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Laughing *at* and Laughing *with*:
Negotiation of Participant Alignments
Through Conversational Laughter*

Phillip J. Glenn

Through talk people continuously adjust their relative affiliation with or disaffiliation from each other. Conversational laughter contributes to displays of both alignment and distancing; which (if either) laughter helps accomplish at any particular moment may be displayed and redefined over several turns. How people interactively orient to variations in laughter's affiliative status is the focus of this analysis.

The phrases *laughing at* and *laughing with* suggest a long-recognized distinction between the power of laughter to promote distancing, disparagement, or feelings of superiority; or, conversely, to promote bonding and affiliation (for a review of theories concerning laughter, see Holland, 1982). Within conversation analytic research, Jefferson (1972) proposes (in passing) laughing *at* vs. laughing *with* as a conversational feature (see below). More recently, Clayman (1992) analyzes the affiliative status of audience laughter during televised American presidential debates. Out of a total of 174 audience responses in three different debates, Clayman codes 24 as "disaffiliative." Of these, 12 are "disaffiliative laughter" and 4 are "equivocal laughter." Affiliative laughter tends to follow (and refer to) criticisms of opponent which are marked as humorous through such devices as pre-warning that a joke is coming; using far-fetched, metaphorical descriptions; and employing fillers and hesitations after the laughable to allow turn space for anticipated audience response. Disaffiliative laughter occurs following positive self-talk by a candidate (description or assessment of own qualities and accomplishments), and in such a context laughter can be heard as treating positive self-praise as "not-serious." Clayman's study demonstrates that analysts (like participants) must look to features of the local sequential environment to disambiguate laughter's status as affiliative or disaffiliative.

The analysis below shows how participants utilize resources available over trajectories of several turns to negotiate laughter's affiliative status. Four keys, which may be present in any laugh-relevant sequential context, help distinguish laughing at from laughing with: laughable, first laugh, (possible) second laugh, and subsequent activities. After explaining each and showing

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how configurations of the four display laughings at, I will present cases where participants effect transformation from with to at or at to with.

Keys to distinguishing laughing *at* from laughing *with*

1. *Laughable*. Of the broad class of conversational laughables (including any object which serves as a referent for laughter), certain types appear likely to make laughing at relevant. Specifically, in laughing at environments, *laughable appoints/nominates some co-present as a butt*. Participants may act as perpetrators of such laughables by ridiculing, teasing, or making fun of co-present others. The butt may collaborate in this alignment, even in the absence of perpetration, by producing overbuilt turns that make teasing relevant (Drew, 1987), errors (Hopper and Glenn, in press), unintentional double entendres, talk or actions revealing a naive or otherwise sanctionable state, etc. Thus the laughable which nominates some co-present as butt may be produced by that person or by someone else as perpetrator.

In such cases co-participant laughter likely will get treated as laughing at. In this face to face conversation between two American college students, Kate comments that something smells bad. After a long pause, she asserts that he may be the source of the smell. He willingly agrees with this probability. After a pause, he recounts a past activity -- he took a bath -- which would seem to rule out one reason why he might smell. In her next turn Kate praises him for this action and laughs:

(UTCL D6)

Kate:	Shy<u>oo</u>w<u>ee</u> Brandon something r<u>i</u>lly stinks.
	(10.0) ((movement sounds in leaves/grass))
Kate:	'S pr<u>o</u>bly you.
Brandon:	°Hm° probly is,
	(1.6)
Brandon:	<u>I</u> took a shower this morning though?
Kate:	Good for you hah hah ↑huh

Now the topic has shifted from what smells bad to Brandon's hygienic habits. By her mock praise she treats his self-disclosure as ludicrous or overdone, as inviting praise for an action which any adult ought to do by routine. Thus they collaboratively construct an interchange in which he is made the butt. Kate's laughter is at Brandon.

