced vowels

Laughter can be combined with different voiced vowels, resulting in characteristic particles such as *huh/hah/heh/hih/hoh*. These can be interspersed with audible in-breaths, which may themselves contain voiced vowels (e.g. 'hih' and 'ha' on line 5). As line 2 and 5 below shows, the same interlocutor may use a variety of forms.

```
2. Location, Location, Location
1   Bill:   Th[e shed-]
2   Kirsty:   [H H h i] h [h h u h   h huh  hhah  hah ]=
3   Phil:     [I don't    [think you're gonna give 'im]=
4   Hazel:                [a h H A H   H A  ↑HA  ↑HAH ]=
5   Kir:    =[hih  ha  hah hah ha .h][i.h] h h]=
6   Phil:   =[a MO:MENT'S CHOI:CE:! ][Hh ]
7   Haz:    =[ahah  hah  ha hah .hh ][h h h   ]=
8   Bil:                              [hihyeahh]=
9   Phi:    =[.Hhugh I thi(h)nk you'll gedover it W:ON:'T you:!]=
```

[1] http://audacity.sourceforge.net/

The presence of 'voiced vowels' can be a clue to how plosive the laughter is, as it often seems that more plosive laughter is more likely to contain a voiced vowel. This could be due to the shape of the open mouth, which seems to give the expelled air (which often includes a vocal accompaniment with varying degrees of volume) a vowel-like quality, whereas a closed mouth or throat would more likely add consonants e.g. 'tsshh' or 'khuh', of which, more later. It's also important that the transcript can represent clearly situations where voiced vowels are not present, as the section below on 'aspiration' will demonstrate.

Vowel placement

Listening out for the placement of vowels relative to aspiration can be a challenge. Consider an example of a laughter particle in which the vowel appears prior to the aspiration.

```
3. Holt:J86:2:1:2-3 (transcript modified)
01 Les:     =D'you fly: (.) °o:[r (.) g[o (.) °with°
02 Fos:                         [.hhh   [We go by helicopter
03          fr'm Penzanc[e to: to Tresco: yes.=
04 Les:                 [Yes.
05 Les:     =Yes.=
06 Fos:     ='t's only a (0.4) quarter'v'n hour fli:ght °but uh°
07              (0.2)
08 Les:     .hhhh expens[ive.
09 Fos:                 [interesting .hhhh
10              (0.2)
11 Fos:     We[ll I yes I s]poze ih-i-it's: uh:: it's about forty=
12 Les:       [ehh heh heh ]
13 Fos:     =pou:nds retu:rn.
14 Les:     Yes:. Yes.
```

On line 8 Lesley completes Foster's turn in a way that then makes him accountable for the expense of his helicopter flight. Her first laughter particle on line 12 starts with a vowel sound 'ehh', and the second is given extra plosive force ' heh'. These differences are marked by the lack of h at the start, and by the underlining. The inclusion of more vowel sounds and a plosive middle particle amplifies the delivery of the laughter, which may relate to Lesley's need to manage what turns out to be her rather non affiliative completion[2] of Foster's prior turn on line 6.

Volume

It is conventional to represent moderately increased volume by underlining. When transcribing laughter, underlining can also mark more plosive aspiration, which will of course sound louder. This use of underlining allows capitals to be reserved for laughter particles which are delivered at a notably higher volume. Thus in:

```
01 Jen:     [Yeh James's a little] divil ihhh  ↑heh heh
```

We see the underlining marking the increased volume and plosiveness. And in:

```
04 Hazel:   [a h H A H   H A  ↑HA  ↑HAH ]=
```

[2] see Lerner, 2004, for analysis of collaborative turn sequences, from which this provides an interesting deviation

The voiced vowel with marked elevated volume (no doubt due both to its status as overlapping, but also to the management of a strongly disaffiliative turn by Hazel[3]) is shown by the capital letters.

Pitch

In addition to variations in the volume of each laugh particle, the pitch of laughter can also vary, and transcription of this follows Jefferson's normal conventions, for example, underlining and arrows. In extract 4 below on line 7, Lesley's laughter is both high pitched with elevated volume and plosiveness.

```
4. Holt:M88:1:5:12
01 Les:            [Eh: ↑WE:LL eh ↑WHAT I RANG up ↓about was ehm
02          di-↑did you have ↓anybody want a photogra:ph?
03               (0.5)
04 Rob:     I'll be honest with ↑you
05 Les:     No.=
06 Rob:     =haven't a:sked ↓th'm.
07 Les:     Oh: that's alrigh[t ↑hhah hah hah hah↑[.ah
08 Rob:                      [(       )           [C'n I leave it
09 another wee:k,
```

On line 7, arrows surrounding ↑hhah hah hah hah↑indicate high pitch, and the underlining indicates plosive delivery as well as delivery that is moderately louder than the surrounding talk. Here Lesley preempts a dispreferred response on line 5, and her laughter manages both the interactional trouble created by Robbie's failure to grant an earlier request, and, as with Extract 3, her own problem in wrongly preempting Robbie's turn.

