

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF LAUGHTER AND ITS  
RELATION TO SOCIAL INTEGRATION  
IN THE CONTACT DYAD

By

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1968

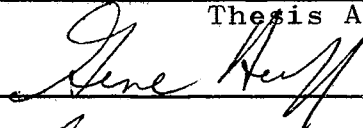
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Graduate College of the  
Oklahoma State University  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for  
the Degree of  
MASTER OF SCIENCE  
May, 1973

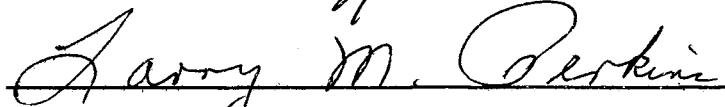
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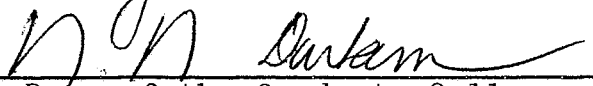
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## PREFACE

The purpose of this thesis was to empirically examine the relationship between laughter occurring in two-person conversational contacts and the strength of the social bond. The major hypothesis guiding the investigation was that the level of social integration manifested in the interaction process is directly related to the incidence of social laughter. Also, the impact of a number of social structural variables on this relationship was examined; namely, the effects of different sex structures, race structures, and age structures. It was hypothesized that the original relationship between laughter and social integration would maintain itself regardless of these structural differences. Data for the study were derived from verbatim transcriptions of the verbal interaction generated in seventy-four contact dyads. The subjects were male and female college students selected from several sociology courses and roughly matched on a number of background factors.

A moderate, positive correlation was found to exist between laughter and social integration in the dyad. This relationship was found to be relatively constant for the total sample of dyads, although its small and non-representative character precluded any meaningful

generalizations beyond this particular group. The tentative conclusion reached was that laughter, by indicating commonality in the actor's co-orientation to a stimulus object or situation, enhances cognitive similarity, and thereby, social integration.

At this time, I would like to express my appreciation to Professor Donald Allen for his guidance and assistance in formulating and executing this study. His unending patience and encouragement over the years have proved invaluable.

In addition, I would like to thank Ms. Mary Margaret Ransom for her personal interest and support, without which I could not have completed this thesis.

Finally, I am especially grateful to Margie Ann Ransom McCloskey whose encouragement, hard work, and dedication have really made this thesis possible. Like the sun, her warm and loving presence brought life to the dormant seed from which this work has germinated.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the Problem

Laughter is a behavioral phenomenon very frequent, very familiar and, at the same time, one of the most overlooked and least understood. Historically, laughter and its assumed causes have stimulated the curiosity of many of the greatest philosophers and social thinkers of all times. Included in these ranks are such men of stature as Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Hegel, Descartes, Darwin, McDougall, and Freud. However, an extensive survey of the relevant literature reveals considerable shortcomings in the treatments of laughter, both in the past and in the present. First, there was no evidence of any serious attempt to construct a typology of laughter, let alone to delineate its various causes and consequences. Second, only a mere handful of empirical studies have been conducted, and these have dealt primarily with the psychological implications of laughter. Third, humor has been assumed to be the principle cause of laughter to the almost total exclusion of all other possible causes. Moreover, humor has usually been defined in tautological terms and, as such, has contributed very little to the body

of scientific knowledge. Generally, humor has been defined as any object, action, or situation that elicits the behavioral response of laughter; conversely, laughter has been defined as the behavioral response to a humorous object, action, or situation. Fourth and finally, there exists an obvious paucity of theory and research regarding the possible social functions of laughter, as opposed to its psychological or physiological functions.

It was this latter deficiency that gave impetus to this particular study. The possible social functions of laughter in the process of human interaction have been largely ignored or glossed over. Indeed, a complete understanding of human interaction requires a careful and accurate assessment of all of its constituent elements and their various interrelationships. This study represents an attempt to empirically analyze the heretofore ignored element of laughter and its relationship to a specific property of social systems; namely, the integrating force which binds social actors into a cohesive whole and facilitates the attainment of their collective and/or individual goals, whatever they may be.

