

**Young children's use of laughter after transgressions**

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**Abstract**

Can very young children deploy laughter interactionally? Using data from video recordings of 52 interactions between six mothers and their young children (ages 1;6-1;11), this paper examines one particular kind of sequence in which interactionally-ordered child laughter occurs. In that sequence the young child commits some kind of potential transgression (e.g. breaking wind, standing on objects on the floor or playing in a proscribed location). The child's mother then draws attention to the potential transgression in some way (e.g. by admonishing the child, requesting a change to the child's behaviour, issuing a particular kind of child-directed gaze), thus treating the child's action as constituting a transgression. At some point following the potential transgression, the child laughs. What is shown is that even young children can fit their laughter to the ongoing interactional sequence. It is argued that the child's laughter provides for a display of affiliation from the mother.

**1 Introduction**

We know a lot about interactions between adults and children from a variety of perspectives (psychological, social-psychological, linguistic). The conversation-analytic approach has been especially fruitful in describing in detail various organisational aspects of interactive talk involving children including turn-construction and turn-taking (Wells & Corrin, 2004; Wootton, 2007), repair (Corrin, 2010a; Forrester, 2008) and other sorts of multi-turn sequences (e.g. object-labelling: Tarplee 2010), gaze and pointing (Filipi, 2009; Kidwell, 2009) and the performing of particular actions (e.g. requests: Wootton, 2005).

Laughter in adult-child interaction is yet to receive sustained attention from a conversation-analytic perspective. This is surprising for two main reasons. First, given

the relatively limited linguistic repertoire of a young child, non-verbal resources such as laughter may have particular value in performing interactional tasks. Laughter may figure in the young child's displays of 'mastery of communication', those displays not necessarily requiring displays of a 'mastery of language' (Forrester & Reason, 2006). Knowing more about the sequential organisation of laughter by children interacting with adults will enhance our understanding of the communicative competencies and sequential skills of young children.

Second, the approach has provided considerable insight into the interactive organisation of laughter in interaction between adults (Wagner & Vöge, 2010). Among other things, work from that perspective has shown that laughter is not always the response to something interactants find humorous, nor is it always the spontaneous outpouring of emotion or the uncontrolled (and uncontrollable) display of positive affect (see Jefferson, 1979, 1984, 1985; Jefferson, Sacks, & Schegloff, 1987; Wilkinson, 2007). The lack of detailed information on the sequential organisation of laughter in adult-child interaction means that it is unclear whether children produce laughter which is interactionally ordered, as opposed to a potentially spontaneous reaction (the sort of laughter that might accompany being tickled, or that might occur in other heightened emotional states), and more importantly *how* that laughter is interactionally ordered.

While the interactional purposes to which laughter from a young child might be put are not known, research focused on other issues indicates that the laughter of a young child can be interactionally ordered, and may receive particular sorts of treatments by an adult co-participant. Furthermore, that research shows that such laughter can be used to perform certain specifiable sequential functions. Filipi (2009) shows how laughter by a pre-verbal child at 0;9 can be treated by a parent as a response to a question (2009, p. 85) and can initiate a conversational sequence at 1;0 (2009, pp. 95-6); an older child at 1;4 is shown to use laughter as one resource among others to select a next speaker (2009, pp. 181-2). Lerner and Zimmerman (2002) show a child at 1;10 laughing in an object-withdrawal tease sequence, just after presenting a toy figure to another child only to withdraw the figure as the child presenting the toy begins to close his fingers around it. Within developmental psychology Reddy (1991) describes real-life scenarios in which very young children (under one year old) do

something which opposes the expectations of adult co-participants (in some cases that expectation having been set up by the child's actions) e.g. taking away a musical instrument being played by the child's mother, moving towards fire irons when on previous occasions the child has complied with prohibition of engaging with them, and withdrawing an object held out to a co-participant. That the children can perform such playful teasing is used as evidence of their knowledge of co-participants' expectations. In each of the cases of playful teasing Reddy describes there is smiling or laughter from the child, and in some cases the teasing occasioned laughter from adult co-participants. However, the precise organization of smiling and laughter in those sequences is not described in detail.

This paper examines one particular sequence in which interactionally ordered child laughter occurs. In that sequence the young child commits some kind of potential transgression such as breaking wind, standing on objects on the floor or playing in a proscribed location. The child's mother then draws attention to the potential transgression in some way (e.g. by admonishing the child, requesting a change to the child's behaviour, issuing a particular kind of child-directed gaze), thus treating the child's action as constituting a transgression. The child then laughs, this laughter therefore occurring at some remove from the potential transgression. It is shown that laughter is a resource a young child can use, and that the laughter of young children can be interactionally ordered. In being interactionally ordered, this laughter is allied with laughter in other sorts of sequences (described on the basis of data from interactions between adults) where laughter is carefully fitted to its interactional sequence and can be oriented to in a reflexively accountable way, and particularly those where the laughable is in some way delicate. Jefferson (1984) demonstrates that troubles-tellings may occasion laughter from a co-participant; Drew (1987) shows that a tease may be responded to with laughter; Holt (2012) analyses sequences in which an in-progress complaint leads to laughter from its recipient. The sequences described here represent a further type of delicate laughable, distinct from those just described in that the actions which constitute the laughables in the current data-set are systematically treated by the co-participants as transgressive in some way.