2. *First laugh*. *First laugh by someone other than the butt (especially by perpetrator) likely indicates laughing at.* Current speaker may invite laughter from other by adding laugh particles within or following the utterance in progress (Jefferson, 1979). In such cases, current speaker makes laughing with explicitly relevant. Other joining in ratifies the affiliation.

Following laughable which nominates a co-present as butt, first laugh by someone other than the nominated butt of the laughable provides additional confirmation that it is a laughing at environment. This first laugh may come from current speaker, especially if current speaker produces laughable which identifies someone else as butt. As two couples are beginning dinner together, Shawn comments on the chicken which Vicki has prepared. His hyperbolic suggestion that the chicken isn't sufficiently cooked gets followed by a silence and an other-initiated repair repeat by Vicki, the butt of this tease. Overlapping her repeat, Shawn himself laughs. Neither of the other participants join in laughing; for them to do so would be hearable as affiliating with Shawn in laughing at Vicki.

(CD II:3. Ts by Jefferson, modified. Face to face)

Shawn: 'Ts got there's still <u>i</u>ce on it.
         (1.3)
Vicki: I<u>:</u> ce:?
              [
Shawn: °kheh-heh-heh-h eh
                          [
Vicki: They w<u>e</u>ren' even fr<u>o</u>zen.

First laugh from Shawn, who produced laughable tease nominating Vicki as butt, further confirms this as a laughing at environment.

3 . *(possible) Second laugh. In multi-party interactions, (possible) second laugh by someone other than butt reinforces laughing at. In two-party situations, laughing at is not shared.* Thus two-party shared laughter will likely be a laughing with, while multi-party laughter may be laughing with or laughing at.

In the following two-party example, Cara has asserted that she will earn a top grade of A in a tennis class. Rick asks why and offers a candidate reason: that she knows the instructor (and thus that her high grade will be due to personal relationship rather than to in-class performance). Rick follows this with laughter. Cara gives a po-faced response (Drew, 1987), not sharing his laughter and rejecting a premise for his candidate reason:

(UTCL D8a. Phone)

161   Rick: Wh<u>y</u>. D'you know the instr<u>u</u>ctor? hh<u>e</u>h heh
162   Cara: ↑N<u>o</u>. Th'instr↑uctor's a ↓l<u>a</u>dy.

His laughable nominates her as butt by suggesting an unethical basis to her assertion that she will earn a high grade. His first laugh is at her. Her not providing second laugh further confirms the laughing at status of this sequence.

Thus far we have looked at three clues to distinguish laughing at from laughing with: nature of the laughable, first laugh, and (possible) second. This may also be a matter of retroactive display: What people do *following* first laugh (and possible second) also helps negotiate these alignments.

4. Subsequent activities. *Subsequent talk on topic displays laughter as at.* Whether laughter is at or with may may depend on retroactive definition through subsequent activities. One such activity (Jefferson 1972: 300-301) involves extending the topic through word or phrase repetitions. Repetition of another speaker's prior talk plus laugh tokens can be a way of appreciating something just said:

(Jefferson, 1972, p. 299. Face to face)

	Al:	Then th'r gonna dismantle the frame 'n
		see if the frame's still there.
	Louise:	hh//heh heh heh!
	Al:	Got *ter*mites.
		(0.6)
->	Ken:	"T(hh)er(h)mite(h)s" hhh
	Louise:	Well y'know wi-n-*fall*out.
		Who knows what they'll eat now.
		(0.6)
	Ken:	hhhh
		(1.5)
	Ken:	hh hh
		(1.0)

Ken repeats "termites" and embeds laugh particles within it. This accomplishes appreciating the prior item. Whether this laughter is at or with Al (who produced the term in the first place) gets displayed in subsequent talk. Jefferson notes that repeats with laugh tokens regularly co-occur with shutting down talk about that topic. In the example above, Ken's repeat of the laughable with laugh particles is followed by another utterance from Louise which attempts to continue talk on that topic. But talk on this topic does not continue: there are several seconds of silences and small laughs from Ken. Finally, the group moves on to another topic (not shown on transcript).