To illustrate some different pitch movements, consider the following extract from a radio show. Frank is telling his listening audience and co-presenters about a photo that was recently published in a daily newspaper featuring him holding his newborn baby, while his girlfriend Cath is in the background on her mobile phone. On lines 1-3 Frank reveals that the reason that Cath was on her phone was because she was attempting to arrange an appointment with her doctor.

```
5. Gastroenteritis
01 Frank:   She was actually: erm (.) phonin the do:ctor to see
02          if she could come in and see him that morning aboud
03          'er gastoenteritis.
04          (0.2)
06 Alun:    Khn[hhhuhh[  °hh-hh° ]
05 Emily:      [O::h. ]
07 Frank:             [↓She'll lo]ve me↓=
08          =[↓fer (.) telling you [that,↓]
09 Emily:   =[    Hn-hn-hn-hn      ]
10 Alun:                           [↑Hhah ] ↑hhah [°↑↑.hhih]
11 Frank:                                         [  Hhnh  ]
```

On line 7 Frank sarcastically remarks that "she'll love me for telling you that", which

[3] see extract 1, preceding which Hazel has just said 'I think you'll get over it won't you' in reference to her husband's objections to buying the house that Hazel wants (see Hepburn and Potter, 2011, for further discussion of this extract)

both co-presenter Alun and guest Emily respond to with laughter (lines 9-11). The high-pitched, elevated volume and plosive quality of Alun's laughter helps him to characterise Frank's utterance as extremely humorous (compare with 'Hhuh' in extract 1). This exaggerated laughter may indicate the kind of institutional requirements of the humorous radio programme, whereas Emily's laughter is much more subdued and possibly done through a closed mouth, resulting in the 'hn' sound.

Aspiration

Laughter may contain differing degrees of aspiration, and in some cases be composed entirely of breathy sounds. For example, in the following extract, laughter is hearably present, but without the vocal features.

```
6. Hyla and Nancy
01  Nancy:    Didja a'ready get the mai:l,=
02   Hyla:    =.hhhh Yes, hh-hh-h⌈h,
03  Nancy:                       ⌊Oh, hhhmhh⌈hh
04   Hyla:                                   ⌊hh-hh
05                  (.)
06  Nancy:    Sorry I brought it uhhhp
```

Here Hyla's response on line 2 reveals a painful lack of correspondence from her boyfriend. The breathiness of her delivery is conveyed by 'hh' without a voiced vowel, and the cut-off indicates that the particles are clearly separated – 'hh-hh-hh'. Compare this with Nancy's breathy laughter in the post-completion slot on line 3. Here a single extended breathy particle is hearable. The value of this type of delivery may relate to Shaw et al's (this volume) suggestion that more muted delivery seems more appropriate when mitigating actions that have the potential for being in some way interactionally troublesome. Were Nancy to do something more raucous here she would risk sounding callous, or as if she was reveling in her friend's discomfort.

How many hhs?
In general when transcribing aspiration of any kind, one rule of thumb for how many hhs to include is to time the aspiration and add one h for every 'beat' of silence (which is usually somewhere in between 0.1 and 0.2, depending on the relative speed of the talk, see Hepburn and Bolden, in press, for ways of counting or measuring this). Where laughter is very breathy, this may be a useful guide. Another would be to compare different examples of laughter that have been transcribed by experts. For example, compare Jenny's post-completion laughter managing her troubles telling:

```
Jen:    No I've gotta pimple on my chin en one on my
        eyebrow so ah ha ha ↑ha
```

With the Charlie's more breathy laughter below, managing what will become, following various hedges and false starts, the delivery of bad news:

```
Cha:    Hi howuh you doin.
Ile:    Goo::[d,
Cha:         [hhhe:h heh .hhhh I wuz uh:m: (·) .hh I wen' ah:-
```

And also in Hyla's laughter below, compare her particles in line 6 with the later ones in line 12, which are delivered with marginally less aspiration:

```
7. Hyla and Nancy 12.01: 18
01 Nancy:    It wasn't fu(h)u(h)nn(h)y
02                 (0.2)
03 Nancy:   ⌈.hhhhhhh
04 Hyla:    ⌊I'm not laughing.⌈.hhhh
05 Nancy:                     ⌊I kno:w,hh⌈hhh
06 Hyla:                                 ⌊he:h huh,
07               (0.2)
08 (Nancy):  .hhh
09                 (0.5)
10 Nancy:    A::nywa::y,
11                 (·)
12 Hyla:    eh-eh .hhhhhh Uh::m,
```

On line 6 the laughter particles are enclosed by 'h' and in the turn initial particles on line 12, they aren't.