It is argued that in the transgression sequences the child's laughter provides for a display of affiliation from the mother (Lindström and Sorjonen 2012). That laughter

provides for a display of affiliation from a co-participant has been shown in several previous conversation-analytic studies. Jefferson (1979) presents various kinds of sequential evidence that one participant's laughter can be used as the basis for affiliative laughter from a co-participant. Jefferson, Sacks and Schegloff (1987) show that laughter can figure in an affiliation sequence. In one such sequence there is a conversational impropriety (e.g. talk which is in some way obscene) which is followed by joint laughter, that laughter providing an environment in which the recipient can provide a lexical reference to the laughable thereby affiliating with the impropriety. Displays of affiliation following laughter may not involve reciprocal laughter. Wilkinson (2007) shows that people with an acquired language disorder (aphasia) may laugh after unsuccessful attempts to repair their own talk, and that while co-participants do not usually join in the laughter they may show their affiliation by entering the repair sequence. Although there is evidence that laughter provides for displays of affiliation, it is yet to be shown that laughter by young children is deployed or treated in this way. Uncovering the seeking of affiliation with laughter is important since it contributes to our understanding of the interactional competence of young children. The task handled by the laughter – providing for an affiliative response from the mother – is especially delicate and sophisticated. The demonstration of the interactionally ordered occurrence of laughter following a potential transgression by the child and its providing for a display of affiliation from M establishes laughter as an important interactional resource young children can use.

## **2 Data and methods**

The data for this study are drawn from digitized analogue audio-video recordings of mothers and their children engaged in unscripted play in their own homes (Corrin, 2010b). The recordings were made by Juliet Corrin and lodged by her with the CAVA repository (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ls/cava>) at University College London (UCL) as “JRC-DHCS: Single word-multiword transition”. UCL manages password-protected access to the data in the repository by researchers. The signed agreement between the End User (the author) and UCL allows the data in the repository to be used for not-for-profit research and publication. A code preceding each transcribed fragment identifies where in the original corpus the fragment can be found to provide for independent verification of the claims made here; the chronological age of the child

(in year; month format) is also given. All names in transcriptions are pseudonyms provided by the author. The researcher was present to operate the recording equipment but did not generally take part in the interaction. There are 6 mother-child pairs (3 boys, 3 girls), with the children in the age range 1;4-1;11 making the transition from the single to multi-word stage. All of the children were considered typical in terms of their speech, language and hearing. There are between 3 and 12 recordings available for each pair, made at intervals of between 1 and 3 weeks. The rationale and methods for the original data collection, including the selection of subjects, are discussed in detail in Corrin (2002). The whole available corpus consists of 52 recordings lasting a total of just over 25 h. The data are of sufficiently high quality to allow for close analysis of a wide range of audible and visible features. In addition to the increased likelihood that children at the ages studied here will be sequentially more sophisticated than younger children, the second year of life is likely to involve more child laughter than the first year and the laughter is likely to be more stable (Nwokah, Hsu, Dobrowolska, & Fogel, 1994). Furthermore, in a study of over 30 h of recordings of children between 0;10 and 1;3 Kawakami, Kawakami, Tomonaga, and Takai-Kawakami (2009) could only find one “spontaneous laugh”, i.e. a laugh which occurs in the absence of any recognized stimulus, characteristic of neonates and infants and occurring in varying states of alertness including sleep. The spontaneous laugh was produced by the youngest child in the sample. It is therefore appropriate to consider all child laughter in these data as potentially responsive to something in the surrounding environment or interactional context and as potentially interactionally ordered.

Relevant sequences were identified by the author watching and listening to all audio-video recordings in the corpus. All sequences with clear audible characteristics of laughter from the child were included in the initial data-set. (While some studies of child laughter take into account facial features in deciding whether or not there is laughter such features were not considered a requirement here for practical reasons: the movements of the participants were unrestricted with the result that audible laughter could occur while the face could not be seen.) Just over 300 sequences were identified. In 28 of these sequences there is some kind of potential transgression to which the mother subsequently draws attention in some way, thereby establishing that action as a transgression. The status of the child’s behaviour as transgressive is

established not only on the basis of the analyst's inspection of the child's conduct, but also crucially on the basis of the mother's observable treatment of it as transgressive. This avoids an over-reliance on some set of assumed cultural norms for determining whether the child's conduct constitutes a transgression. The mother's response to the potential transgression is followed by laughter from the child.

Analysis of interactional aspects of the talk follows the principles of conversation analysis (CA). The mode of presentation follows standard procedures in CA research: detailed analyses of selected single instances are put forward as exemplars of patterns evident across the larger data-set. The presentation transcriptions given here are intended to capture aspects of the sequential organization of the talk and its lexico-syntactic make-up. The transcriptions are basic in terms of capturing pronunciation detail, using a modified form of standard orthography to maximise readability. In some cases where a child's speech is transcribed the target words are provided rather than orthography modified to reflect actual pronunciation. Transcriptions of laughter are rather basic, and orthographic; relevant post-transgression child laughter is highlighted through presentation in a frame. Some visual details and descriptions are presented in italics and in double brackets. Where the description is placed at the end of a line the activity accompanies what is transcribed in that line; where the description occurs on its own line the described activity occurs between what is transcribed in the lines immediately above and below the description. Where relevant, simple line tracings of video frames are provided.

### **3 Analysis**

This section presents exemplars of a set of 28 instances where a child commits a potential transgression which is established by the participants as constituting a transgression. Child laughter then follows. (For brevity, all children will be referred to with 'Ch'; all mothers will be referred to with 'M'.) The sequences are dealt with in three 'rounds'. In the first round the basic organisation of 5 sequences is described, with coverage up to and including the laughter (section 3.1). Evidence is then presented from each of the 5 cases dealt with in section 3.1, and 2 further cases, in support of a view that the laughter is interactionally ordered (section 3.2). Section 3.3 deals with the interactional purpose served by Ch laughter in these sequences, where

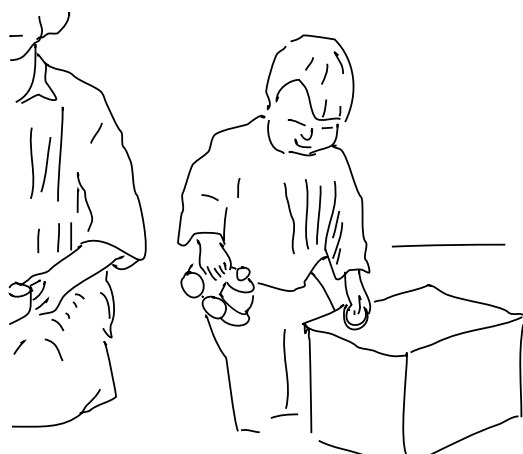
it provides for a display of affiliation from M.