In some cases repeat + laughter does get followed by attempts to continue topic talk. Here, laughter's ambiguity becomes relevant. If laughter is with, that is, appreciating, then it will function as a terminator. If the laughter is "at" -- disaffiliative -- it functions, like a questioning-repeat, to produce more talk, perhaps including a repair, of the trouble item. Delay then repeat may show participant uncertainty about which meaning of laughter is in operation. The attempt to continue the topic gives more chances to resolve that ambiguity.

In this next instance, Cara (line 33) retrieves and laughs at a word she seems to have *heard* Rick say a few turns earlier (line 24). The repeat plus

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laughter *at* Rick's word generates a lengthy sequence of talk devoted to resolving its meaning:

(UTCL D8a. Phone.)

```
21        Cara:     ↑We̱ll- u̱h we've been looking fer:: apartments all
22                  ↑da̱:y n' no::w (.) we're keuking.
23                  (.)
24-->     Rick:     Ye:r (p) (.) yer pu̱nting.
25                  (0.3)
26        Cara:     Keu̱king.
27                  (0.5)
28        Rick:     Ki̱cking.
29        Cara:     ↑Coo̱king.
30        Rick:     Coo̱king  hh hh   •eh hh
                                [         ]
31        Cara:                      ↑Ye::s.h
32        Rick:     Uhh hhu̱h ho   °ho°
                                 [
33        Cara:                  Pu̱mping. Wer pu̱mping. (hh) ↑eh
                                                           [   ]
34        Rick:                                            (hh)
35        Cara:     ↑huh-huh-h      uh
                                [
36        Rick:                  •ehhh •uhh=
37        Cara:     =•h:hh  Hu̱:h what could tha̱t mean,
38        Rick:     u:h I don' kn↑o̱::w u:h-h.
39                  (0.4)
40        Cara:     (t)Hu̱:h?
41                  (0.2)
42        Rick:     °ih-° You got me̱: hhc̱h-heh-↑he̱ h •hhh
                                                [
43        Cara:                                 hhhh
44        Cara:     You' the one that s:a̱id the wo̱:rd.
```

This continues for some time. For these potential dating partners, the possible sexual innuendo of "pumping" may be relevant to Cara's relentless pursuit of its meaning here.

Jefferson (1972: 301) further suggests that these alternatives are not symmetrical -- rather, there exists a "uni-directionality" to them such that "laughing at" is unambiguously hearable as such, while laughing with may also be laughing at. Even when one speaker does something specifically to be funny, there is the possibility that hearers laugh, not for the reasons speaker wants, but for reasons carrying some degree of judgment or criticism of the speaker.

Subsequent activities can retroactively display laughter as at or with its object, and serve as a fourth key by which conversationalists negotiate this alignment. In summary, conversationalists key laughing *at* via these features:

1. Laughable which proposes some co-participant as butt;
2. First laugh by someone other than the butt, especially by the perpetrator;
3. In two-party settings, no shared laughter; in multi-party settings, possible second laugh by someone other than butt; and
4. Extended talk on the topic of the laughable utterance.

The following exemplifies how these features combine to display a clear instance of laughing at. Kate tells Brandon to forget about the tape recorder (which is recording them). After several exchanges during which he remains silent, she goes on to construct a tease:

(UTCL D6a. Face to face)

1→	Kate:	Betchyou sound really stupid on tape too.
		(2.0)
2→	Kate:	B̲h̲h ha̲h̲ ↑huh huh °°hh°=
		[[ ]
(3→)	Brandon:	Do ↑I soun' stupid?
	Kate:	=I betcha do:.
4→	Brandon:	Yeah: ↑I've heard myself before ↑I sound
		pretty °stupid.°
		(.)
	Kate:	W'↑you sound pretty (.) stupid. . .