#### Review of the Literature

The body of literature relevant to the study of laughter is inextricably interrelated with the subject of humor, which has been the presumed cause of laughter. In fact, hardly a piece of literature or empirical research was



encountered that dealt with laughter qua laughter. To attempt a review of all of the resources that have dealt specifically or tangentially with the subjects of humor and laughter would be a formidable task indeed, as such works appear to number in the hundreds. The largest share of relevant scientific literature has been contributed by psychologists and, particularly, psychoanalysts who, following the lead of Sigmund Freud, have paid close attention to the personality functions of wit and humor.<sup>1</sup> Surprisingly, however, the social implications of humor and laughter have not merited the same concern and systematic treatment by social psychologists or sociologists.<sup>2</sup> This state of affairs has apparently been justified by the implicit and dubious assumption among many social researchers that humor is, by its very nature, frivolous and

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<sup>1</sup>For a comprehensive review of this literature, see J. C. Flugel, "Humor and Laughter," in Gardner Lindzey and Sidney Aronson (eds.), Handbook of Social Psychology, Vol. II (Reading, Mass., 1954), pp. 709-734; and Yvonne Treadwell, "Bibliography of Empirical Studies of Wit and Humor," Psychological Reports, XX (1967), pp. 1079-1083.

<sup>2</sup>A few researchers have lamented the relative lack of sociological studies of humor and laughter. Despite extensive discussion of the area, laughter and humor have rarely been subjected to rigorous empirical investigation. See, for example, Flugel (1954), pp. 730-732; Rose L. Coser, "Some Social Functions of Laughter," Human Relations, XXII (1959), p. 171. The irony of the situation is further amplified by the fact that many early social scientists had already emphasized the peculiar social nature of laughter. See H. C. McComas, "The Origins of Laughter," Psychological Review, XXX (1923), pp. 45-55; Donald Hayworth, "The Social Origins and Functions of Laughter," Psychological Review, XXXV (1928), pp. 367-384; and Sylvia Bliss, "The Origins of Laughter," American Journal of Psychology, XXVI (1915), pp. 236-246.

frivolity in human relations is hardly worthy of the attention of serious researchers. However, Freud, in his study of the psychology of errors in everyday life, encountered similar objections to which he addressed the following poignant remarks:

In scientific work it is more profitable to take up whatever lies before one whenever a path towards its explanation presents itself. And then, if one carries it through thoroughly, without prejudice or pre-conceptions, one may, with good fortune and by virtue of interrelationship linking each thing to every other (hence, also, the small to the great), find, even in the course of such humble labour, a road to the study of great problems.<sup>3</sup>

Since this study was primarily concerned with the social implications of laughter, an attempt was made to include only that literature representative of the progress made in this particular area to date. It was recognized, however, that the limits imposed on the selection of materials were somewhat arbitrary and, consequently, they were transgressed without apology when such action was deemed necessary to enhance understanding of the subject. This was particularly evident in the presentation of theories and research which have treated humor rather than laughter per se as the major variable of interest, the assumption being made that laughter, at least from a social viewpoint, is merely a consequence of humorous social stimulation.

In their attempts to arrive at a functional theory of humor, psychologists and kindred social scientists have

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<sup>3</sup>Sigmund Freud, A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis, translated by Joan Riviere (New York, 1969), p. 27.

generated considerable disagreement among themselves.<sup>4</sup> They have been generally in agreement with the rather obvious point that humor is a special product as well as a medium having social, as well as psychological, functions. There seems to be a considerably reduced consensus, however, among the notably few interested parties regarding the specific nature of these functions.<sup>5</sup> These differences have sometimes been magnified beyond any practical reason by the arrogance too often found among specialists who, in their zeal for the discovery of "knowledge" and "truth", ignore or dismiss the findings of other specialists who happen to march to the sound of a different drum. Fortunately, though, these differences appear to be more apparent than real. Careful study of the relevant literature reveals the existence of several themes held in common. A clear majority of the studies that have dealt with the functions of humor and laughter evidenced the influence of two broad and interrelated orientations, both of which are rooted in rich theoretical and research traditions.

#### Humor and Laughter as Conflict Techniques

The first of the aforementioned orientations has its origins in the works of Sigmund Freud and Georg Simmel, both

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<sup>4</sup>Milton L. Barron, "A Content Analysis of Intergroup Humor," American Sociological Review, XXV (Feb., 1959), p. 88.