### 3.1 Basic organisation

In (1) Ch is standing up while M is kneeling on the floor. There is also a box of toys on the floor.

(1) RB21-02-26m30s. 1;8.

1	M:	does a man drive the lorry	<i>((Ch walks to toy box))</i>
2		(1.5)	<i>((Ch reaches into toy box))</i>
3	Ch:	<i>((breaks wind))=</i>	
4	M:	=Eddie?	
5	Ch:	<i>((belches))</i>	
6		(1.1)	
7	M:	pardon [(me/you)	<i>((M looks briefly to camera))</i>
8	Ch:	[he(h)eh]	<i>((Ch head turned right))</i>
9		(2.8)	<i>((Ch turns to M, then back to toy box))</i>
10	M:	(what's in there/Eddie)	<i>((M reaches into toy box))</i>



(a) Middle of Ch laugh, line 8



(b) After 1 s of silence, line 9

**Figure 1:** Tracings from (1)

Just prior to (1) M has been trying to engage Ch in talk about a toy lorry M has been holding. Ch has taken a toy figure of a lorry driver from her and he walks to a box of toys on the floor. It is this toy figure that M is referring to with her talk at line 1. Ch does not respond to M's enquiry and instead reaches into the toy box. As he reaches into the toy box he breaks wind. Immediately after this M uses his name to solicit a

response to her enquiry which has not yet been responded to (line 4). There are two reasons for considering this to be a pursuit of her initial enquiry, rather than a response to Ch's breaking wind. First, Ch breaks wind only briefly (lasting about 150 ms), and M's response is latched to it. It is therefore likely that her response is being produced before she could be responding to Ch's breaking wind. Second, the phonetic design of M's talk at line 4 connects it to her talk at line 1 in much the same way as other sorts of turn extensions such as increments (Walker, 2004). Ch then belches just after M's attempt to solicit a response to her enquiry. Ch's actions incorporate two potential transgressions. One potential transgression by Ch is his failure to provide the response M's turn at line 1 made relevant. M's pursuit of a response, and in particular her pursuit of a response by only issuing his name, is good evidence that in her view Ch should be able to respond to the enquiry: note that she does not reformulate her initial enquiry in ways which might assist in dealing with a problem of speaking, hearing or understanding on Ch's part. Another potential transgression is breaking wind and belching in public (made perhaps all the more important as the interaction is being recorded), which is treated by M as constituting a transgression through her production of "pardon (me/you)", line 7. It is during this turn, and after the production of its first word which projects the production of a formulaic post-transgression utterance, that Ch laughs. Figure 1a shows the position of the interactants at the middle of Ch's laughter. (1) exemplifies the basic pattern focussed on in this article: a potential transgression by Ch, M treating Ch's actions as constituting a transgression, and Ch laughing.

In (2) Ch is standing up while M is sitting on the floor. Just prior to the transcribed fragment Ch picked up a hard and relatively large plastic ball (about the size of Ch's head), turned away from M, and threw the ball forwards and downwards onto the floor.

(2) KM26-07-18m40s. 1;6.

1	Ch:	[oh	
2	M:	[oh	
3			(2.0)
4	M:	throw	
5			(1.5)
6	Ch:	b[euw	



7 M: [ba  
 8 (0.4)  
 9 M: bang  
 10 (.)  
 11 M: it went bang d[idn't it  
 12 Ch: [.hh  
 13 (0.6) *((Ch approaches ball))*  
 14 Ch: fhehf (.) .hhh yab *((Ch picks up ball))*  
 15 (1.6) *((at 1.0 Ch throws ball))*  
 16 M: no no no Bridget don't do that lo[ve  
 17 Ch: [hh  
 18 Ch: fhe:hʃ  
 19 M: cuz it's (0.4) quite (.) big and heavy isn't it *((M crawls to ball and picks it up))*  
 20 (1.8)  
 21 Ch: ih ih [(bang)  
 22 M: [this is  
 23 M: this is what you're supposed to do you're supposed  
 24 to roll it like this look



**Figure 2:** Tracing from the middle of Ch laugh in (2), line 18

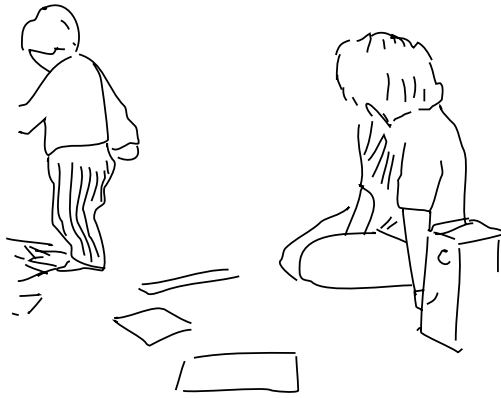
After commentary on Ch's throw which preceded the transcribed fragment (lines 1-11) Ch approaches the ball and picks it up. She throws the ball overarm but this time she throws it harder and with less control than before. During the whole of the throw Ch has her face turned away from the direction in which she is throwing and her eyes are closed. Neither of these features were evident during her first throw, when she looked in the direction of her throw and kept her eyes open until she released the ball. These changes are compatible with Ch's increased exertion and her anticipation of a loud noise (and possible damage) after the ball is released. Immediately on the ball

landing M frowns and admonishes Ch: “no no no Bridget don’t do that love” (line 16). M’s turn draws attention to Ch’s action (throwing the ball) and treats it as a transgression. It does this in several respects: it is begun with repeated “no” tokens, it includes explicit admonishment, it is accompanied by a frown, and towards the end of her turn M begins to move towards the ball to recover it and demonstrate its correct usage (lines 23-24). During M’s turn Ch has been stationary while looking towards the ball and smiling. At just the moment M brings her admonishing turn at line 16 to completion, Ch laughs (line 17). As she laughs, Ch turns to the camera. Figure 2 shows the position of the interactants at the middle of Ch’s laughter.