The #1 arrow marks the laughable which nominates Brandon as butt, providing an imagined assessment of how he sounds on tape recorder. After a silence, Kate provides first laugh (arrow #2). Simultaneously Brandon produces non-laughing talk; he does not share in Kate's laughter (arrow #3). This leads to subsequent talk on topic (arrow #4). The combination of cues -- laughable which nominates a butt, first laugh by someone else (the perpetrator), butt not sharing laughter, and subsequent talk on topic -- clearly displays this as a laughing at.

These features provide a starting point for understanding some of the ways people may disambiguate laughing at from with. In the following section some more complex instances are presented, in which conversationalists transform situations from laughing at to with or with to at. Explication of these instances displays how laughing at and with are alignments to which participants orient; such explication will also show that these alignments are not fixed but changeable, sometimes equivocal, and subject to moment-by-moment negotiation.

Converting laughing *with* to laughing *at*

Joke-tellings would seem inherently to set up laughing *with* environments. The teller seeks recipient laughter, which one would expect to display affiliation among participants, appreciating the joke and the telling. However, joke-telling environments may be volatile. Tellers must deliver the joke successfully; hearers must "get" the joke and respond appropriately. Failure in either role may convert a laughing with context into a laughing at.

Six people representing three generations of an extended American family are gathered in a kitchen, telling jokes. Milt brings a narrative joke to completion. The joke itself seems appropriate for this gathering, for it concerns a granddaughter and grandmother, and its humor turns on the child's naivete and on declining sexual activity of older adults. Following the punch line Chris laughs (line 31) and Cecil adds an appreciative "oh no" with laugh particles (line 33). It is, at this point, a laughing *with* environment:

(NP, family joke telling. Face to face)

```
27    Milt:     Sh'aid (for-) a:bso↑lutely right. (0.7) She says I
28              think I: know why you and grandpa sleep in separate
29              rooms.=Sh'said ↑Why is that.
29a             Said you got an F in se:x.
30              (0.8)
31    Chris:    Ohh HA HA HA HA HA HA  •↑Hooo=
33    Cecil:    =↑Hoh ↓n:o. •↑Thuuh
```

Overlapping Chris's laugh, Vaughn's repair initiator (line 32) asks for a repeat of the materials that follow "got a." The non-laughing question hearably displays that Vaughn does not get the joke. But Milt does not immediately provide the information Vaughn seeks, and Vaughn repeats the question (line 34).

```
31         Chris:    Ohh HA HA H A HA HA HA    •↑Hooo=
                                [
32         Vaughn:              Ya gotta what?
33         Cecil:    =↑Hoh ↓n:o. •↑ huuh
                                      [
34         Vaughn:              °Got a° what?
```

Milt, the joke-teller, now laughs. But placement of Milt's laugh suggests that it orients not to his own joke, but to Vaughn's questioning repair initiator. Evidence for this includes Milt's use of Vaughn's name, with laugh particles embedded in it, and his subsequent turn calling for someone to explain the joke to Vaughn (lines 39-40). The joke punch line provides an

opportunity for the participants to align and laugh with each other. Now the
others are invited to laugh with Milt *at* Vaughn.   Although it is not clear
from talk at this point whether others in the group *also* didn't hear or get the
joke, Vaughn's repair initiators make clear that *he* doesn't understand.[1] For
this demonstrated naivete, Vaughn gets laughed at:

```
34    Vaughn:   °Got a° what?
35              (0.3)
36    (?):      ↑•hu uh-huh
                    [
37    Milt:          Va (hh)ughn? •hh yes ha ha ha h   uh
                        [                [                [
38    Cecil:          ↑oh: ↑oh  ↑ohuh-hoo            ↑•uhhh-hoo
                                                         [
39    Milt:                                              Somebody
40    Milt:    explain that to him.
```

Vaughn's repair initiators (lines 32 and 34) suggest that the problem lies in
failure to hear part of the punch line, rather than hearing it but not understood
its full meaning. Yet Milt, through his turn at lines 39-40, treats this as a
failure to "get" the joke. Such a failure makes hearer subject to teasing and
ridicule. Sacks (1967: 346) explains that

> Jokes, and dirty jokes in particular, are constructed as "understanding
> tests."   Not everyone supposably "gets" each joke, the getting
> involving achievement of its understanding, a failure to get being
> supposable as involving a failure to understand.   Asserting
> understanding failures can then reveal, e.g., recipients' lack of
> sophistication, a matter that an appropriately placed laugh can
> otherwise conceal.