Audible in-breaths can also accompany episodes of laughter, and seem related to the plosive exhalations that precede them, as the above example shows, e.g. line 3 sounds like the inhalation from Nancy's laughter particles through line 'funny' on line 1, and similarly Hyla's in-breath on line 11 sounds like the aftermath of her bout of laughter that starts on line 6, and is finished on line 11, although it's difficult to hear any intervening laughter.

Distinguishing laughter from different sounds

Sometimes when we just have a transcript, it can be hard to tell laughter from other practices[4] such as crying or coughing, for example:

```
FAN:  Yeah. .hh uh-hhu-uh: how d'd they live uh lately.=
```

Here the speaker has a couple of aborted attempts at 'uh: how..' – we can hear the cut off sounds and the hhu- sound headed for 'how'. The result is something that looks like laughter, but sounds very different. Sometimes the only way to check is by listening to the recording, or here analysts might rely on features of the context - speakers are discussing the death of a mutual acquaintance, and the sounds are compatible with a word search.

Laughter composed solely of aspiration is also in danger of not being seen as laughter by analysts working with transcript alone. If this runs the risk of generating confusion than it may be important to add a description, such as ((breathy laughter)). In order to distinguishing breathy laughter from out-breaths where it has the characteristic 'staccato' delivery, separate out the particles with the 'cut-off' symbol, as with extract 5 'hh-hh':

```
06 Alun:    Khn[hhhuhh[  °hh-hh° ]
```

And extract 7:

```
02   Hyla:    =.hhhh Yes, hh-hh-hh,
```

Consonants

[4] See Hepburn (2004) for a discussion of laughing and crying in transcription

Laughter isn't simply composed of voiced vowels such as *huh/hah/heh/hih/hoh*. These sounds are often transformed into sounds that are more like consonants through the speaker's use of some combination of larynx, mouth tension and nose.

A common feature of laugh particles is a guttural quality. This is a distinct back of the throat quality that modifies the resulting laughter, such as the "g" in Phil's ".hhugh" in extract 1 line 9 (see Jefferson, 2010 for useful discussion of gutteral laughter particles).

Just as 'g' can be used by transcribers to record the guttural sound, so too can an 'k' be used for another back of the throat quality that is hearable in laughter. This might be characterised as snorty. For example, returning to extract 5:

```
06 Alun:    Khn[hhhuhh[  °hh-hh° ]
```

Alun's laughter begins in a snorty way, as if suppressing some other sound.

In extract 6, we noted that Nancy's laughter was managing her having placed Hyla in an uncomfortable position. We noted the lack of voiced vowels as a useful device to deliver laughter in a more downplayed way.

```
03  Nancy:   ⌊Oh, hhhmhh⌈hh
```

Whereas the aspirational elements can be produced by the mouth, which may be open to deliver vowel sounds or snorts, where laughter takes on a more stifled quality, through a more closed (leaving only the nose) or tensed mouth, it makes other consonants such a 'n' or 'm' or 'l' hearable:

Laughter particles within talk

Laughter may interlace speech so that laughter particles are produced simultaneously with talk, or there may be a small number (typically 1-3) of particles in pre- or post-completion position. As Potter and Hepburn (2010) showed, it is important to transcribe the degree of plosiveness of laughter particles – how 'explosive' they sound, indicated by parentheses, such as in "thi(h)nk" in extract 1, line 9:

```
9   Phi:    =[.Hhugh I thi(h)nk you'll gedover it W:ON:'T you:!]=
```

They may also be simply *breathy*, as in "yeahh" in Extract 1 line 8:

```
8   Bil:     [hihyeahh]=
```

The usefulness of laughter for speakers engaged in a range of actions and emotion displays is revealed by the many ways it can be inflected in talk. For example, sympathy is hearable in Nancy's uptake to Hyla's confession on line 4:

```
Extract 8 Hyla and Nancy
01   Hyla:    Hu:h?
02  Nancy:    C'djih tell iz vo⌈i:ce,⌉
03  Hyla:                      ⌊Y e a⌋:h, I knew iz voice,=
04  Nancy: →  =Oha:::⌈w,
```

```
05   Hyla:          └hhhih .hh=
```

The laughter works here because sympathy on its own would be to cast Hyla too far into the role of rejected girlfriend.