In (3) Ch and M are both sitting on the floor with a puzzle. Just before the transcribed fragment M has drawn Ch’s attention to one of the puzzle pieces which shows a man pushing a wheelbarrow.

(3) KP26-05-20m52s. 1;6.

1	M:	and you’ve got a wheelbarrow in your box	<i>((M points briefly to corner of room))</i>
2		(1.0)	<i>((Ch turns in direction of M’s point))</i>
3	Ch:	n[nuh	
4	M:	[don’t you	
5		(1.2)	
6	Ch:	(cardboard) box	
7	M:	mm in the box with your tractor	<i>((M points briefly to corner; Ch starts to stand up))</i>
8		(3.8)	<i>((Ch walks into corner; walks on books))</i>
9	M:	y’going to find your wheelbarrow	
10		(2.6)	
11	M:	could you not [tread all over the] books	
12	Ch:	[ <u>hheh heh .hh</u> ]	
13	Ch:	noise	
14		(0.5)	
15	M:	you made a noise (yeh) (0.2)	
16		should mummy put these ones back	<i>((M picks up puzzle pieces))</i>



**Figure 3:** Tracing from (3), two-thirds of the way through the silence in line 8

During M's talk at line 1 ("and you've got a wheelbarrow in your box") she points to the corner of the room, past Ch. More detail about the location of the wheelbarrow is produced in line 7, again accompanied by a point from M to the corner of the room. In the silence which follows in line 8 Ch stands up and walks into the corner M has been pointing to. As he does this, he commits a potential transgression: he walks across some books on the floor. There are three principal ways in which this is performed by Ch as a potential transgression rather than being accidental or inadvertent behaviour. First, Ch is looking down at the books when he walks into the corner of the room. Figure 3 shows a tracing from the start of line 8 as Ch begins to walk over the books. (Note also that M, whose gaze is directed towards Ch as he walks into the corner, will be able to see Ch walking on the books). Second, Ch is on the books for some time, rather than making only brief contact with them: approximately 5 s elapse between Ch first standing on the books and M's turn at line 11. Third, Ch walks on the books, rather than standing on them either briefly or without knowledge. Ch continues to walk on the books during M's turn at line 11 and in the silence which follows it. M treats Ch as having committed a transgression with her request that he stop walking on the books ("could you not tread all over the books", line 11). The choice of "tread" makes a stronger complaint against Ch than other plausible alternatives (e.g. "walk" or "stand"), treating Ch's movements as potentially deliberate and intentionally harmful. The selection of "all over" (as opposed to "on", for example) also strengthens M's complaint. In overlap with M's turn Ch laughs (line 12). While this laughter begins some way before the end of M's turn, it begins after the auxiliary+subject+negative marker ("could you not") and thus at a point where it is clear that M is making a complaint about Ch's ongoing conduct, and therefore

treating his walking on the books as a transgression.

In (1)-(3) Ch commits a potential transgression. In each case M treats that behaviour as a transgression. Following this treatment, Ch laughs having not laughed either during or immediately after the potential transgression. Since the laughter occurs at some remove from the transgression – arguably the source of the humour – the argument is put forward that the laughter is potentially interactionally ordered, carefully fitted to its interactional sequence.

The final examples in this section, (4) and (5) show the same sequential organisation. In (4) M is sitting on the floor and Ch is sitting on her lap.

(4) RT05-02-01m54s. 1;11.

1 (M:) \* \* \*  
2 (2.5) *((at 2.1 Ch leans forward and breaks wind))*  
3 M: oh (.) s[cuse me  
4 Ch: °mm° *((Ch sits up, smiling))*  
5 (0.5)  
6 Ch: fm(h)mm .hhf  
7 (1.4)  
8 Ch: fdone a poopf  
9 M: fu(h)eh did a poopf



**Figure 4:** Tracing from the middle of Ch laugh in (4), line 4

During the silence at line 2 Ch leans forward to put one of the toys she is holding onto the floor. As Ch leans forward she commits a potential transgression: she breaks wind. Approximately one-third of a second after Ch breaks wind, and without any

response from Ch who continues her movement to place the toy she is holding onto the floor, M responds with a free-standing production of “oh” (line 3; Heritage, 1984). The free-standing “oh” token which makes up the first part of M’s vocal response to Ch’s transgression (line 3) is produced with very high rising-falling pitch (rise of 2.5 semitones, fall of 11.4 semitones, maximum pitch of 665 Hz). The extent of the rising-falling pitch is made all the more noticeable by its relatively short duration (approximately 230 ms). After her “oh” M goes on to say “scuse me”. While her initial response (“oh”) claims that something has just happened worthy of public acknowledgement, as a prototypical apology M’s “scuse me” goes further and treats what has occurred as constituting a transgression. In addition, Ch has failed to produce this apology for herself (cf. (1)). Following M’s “oh”, in overlap with the early part of M’s continuation, there is a single pulse of quiet laughter from Ch. After Ch has released the toy she is placing on the floor, she sits up straight in M’s lap and looks to the camera. Ch brings the silence following M’s “scuse me” to an end with further laughter (line 6). Figure 4 shows the position of the interactants at the middle of Ch’s laughter.