By this last utterance, Milt singles Vaughn out for ridicule, suggesting that
someone, indeed anyone else in the room could explain this joke to Vaughn.
More laughs follow from Milt and others, but not from Vaughn. Vaughn
accounts for his failure to laugh and repair initiators (line 49). This account
invokes "not hearing" as the source of trouble rather than, for example,
hearing but not "getting" the innuendo in the joke. It orients to his prior
actions being sanctionable -- and in this case, sanctioned. It thereby provides
confirmation of the isolating actions performed by Milt's laughing at him:

```
39-40   Milt:   Somebody explain that to him.
41      (?):    °nh-h    uh°
                    [
42      Milt:         hu hah hah hah hah hah hah
                          [
43      Cecil:              ↑hu::h- ↓huh
```

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44	(?):	[°↑huh hih-hih°=
45	(?):	=°↑uh-hunh!°
46	(?):	°hhh :::::°
		[
47	Ethel:	↑O:h ↓no(h)o=
48	(?):	(ehih uheh)
		=[[ ]
49	Vaughn:	I didn't hear the ↑first word.

At the punch line of a joke, especially a joke with dirty or naughty overtones, hearers have an opportunity to display their understanding by laughing in appreciation. In this example, the participants affiliate in appreciating the joke until one of them makes clear that he hasn't gotten it. Then the joke-teller makes this hearer's failure itself into a laughable, thus transforming the interactional environment from laughing with to laughing at.

Transforming laughing *at* to laughing *with*

As the prior example shows, alignments displayed through laughing at or with are not static but changeable, dependent upon moment-to-moment ratification or re-negotiation. One sort of change involves the butt -- the person laughed at -- attempting to shift participant alignment to a laughing with via subsequent activities.

In the following example three American college students are talking on the telephone. After a prior topic winds down Stanley refers to an earlier conversation he had with the "fellas" at the dorm. Neither Jeffrey nor Rhonda speak during several transition-relevance places and gaps (not shown below). Stanley emphasizes the term "deeming" within his turn which refers to the co-present interactor, Rhonda, in the third person, in a playful-formal phrase, "a young lady."

(UTCL A30. Phone)

Stanley: But deeming that a young ↑lady's on the phone wu' we
            woh' discuss none u'thet.

This turn proposes that Jeffrey and Stanley, as the "we" who won't discuss, align apart from Rhonda, the "young lady." As such it may make relevant Jeffrey and Stanley laughing with each other, at Rhonda. However, following a gap of 1.6 seconds, Jeffrey initiates a repair sequence by a repeat and first pair part question. Stanley's second pair part reveals that he doesn't know the meaning of the word he has just used, and that he employed it only because it is "catchy":

```
Jeffrey:    Deeming. Now ↑wha' does ↓deeming mean ma::n).
                                                    [
Stanley:                                              eh Deeming ↑I don't
            know ma:n ↑is jus'as jus uh c:atchy wo:rd ma:n.
```

Overlapping this Jeffrey starts laughing. That this is a laughing at environment is hearable by the nature of the laughable (getting caught using a term one doesn't understand), by Jeffrey's other-initiation of laughter, by Stanley's withholding second laugh and Rhonda providing it, and by initiation of subsequent talk on topic:

```
Stanley:    eh Deeming ↑I
            don't  know ma:n ↑is jus 'as jus . uh c:atchy wo:rd ma:n.
                               [                     ]
Jeffrey:              ↑hih-huh hu↑AH! huh-hah!
Rhonda:     °↑hih heh.°
                     [
Stanley:              It don't fit shit.
```