<sup>5</sup>Antonin J. Obrdlik, "Gallows Humor--A Sociological Phenomenon," American Journal of Sociology, XLVII (March, 1942), pp. 709-716.

of whom ascribe a primarily aggressive quality or conflict function to humor and laughter. The major tenet of this orientation is that conflict, like any other form of human interaction, is regulated by a relevant set of social norms. These norms both prescribe and proscribe the ways in which conflicting parties, be they persons or groups, may express their aggression. For Freud, humor constituted one such means; a culturally approved means whereby members of an in-group may enhance their collective ego, while, at the same time, doing damage to the collective ego of their opponent through ridicule and sarcasm. Why would a group choose humor rather than a more direct conflict technique? Humor, suggested Freud, would be selected over more direct means in those situations where the distribution of power is such that it provides the least hazardous means of collective ego gratification.

Wit permits us to make our enemy look ridiculous through that which we could not utter loudly or consciously on account of existing hinderances; in other words, wit affords us the means of surmounting restrictions and of opening up otherwise inaccessible pleasure sources.<sup>6</sup>

In those situations involving the relationship of a majority and a minority group, the latter must exercise considerable caution in challenging the authority of the former in order to avoid damaging reprisals. Humor may avail the minority

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<sup>6</sup>Sigmund Freud, "Wit and Its Relation to the Subconscious," in The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud, A. A. Brill (ed.), (New York, 1938), p. 698.

group with a means of challenging the more powerful majority group in a relatively nonreactive manner. Simmel apparently recognized this quality of humor when he wrote:

Since displaced means such as wit may not bring about a change in the relations between one person and another, especially if the target of aggressive wit is not aware of the source and intention of the witticism, they may afford expression to the weaker member without changing the terms of the relationship.<sup>7</sup>

Even though aggressive humor will not in all likelihood alter the objective terms of a relationship between conflicting parties, it does provide an outlet for subjective feelings and, thereby, creates a relatively more tolerable situation for the less advantaged. "The prevention of abuse or insulting retorts through outer circumstances is so often the case," theorized Freud, "that tendency-wit is used with special preference as a weapon of attack or criticism of superiors who claim to be in authority. Wit then serves as a resistance against such authority and as an escape from its pressure."<sup>8</sup> The implication is that humor provides an indirect means for assaulting those who are in positions of power and authority, where direct hostility is precluded by the unequal distribution of power, or by the operation of restrictive social norms.

There are a number of empirical studies in which propositions derived from the conflict orientation were put to

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<sup>7</sup>Georg Simmel in Lewis Coser, The Functions of Social Conflict (New York, 1956), p. 43.

<sup>8</sup>Freud, The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud, p. 699.

the test. Several of these studies concerned themselves with the functions of humor in majority-minority relations. One of these is part of a classic study of the caste and class structure of a small Southern community.<sup>9</sup> It was found that humor played a very important role in the community for both Negro and white subcultures. An analysis of the jokes related by upper- and middle-class whites revealed an interest on their part in Negro sexuality, particularly the sexual freedoms thought to be enjoyed by Negro women. Negroes, on the other hand, were found to incorporate humor for the purpose of venting their rage against the overwhelming white power structure. The conclusion was drawn that humor provided whites, especially white women, with a vicarious means of sharing in Negro sexual freedoms which were denied them because of their status and position in the community; and that humor provided the relatively powerless Negroes with a weapon to combat the prejudiced and discriminating whites.

Another study of racial humor reported the finding that Negroes in certain situations used humor as a means of accommodation.<sup>10</sup> This study was concerned with the extent to which racial subcultural variations in humor were present

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<sup>9</sup>John Dollard, Caste and Class in a Southern Town (New York, 1949), pp. 168-170 and 309-310.

<sup>10</sup>Russell Middleton and John Moland, "Humor in Negro and White Subcultures: A Study of Jokes Among University Students," American Sociological Review, XXIV (Fall, 1959), pp. 61-69.

in the jokes circulated among Negro and white students in several universities located in the southern United States. The researchers learned that their white subjects related proportionately more anti-Negro than anti-white jokes, as was expected. Surprisingly, however, they found that Negro subjects circulated more than four times as many anti-Negro jokes as anti-white jokes. On the basis of this finding, they concluded that Negroes, in their attempt to survive in a predominately hostile white environment, used humor as a technique of accommodation; hence, the subordinate Negro college student identified with his white counterpart, accepting their attitudes, values and beliefs in the attempt to minimize the threatening aspects of the situation.