In (5) M is lying on the floor playing with some puzzle pieces; Ch is standing in front of her.

(5) NS10-07-11m10s. 1;6.

1	M:	one	<i>((Ch looks at M))</i>
2		(0.8)	
3	M:	two	<i>((Ch falls across puzzle pieces M is stacking))</i>
4		(0.8)	
5	M:	thr(h)e(h)e	
6		(0.2)	
7	M:	.hhhhh destructive	<i>((Ch stands up))</i>
8		(8.0)	<i>((Ch walks back and forth across puzzle pieces; from 2.0 M looks at Ch; at 4.5 Ch picks up some pieces and drops them from head height, looking at M))</i>
9	Ch:	<u>hhuhhuhh</u>	
10	M:	n(h)o(h)w w(h)at £huh huh huh huh °huh huh huh°£	
11		(0.2)	
12	M:	£now£ what	<i>((smiling))</i>
13	Ch:	<u>hh</u>	<i>((M pats Ch on the bottom))</i>
14	M:	huh huh huh huh [huh	
15	Ch:	[ <u>hh</u> hahaha	



(a) Ch dropping puzzle pieces, line 8

(b) End of Ch laugh in line 9

**Figure 5:** Tracings from (5)

M begins to stack the puzzle pieces, counting them out as she does so (lines 1-5). During this phase Ch falls over where M is collecting the pieces together. Due to the angle of the camera relative to the participants it is not possible to tell whether this fall is accidental or not, and whether Ch or not knocks over the tower M has built. However, all of this would have been visible to M, and Ch's behaviour occasions M's laughter in line 5 and her production of "destructive" in line 7. As M is producing this word Ch begins to stand up from her position on all fours. Once stood up Ch walks first one way over the pieces, kicking them as she does so, and then back towards M. As Ch turns to come back towards M she orients her head to Ch. M has her head oriented to Ch for the remainder of the fragment. Approximately 1 s after Ch has returned to stand in front of M, and with M gazing at her, Ch bends down and picks up some of the puzzle pieces from the floor. Ch then lifts the pieces she has picked up and holds them in front of her face. While in a state of mutual gaze with M, Ch drops the pieces between her and M. This dropping of the puzzle pieces constitutes the potential transgression in this sequence. This transgression is also compatible with one type of playful teasing described by Reddy (1991) in that Ch is "[o]pposing other's actions/intentions" (p. 145). It is clear from M's counting aloud in synchrony with her movement of the pieces (lines 1-5) that M she is counting out the pieces as she stacks them. Ch's actions – falling over the pieces (line 3) and then walking over them before lifting them up and dropping them – oppose M's ongoing activity of counting and stacking the pieces.

Figure 5a shows the position of the interactants in (5) just after Ch has dropped the

puzzle pieces. As in (3), it is possible that performed in some other way what the Ch does could be accidental or inadvertent behaviour. However, there are several ways in which Ch marks out the dropping of the pieces as a potential transgression. First, she doesn't engage in any other activity with the puzzle pieces: she picks them up and drops them, rather than dropping them as part of some other course of action (e.g. building a tower, moving from one location to another etc.). Second, she moves the pieces in an exaggerated fashion, raising them with arms outstretched in front of her and M: see Figure 5a. This has the effect of maximising the visibility of her dropping them. Third, she directs her gaze at M before dropping the pieces, which allows her to establish whether M will see. Fourth, after she has dropped the pieces Ch does not engage in any remedial work which might suggest an accident, such as picking them up, saying "oops" and so on. Ch stands in silence and in mutual gaze with M for approximately 2.5 s after dropping the pieces, and until Ch laughs and falls into M. Figure 5b shows the position of the interactants at the end of line 9, at the end of Ch's laughter and as she falls into M's lap.

In sum, the way in which Ch drops the puzzle pieces in (5) marks this out as a potential transgression. Furthermore, M's responses treat Ch's actions as having constituted a transgression. M's gaze is fixed on Ch throughout this part of the sequence, from well before Ch picks up the puzzle pieces, until well after she has dropped them. This fixed gaze by M constitutes what Kidwell (2005) described as 'the look', identified in interactions between caregivers and young children. 'The look' is characterized by gaze from a caregiver of relatively long duration which is fixed on a child and which is done as an activity in its own right (in this case following M's ceasing playing with the puzzle pieces) as a child engages in sanctionable activity (see also Schegloff, 1989). In addition to 'the look' from M, M's next turn ("n(h)o(h)w wh(h)at £huh huh huh huh °huh huh huh°£", line 10) treats Ch's behaviour up to that point as transgressive by challenging her, albeit in a lighthearted fashion with accompanying laughter. But it is 'the look' from M which first treats Ch's potential transgression as constituting a transgression. It is 'the look' to which Ch responds with laughter. Given the duration of the gazes which Kidwell (2005) states for instances of 'the look' (between 1.2 and 3.2 s), it will have been evident to Ch that M was issuing 'the look' well before Ch laughs, that laughter coinciding with her falling into M.

In summary, (1)-(5) exemplify a particular sequential organisation. Ch commits some kind of potential transgression. That this behaviour is transgressive is evident from the action itself, and from its subsequent treatment. M draws attention to the transgression verbally or visually. After M draws attention to the transgression, Ch laughs. This sequential organisation can be schematised as in (6).

- (6) schema of basic sequence
- 1 Ch: potential transgression
  - 2 M: treatment of Ch behavior as a transgression
  - 3 Ch: laugh

In the next section, evidence is set out in support of the view that Ch laughter is interactionally ordered and carefully fitted to its interactional sequence.