This last turn by Stanley serves as a new laughable orienting to his prior word-error. This turn's laughability lies at least in part in its brevity, internal rhyme, and use of the expletive "shit." By this Stanley bids to transform the environment to laughing with. Rhonda laughs and Jeffrey provides appreciative talk. Stanley continues, with another laughable relevant to his use of "deeming":

```
Stanley:    It don't fit shit.
Rhonda:     ihh huh  huh      °h:::h
                         [            ]
Jeffrey:        Wu'I tellyou what ma:::::n.
                                   [
Stanley:                            My English teachuh be exin
Stanley:    my ass on that. ↑Ev'ry time.=
```

Stanley produces comic characterizations of an English teacher deleting an item from a paper as if it were to be banished or decapitated. Jeffrey and Rhonda laugh. Stanley has now successfully converted a laughing at environment into a laughing with, realigning from an accidental producer of a teasable error into an intentional producer of comic accounts and narration. The realignment achieved, he proceeds with non-laughing talk on the same subject.

Rhonda: =°Who deeming?°
                              [
Stanley: Deemin',
                    (0.2)
Stanley: Ooph! It don' fit.
                    (0.7)
Stanley: Off with it.
                    [[
Jeffrey: (t'sh)   mh! hmhuhmhuh.
                                             [
Rhonda: u-huh?=
Stanley: =I'm like right oh kay?
                    (1.8)
Stanley: See ↑I got that from this white guy ma:n,

Errors -- in this case misusing a word and not knowing what it means -- make relevant laughing at. The producer of an error can recover artfully, as does Stanley, and bring those laughing back into alignment with him.

The possibility of getting laughed at following an error may be oriented to even before the laughs begin. Thus, error-producer may pre-empt opportunities for others to laugh at and try to convert the environment to a laughing with by leading self-laughter. In the next example a young American married couple are at home, watching television and chatting about what's on. In response to Jay's question, Anna produces the wrong name for an actor. This wrong name belongs to another media celebrity of recent years, Karen Ann Quinlan, the unfortunate young woman who remained in a coma for years and became the focal point for national debate about the right to die. Jay initiates repair, and they produce a collaborative time out to hunt down the correct first name.

(AS 1, 7/89. Face-to-face)

Jay: Who's that girl.
                    (0.5)
Anna: That's u::h Karen Ann Quinlan.
                    (2.5)
Jay: I'dn she in a coma honey?
Jay: °hhh°
                    [[
Anna: No::. whatzit (.) what's her name?
Anna: Something Quinlan,
                    (1.2)
Anna: Elizabeth Quinlan?=
Jay: =Kathleen Quinlan?
Anna: ↑KAthleen.

Once they have arrived at the correct "Kathleen" Anna laughs and produces a next laughable relevant to the erroneous use of "Karen Ann":

Anna: ↑KAthleen.
(?)   ((slapping sound))
         (.)
Anna: Huh (h)'ve got the wo man °hhh
                         [   ]
Jay: She
Anna: I'VE GOT THE WOMAN. (.) IN A COMA DRIVIN' HER CA:R.=
Anna: =huh hih huh (0.8) °ihh
Anna: Duh EE::e-huh!
Jay: Amazing what they do with strings.

Anna leads the laughter in reference to her own error. By this she laughs at herself and invites Jay to align with her in appreciation of it. She transforms a laughing at sequential environment, keyed by her error, into a laughing with environment keyed by her laugh invitation and subsequent laughable.

Willingness to go along with, or even initiate, laughter at self provides potential payoffs in realigning towards affiliation. Once laughing at either is underway or relevant, willingness to laugh at self provides a resource for converting the environment to laughing with.