For a more exaggerated example of this, see Mum's turn below, where she is responding to Sarah's story about how her young son (Mum's grandson) became upset.

```
9. Shaw PC
Sarah:      And he got him£self all upset£='cause he thought I'd
            tell him off=[because he didn't have his jum]per,
Mum:                     [Oh~:: bless °him°              ]
Sarah:      Hh[hh      ]
Mum:  →       [Tch ohhh] hoh hoh hoh hoh [.HiUHH
Sarah:        [.HHH
```

In the following extract, Caroline is watching TV with her friends, one of whom is from India.

10. Shock

```
06 TV1:     =you take the phone for a bit and let me know if any re:al
07 people come on.
08                (.)
09 TV3:     Indians are real people dad.
10          ((Doorbell rings on-screen))
11          Barbara:  Mphuh
12          Caroline: ↑Ehohh!
13          Denise:   Ohkh=
14          Annette:  =↓Owh>hoh hguh [hooh<]
15          Caroline:                [hhh  ] wh↑(h)howh! .hhh
```

FIG.1 – Caroline at line 12

Here laughter is mixed with an 'oh' in line 12 (see Fig 1 for illustration of accompanying facial features) and a 'wow' in line 15. It is useful in displaying both disbelief and a non-serious orientation towards TV1's racist utterance.

Post completion particles

As Shaw et al (this volume) show, it is also important to capture the quality of delivery in post-completion position, as sometimes laughter particles can be designedly 'raucous' or minimal, depending on the interactional work being done. As we've seen, plosive interpolated particles are enclosed in parenthesis, and breathy ones are not. However, the parenthesis/non parenthesis solution can lead to

confusion when transcribing standalone particles because of the role of parenthesis in marking uncertain hearing. For this reason, post completion plosiveness can be represented through other means such as underlining to represent the sound as 'punched up'. For example, line 1 below:

Extract 1a: Rahman B.2.IV; 1.10, P2 (Raymond & Heritage, 2006)

```
1 Jen:     [Yeh James's a little] divil ihhh  ↑heh heh
2 Ver:     [That-
3 Jen:     [huh .HH[H He:-
```

As Shaw et al note, Jenny's post-completion laughter on line 1 is produced as plosive via the underlined 'h': '↑heh heh', and it also contains elevated pitch and voiced vowels. By contrast the laughter particle on line 3 'huh' has a less plosive and more breathy sound.

Discussion

The study of laughter and interaction will only move forward as a topic if the field of analysts works with clear and accurate transcripts of its different features. This is challenging – but that challenge is manageable. We have made a start on setting out in detail some of its key features. Comparing examples with sound files is absolutely crucial for developing a good transcriber's ear for laughter. We sketch below some thoughts on possible areas of future study opened up by this endeavour.

Although she distinguished between the kind of laughter that is 'compatible with the notion of flooding out' (Jefferson, 1985: 31) and that which is 'put in' to do interactional tasks, careful transcription and some initial analysis of a range of examples shows that even when laughter appears to be 'flooding out' it can still be organised in orderly ways and modulating actions or managing some perceived insufficiency or trouble. It seems then that in many cases, the distinction between what is 'put in' to do interactional tasks and what simply 'floods out' begins to blur. This would be an interesting topic for future study.

Another avenue opened up by careful transcription relates to the boundaries between laughter and other emotional inflections, for example crying and pain, or more fine grained modulations, for example a tut particle bleeding into laughter, or laughter with 'sympathetic' intonation. Laughter and displays of relational closeness or empathy and sympathy would also be an interesting avenue.

Further study is also needed on how the vernacular terms for laughter map on to the technical representations (or not), and laughter's potential to replace or supplement propositional forms. Related to this, perhaps a key area for development, suggested by many of the chapters in this volume, is laughter in action formation and action modulation.

One thing seems apparent - only when clear and accurate transcripts have been developed can we start push forward the study of laughter and its various interactional functions.

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Appendix: table of different elements of laughter relevant notation

Voiced vowels	huh/hah/heh/hih/hoh
Elevated volume	H A HA
Reduced volume	°huh hih°
Pitch shift, moderate	<u>hah hah</u>
Pitch shift, marked	↑hhah ↑↑.hhih
Plosive particles	<u>h</u>eh <u>h</u>eh

Breathy	hhhe:h

Breathy, hearable particles	hh-hh-hh
Consonant sounds	hhhmhhhh, Khnhhhuhh
Plosive interpolated particles	fu(h)u(h)nn(h)y
Breathy interpolated particles	uhhhp