### **3.2 Laughter as interactionally ordered**

In the interactional sequence under inspection here the laughter is interactionally ordered. This section sets out evidence in support of this position, based on re-inspection of (1)-(5). The evidence that the laughter in these sequences is interactionally ordered is important as a preliminary to the argument developed in section 3.3 that the laughter is an interactional resource available to Ch.

One piece of evidence that the Ch laughter is interactionally ordered, rather than 'spontaneous', is that the Ch laughter occurs some time after anything that could reasonably be considered humorous. In particular, the act of committing the potential transgression occurs some time before Ch laughs. In (1) Ch the laughter at line 8 occurs approximately 2 s after Ch breaks wind (line 3) and approximately 1.4 s after he belches (line 5). In (2) Ch laughs approximately 1.9 s after the ball she has thrown lands. In (3) Ch's laughter occurs approximately 4 s after he first steps on the books, and 2.1 s after the noise which his treading on the books causes and which he comments on later (line 13). In (4), Ch laughs approximately 1 s after breaking wind. In (5) Ch laughs approximately 2.6 s after the puzzle pieces she has dropped reach the floor. In these sequences Ch laughter occurs some time after the potential



transgression was committed, which suggests that the laughter is interactionally ordered rather than spontaneously produced.

A possible explanation for the lag between the transgression and the laughter is that Ch is laughing not because of the transgression, but because of something in the period between the potential transgression and the laughter. However, there is regularly nothing in that intervening period which might have provided a new stimulus for laughter, and there is usually nothing in M's visible or vocal conduct to suggest an attempt by M to solicit laughter from Ch. Indeed, it is possible for Ch to laugh following a potential transgression without M first treating it as a transgression, as shown in (7).

(7) RT05-02-23m07s. 1;11.

- 1 M: what about y[our people on] what about your people on  
2 Ch: [agh : : : : ]  
3 M: [the ] bus  
4 Ch: [°hih°]  
5 (1.0)  
6 M: are they sitting nicely on that bus (.) a couple of  
7 people [ look a bit ] (0.3) wonky on that bus  
8 Ch: [((breaks wind))]  
9 (0.6)  
10 Ch: ehi::h  
11 M: s(h)cuse m(h)e who [was that] ((M pokes Ch gently four times))  
12 Ch: [ I don]e a poop  
13 M: £hih hih huh£



**Figure 6:** Tracing from the middle of Ch laugh in (7), line 10

As Ch is sprawled across M's lap, Ch breaks wind partway through M's turn at lines 6-7. Following a short silence after Ch has broken wind M brings her turn to possible completion. Aside from this short silence, there is no sign that M's conduct has been altered by Ch's potential transgression or of M drawing attention to it in any way. By bringing her turn to completion M is carrying on as if Ch's potential transgression had not been committed. During the silence in line 8 M sits motionless gazing at Ch. There are two reasons this gaze cannot constitute 'the look' (cf. (6)): (i) its relatively short duration, and (ii) Ch is looking away from M throughout with the result that M is gazing at the back of Ch's head with no period of mutual gaze. Figure 6 shows the position of M and Ch during Ch's laughter at line 10, which is how they have been positioned since before Ch broke wind. It is after M has completed her turn and a 0.6 s silence that Ch laughs (line 10). In M's next turn (line 11) she treats Ch's behavior as a transgression with her "sc(h)use m(h)e who was that", accompanied by her gently prodding Ch's bottom. As in (1)-(5), Ch laughter occurs some time (approximately 2.3 s) after the potential transgression. Again, then, this laughter is potentially interactionally ordered.

Where M responds vocally after the potential transgression these responses are not infused with laughter, produced with exaggerated prosody, or with marked changes to overall voice quality. There are no visible attempts to solicit laughter either, such as marked changes to facial expression. In (1) M's response to the potential transgression in line 7 is delivered without any sort of exaggeration, and without Ch looking to M. In (2) M's response following the potential transgression (line 16) is produced as might be expected for an admonishing turn, low in M's speaking pitch range. In (3), M's turn following the potential transgression (line 11) is not appreciably different from her preceding turns in terms of speech rate, loudness or placement in her speaking pitch range. In (5) it is M's visible behaviour – prolonged mutual gaze with Ch – which treats Ch's behaviour as a transgression. As in the cases where there is a vocal response by M to the potential transgression, there is nothing about M's visible behaviour (e.g. facial expression) in (5) which suggests an attempt to solicit laughter. Rather than attempting to solicit laughter, M's expression and other visible behaviour is noticeably 'neutral', and does not change until after Ch begins to laugh (line 9). This is in line with Kidwell (2005) where termination of sanctionable activity by the child is set out as one way Ch can respond to 'the look' whereas

laughter is not. Of the examples of Ch laughter produced following a response by M in (1)-(5) only (4) contains anything which could be taken as an attempt to solicit laughter. The possibility that M's 'exaggerated' free-standing 'oh' token (line 3, described above) is designed, at least in part, to provide for Ch laughter gets some support from Ch's laughter beginning just after this part of M's response (line 4). In the other cases presented here there is nothing in M's conduct to suggest that M is soliciting laughter from Ch.

A further possible account for the lag between the potential transgression and the laughter is that Ch needs time to process the laughable (i.e. the potential transgression) before laughter can occur. However, children of the age under study here have been shown to be able to produce responsive vocal behaviour without delay. Wells and Corrin (2004) present a case-study of turn-taking in child-parent interaction in which it is shown that a child in this corpus (the child in (1)) is quite able to start his talk immediately on his mother bringing talk to possible completion, projecting a transition relevance place. It is therefore implausible to consider the lag between the transgression and the laughter in sequences such as (1)-(5) as having arisen from Ch needing time to process what is going on in the interaction and subsequently laughing. Furthermore, it is quite possible for Ch to produce laughter earlier, as the potential transgression is being committed as in (8).