Discussion

A prime domain of social negotiation involves moment-by-moment displays of alignment with co-participants. Laughter may accomplish affiliation or distancing, laughing with or at someone else. Conversationalists utilize features in the sequential environment to create, amend, or disambiguate the affiliative work laughter may be doing. These features include the nature of the laughable, first laugh, (possible) second laugh, and subsequent talk. Laughing at environments are recognizable as such by: laughable which nominates some co-participant as butt, first laugh by someone other than butt (especially by perpetrator), possible second laugh by someone other than butt, and continued talk on topic. These cues do not rigidly determine orientations, but are themselves subject to re-negotiation. If others laugh at us, we may try to convert that to a laughing with. We may provide opportunities for others to laugh at us. We may shift at a moment's notice from laughing with to laughing at another. The options are many.

By transforming laughing at to with (or vice versa), participants may accomplish a micro-transformation of social structure. In his autobiography, professional comedian Dick Gregory describes how he did this as a child:

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as a child:

I got picked on a lot around the neighborhood ... I guess that's when I first began to learn about humor, the power of a joke ...

At first ... I'd just get mad and run home and cry when the kids started. And then, I don't know just when, I started to figure it out. They were going to laugh anyway, but if I made the jokes they'd laugh *with* me instead of at me. I'd get the kids off my back, on my side. So I'd come off that porch talking about myself ...

Before they could get going, I'd knock it out first, fast, knock out those jokes so they wouldn't have time to set and climb all over me ... And they started to come over and listen to me, they'd see me coming and crowd around me on the corner ...

Everything began to change then ... The kids began to expect to hear funny things from me, and after a while I could say anything I wanted. I got a reputation as a funny man. And then I started to turn the jokes on them. (Gregory 1964: 54-55, cited in Bauman 1977: 44-45).

Gregory realigned his role from that of unwilling butt to willing creator of jokes, from others laughing at him to laughing with and, ultimately, to him laughing at others. From his description we can infer that the transformation from laughing at to with happened over a series of interactions. Yet the same process can occur within several seconds of a single interaction, as examples above show.

Laughing at makes the other into an object, distancing and disaffiliating laugher and victim. But such distancing is labile and subject to change. As examples shown here suggest, those being laughed at may attempt to transform the sequential environment into one in which affiliation becomes relevant. Examples above show this occurring following errors. It also can occur in the environment of teasing. Drew (1987) describes teasing sequences arrayed by a continuum of victim responses ranging from absolute seriousness and rejection of the tease to laughing and full participation. Those who laugh along when getting teased can be seen as attempting affiliation with the teaser(s), realigning a laughing at to a laughing with.

Knowledge of this possibility itself provides a resource for creating affiliation. Conversationalists can create situations in which laughing at them is relevant, as a means of inviting and promoting affiliation. One phrase in our common parlance for this is "playing the fool." The individual willing to regularly take on a role that entails pratfalls, mistakes, and embarrassments, for purposes of generating recipient laughter, may get laughed at, yet can provide for displays of group affiliation. Those who provide this role may begin as victims, like Dick Gregory, or begin by willingly producing items for others to laugh at. In ongoing relationships, who is to say which comes first. Does Stanley, in the example above, play the fool because his friends laughed at him? Or do his friends orient to the *possibility* of laughing at him because he has, at other times, willingly played the fool?

I do not intend the with/at distinction to be a too-limiting dualism, suggesting that all laughter must do one or the other. Rather, these can be

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seen as two possibilities that arise with laughter, which do seem to be opposites. Viewed in this way, the with/at possibilities stand as microcosms of, and ways of enacting, cybernetic adjustments common to all relationships. The development, maintenance, and termination of relationships involves continuous adjustments between movement towards greater intimacy and movement towards distancing and differentiation. We do this moment by moment, through such seemingly insignificant actions as laughables and laughter. Thus conversational laughter plays a fundamental role in the organization of human interactions.

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1   In fact, some evidence suggests that Vaughn isn't the only one who fails to get the joke on first telling. Only Chris and Cecil explicitly demonstrate understanding through laughter and appreciative comments. Display of one participant's understanding failure foregrounds the relevance for others to display that they *do* get it. In such an environment, an absence of positive understanding cues -- note, for example, Ethel's silence -- may serve as stronger evidence of failure to get. (My thanks to Gail Jefferson for this observation.)