(8) NS10-07-23m26s. 1;6.

1	M:	(and) squirrels	
2		(0.5)	
3	Ch:	squirrels	
4		(1.0)	
5	Ch:	oouh [ouhh	<i>((Ch presses hand on book))</i>
6	M:	[oh	
7		(.)	
8	M:	oh	
9		(0.4)	
10	M:	there we are	
11		(0.7)	
12	M:	(we'll) sit on a log and have our picnic	<i>((reading from book))</i>
13		(1.8)	<i>((Ch pushes pages back to reveal previous page; puts hands on book))</i>
14	M:	th[is one h]as holes=	
15	Ch:	[°hhuhhh°]	<i>((Ch puts fingers in holes on previous page))</i>
16	Ch:	=.hhh	

17 (0.6)  
 18 Ch: huh huh hih hih hih [hih .hh[hh]  
 19 M: [uh hih hih [get o:::ff (M tugs at book)  
 20 (0.4)  
 21 M: oow  
 ((after 1.1 s M removes Ch's fingers from holes and puts her own  
 fingers in))



**Figure 7:** Tracing from the start of Ch laugh in (8), line 18

M and Ch are sitting on the floor looking at a book. While Ch has her hands in the book M turns to reveal the next page. After M has turned the page, she says “there we are” (line 10), and goes on to read part of the story in the book (line 12). Ch, whose hands have been on the previous page throughout, then pushes the page back to reveal the previous page. Referring to the page Ch has turned back to M says “this one has holes” (line 14). Perhaps adumbrated by her audible breathing as she puts her fingers into the holes on the previous page (lines 15 and 16), Ch laughs enthusiastically while her fingers remain in the holes (line 18). Figure 7 shows the position of the interactants at the start of the laughter in line 18. Towards the end of this bout of laughter, M joins in with her own quiet laughter (line 19). This is followed by M tugging at the book, as if to try to remove it from Ch’s grip on the book. As M tugs at the book she produces a melodic “get o:::ff” with short first syllable and long second syllable, with the perceptual effect of an interval of a perfect fifth (5 semitones) between the syllables. The melodic production of M’s turn echoes the playful nature of Ch’s tease. In tugging at the book and producing “get o:::ff”, M is treating Ch’s action – keeping her fingers in holes on a page she has turned back to – as a transgression. Ch’s action constitutes a potential transgression in that she is halting the progression of the story, which is what M has clearly attempted to do by turning the page and reading the next part of the story (line 12). In halting the progression of

the story, Ch is teasing M by opposing M's actions (Reddy, 1991; cf. (5) above). While there is overt treatment of Ch's action as a transgression following the laughter (lines 19 on), there is no such treatment by M between the point where Ch puts her fingers in the holes in the book (near the start of line 14) and the beginning of Ch's enthusiastic laughter at line 18. While M refers to the book having holes (line 14), there is nothing in her vocal or visible conduct which establishes Ch's behaviour as a transgression. The sequence in (8) shows that there is no particular need for M to treat Ch's behaviour as a transgression in order for Ch to laugh.

In summary, the following observations have been made in this section: (i) there is a lag in these cases between the potential transgression and the laughter, (ii) that there is regularly nothing between the potential transgression and the laughter which could have occasioned spontaneous laughter by Ch, and (iii) that children of the age under study here do not need time to process what is going on before laughing. Taken together these observations lead to the conclusion that the laughter in these sequences is interactionally ordered, and is a potential interactional resource available to be deployed in an interactionally purposeful fashion and to serve a particular interactional function. This function is discussed in the next section.

### **3.3 Laughter and affiliation**

It has been argued up to this point that Ch laughter following a potential transgression is neither the result of Ch laughing spontaneously following the potential transgression, nor is it prompted by M soliciting laughter in the response to the transgression. What Ch laughter does following a potential transgression is this: it provides for an affiliative response by M.

That Ch laughter provides for an affiliative response is evident from the various treatments in the data-set and exemplified by the cases above. M can affiliate following Ch laughter by producing laughter-infused speech, as evident in (5). M's response to Ch's potential transgression ("now what") is lexically a challenge to Ch, but the laughter accompanying the first version (line 10) and smiling accompanying the second (line 12) modulate the prima facie disaffiliative nature of the utterance and signal that they are not to be taken as serious challenges. M's response in (8), line 19 is

similar to that in (5) in that she produces talk which addresses Ch’s transgression (“get off”). The imperative format of M’s turn draws attention to M’s expectation that Ch will follow M’s proposed course of action and let go of the book (Craven & Potter, 2010; Drew, Walker, & Ogden, 2013). This is prefaced by laughter and further modulated by its melodic production. In (7), line 11 M produces what is lexically a challenge to Ch over her potential transgression (“excuse me who was that”), that challenge modulated by M laughing while producing it.

Weaker affiliation and disaffiliation is evident in the remaining fragments set out above. In (2) M continues her talk about Ch’s transgression with an account for the admonishing utterance at line 1 which preceded the laughter while she crawls to retrieve the ball (“cuz it’s (0.4) quite (.) big and heavy isn’t it”, line 18). In (3) M continues her admonishment through and beyond Ch laughter (“could you not tread all over the books”, line 11) without any laughter, smiling or other features to modulate its status as a disaffiliative response. A disaffiliative response from M following Ch laughter after a potential transgression is evident in (9). Prior to the transcribed fragment Ch has been climbing on a chair which is out of shot, and which is evidently a proscribed location for play. M has retrieved Ch from the chair and attempted to engage him in play.

(9) KP09-05-07m31s. 1;6.

1 M: where is it  
2 (0.4)  
3 Ch: nah nuhn huhhuh [ uh nih ] ((whining))  
4 M: [no:: you’re] not playing on the  
5 [settee ] you’re n[ot allowed to do it  
6 Ch: [uhhuh] [ah huh huh .ihh ((whining))  
7 Ch: uh huh da:d dy:::[: .h h h h ee hee hee .h h h ((whining; reaching to settee))  
8 M: [no what will daddy say  
9 Ch: n::aughty::: ((whining))  
10 M: naughty [yes  
11 Ch: [((grumbling; continues for 3.5 s))  
12 ((M turns Ch round to toy))  
13 M: [shall we find the monkey on here then]  
14 Ch: [((grumbling through M’s talk)) ]  
15 Ch: nee n:aughty nee  
16 M: can you [press t]his one ((Ch starts to crawl to settee))  
17 Ch: [ eeh ]

18 (3.2) ((M watches Ch crawling; at 1.6 Ch starts run to settee, panting))

19 Ch: huh ↑hah

20 (1.3)

21 M: well (.) I don't think it's funny ((M reaches for tea))

22 (0.4)

23 M: I'm going to drink my cup of tea then ((moves cup to mouth))



**Figure 8:** Tracing from the end of (9), line 16

Following a struggle by Ch to get to the settee while M holds Ch in her arms, M tries to engage Ch in a search for a monkey on a push-button toy (lines 13 and 16). During M's turn at line 16 Ch, now sitting on the floor and out of M's arms, turns away from the toy and begins to crawl enthusiastically away from M and towards the settee: see Figure 8. It is clear that the settee is a proscribed location for play: note M's retrieval of Ch before the start of the transcribed fragment, her explicit prohibition (lines 4-5) and her attempts to engage Ch in other activities (lines 13 and 16). It is clear from Ch's responses that he treats the settee as a proscribed location for play too, referring to what his father will say about him playing there ("n::aughty:::", line 9). Just before Ch exits the shot he stands up and begins to run to the settee and laughs briefly (line 19). Given that Ch has already oriented to approaching the settee as a proscribed activity, Ch's running towards it is compatible with another type of playful teasing described by Reddy (1991) which involves a child "[o]pposing other's directives/expectations" (p. 145). As in (2), (5), (7) and (8) M produces responsive talk after the laugh. In (9) M not only withholds affiliation but she produces a disaffiliative response: "well (.) I don't think it's funny" (line 21). Her response provides an overt account of why she is not laughing: she doesn't find his behaviour to have been funny. This account is only required if laughter at this point might be

expected. This demonstrates M's orientation to Ch's laughter following his potential transgression as providing for a reciprocal display of affiliation through laughter.

Evidence that Ch is seeking some display of affiliation from M can be found in Ch behaviour following the post-transgression laughter. In (1) Ch laughs following his breaking wind and belching. Silence follows Ch's laughter, with M gazing at Ch but Ch not returning her gaze. After approximately 1 s of silence Ch turns his head further so that he is gazing at M (see Figure 1b). M treats this shift in Ch's gaze as a search for a response from her. At the moment that Ch's gaze reaches her she widens her smile, and when he turns his head away from her, her smile reduces (on smiling as an affiliative response to laughter in a previous turn in other forms of interaction, see Haakana, 2010). Pursuit of affiliation is also evident in (4). Following Ch's laughter at line 6 there is a long gap (line 7) which is brought to an end by Ch's production of "£done a poop£" while smiling (line 8). This utterance is responded to by M with laughter and affirmation of Ch's comment while smiling ("£u(h)eh did a poop£")

In summary, Ch laughter following a transgression provides for a display of affiliation from M. M's response may be more or less (dis)affiliative, and may include smiling, laughing or producing speech which is laughter infused or otherwise modulated. The range presented here also encompasses responses without any laughter or nonserious modulation, and may elaborate on why the action being treated as a transgression is prohibited. Finally, there may be an explicit refusal to offer the display of affiliation provided for by the laughter from Ch.

#### **4 Conclusion**

Three main observations arise from this paper concerning laughter in interactions between adults (mothers in this case) and young children. First, it has been demonstrated that laughter from young children can be interactionally ordered. This may not be surprising given the order found in laughter in interactions between adults, and the order found in other aspects of interactions involving young children. However, to date no empirical evidence from the systematic study of laughter by young children had been presented to support a claim that such laughter is interactionally ordered. Second, laughter has been shown to occur – and without any



prompting by the mother – after a potential transgression committed by the child. Third, laughter by the child in that environment has been shown to be a resource the child can use to provide for a display of affiliation from a co-participant (e.g. reciprocal laughter, laughter-infused speech). Where such a display does not occur, it may be pursued by the child. A co-participant can also use the post-laughter slot provided by the child to produce a response which does not affiliate with the laughter (e.g. admonishment, an explicit refusal to treat the child's behavior as warranting laughter).

There are several avenues of research suggested by the present study: nothing in detail has been said here about how the participants 'move on' from the transgression to next matters; connections have been made between certain transgressions and descriptions of playful teasing, but the relationship between these transgressions – which are generally of a quite minor kind – and play might be more fully explored; and while one criterion for inclusion in the current data-set is the occurrence of laughter, considering transgressions which do not engender laughter might shed more light on why laughter occurs in the present cases.

This paper has shown that even young children with a restricted linguistic repertoire have the sequential skills to deploy laughter as an interactional resource, i.e. for their laughter to be interactionally ordered. The findings of this study demonstrate the relevance of inductive analytic techniques to attempts at understanding other sorts of interactional order to laughter by young children, in other sequential environments.

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