In yet another study of humor's function in racial conflict situations, Negroes were found to use aggressive humor in their struggle with whites.<sup>11</sup> The anti-Negro jokes circulated by whites, on the one hand, were typically blatant, playing on such commonly stereotyped Negro characteristics as their alleged sexual hyperactivity, shiftlessness, laziness, and natural rhythm.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the humor related by Negroes tended to be more subtle and used both as an offensive and defensive conflict technique.

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<sup>11</sup> John Burma, "Humor as a Technique in Race Conflict," American Sociological Review, XI (Dec., 1946), pp. 710-15.

<sup>12</sup> Commensurate findings were reported in an independent study of intergroup humor. Stereotyped conceptions of Negro, Irish, and Jewish ethnics were found to proliferate in the ethnic humor analyzed. See Barron, pp. 88-94.

Thus, it was concluded that the anti-Negro humor functioned as a means of maintaining, perpetuating, and justifying white prejudices and discriminatory practices; while anti-white humor functioned as a vicarious means of defying white power and, hence, as a means of adaptation to a situation largely defined by a potent white power structure.<sup>13</sup>

The conflict function of humor was examined under somewhat different circumstances in a study of the jokes circulated in Czechoslovakia following its invasion and occupation by German troops during the second world war.<sup>14</sup> As a direct observer, the researcher noted the proliferation of "gallows humor" throughout the German-occupied country. Although the content of these jokes changed over time, they seemed to share a common purpose; that purpose, it was argued, was to provide the Czech people with a means of striking out against their oppressors. The positive effects of the humor seemed to be a strengthening of Czech morale and, hence, their resistance in their struggle for national survival; the negative effects were demonstrated in the noticeable demoralization of the occupation forces noted by the researcher.

These and similar research findings lend credence to the contention that humor and laughter may, under certain

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<sup>13</sup>A comprehensive discussion of humor involved in racial conflict may be found in Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma (New York, 1944), esp. pp. 38-39.

<sup>14</sup>Obrdlik, pp. 709-716.



conditions, have value as a conflict technique, as Freud and Simmel proposed. The perceived power differential between parties appears to be a crucial variable in those situations involving aggressive humor. The greater that differential, then the more likely that humor will be used as a conflict technique to the exclusion of more direct techniques. Conversely, the less the perceived differential, the less likely aggressive humor will displace more direct conflict techniques. It appears that the more powerful party in such situations is likely to use aggressive humor as one of various means to maintain its advantage, while the less powerful party is likely to use it as a veiled form of aggression. Although the use of aggressive humor by the latter party is not likely to bring about dramatic changes in the objective power relationship, its utilization does permit a degree of self-assertion and control over the situation. Finally, it has been pointed out that a group may turn aggressive humor inward in an attempt to accommodate itself to an unfavorable situation, which is thought to be otherwise unalterable.

#### Control Functions of Humor and Laughter

A logical corollary to the conflict approach is the orientation that attributes a social control function to humor and laughter. Humor and laughter are thought to be communicators of group sentiments and, as such, function to maintain and strengthen group structure.

Social anthropologists have encountered formalized joking relationships in almost every society. Radcliffe-Brown was particularly interested in such relationships as they occurred in so-called primitive societies.<sup>15</sup> He described the formalized joking relationship as "... a relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offense."<sup>16</sup> He explained the existence of such relationships in terms of structural tendencies toward friction and antagonism. The primary function of these relationships in primitive societies appeared to be the maintenance of satisfactory relations between the parties who, by virtue of their social positions, would be likely to come into conflict; but from the standpoint of society it is important for the relationship not to be strained. The prototypical joking relationship is that which obtains between grandparents and their grandchildren.

Grandparents and grandchildren are united by kinship; they are separated by age and by the social difference that results from the fact that as the grandchildren are in the process of entering into full participation in the social life of the community the grandparents are gradually retiring from it. Important duties towards his relatives impose upon an individual many restraints; but with those of the second ascending generation, his grandparents and collateral relatives, there

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<sup>15</sup>A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, Structure and Function of Primitive Society (London, 1952), pp. 90-116.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

can be, and usually is, established a relationship of simple friendliness free from restraint. In this instance also, it is suggested, the joking relationship is a method of ordering a relation which combines social conjunction and disjunction.<sup>17</sup>

Here, the joking relationship is conceived of as a safety-valve institution, which serves to maintain order and stability by providing for the release of structurally induced tension.

Commensurate findings were reported by Bradney in a participant observation study of formalized joking relationships found to exist between sales personnel in a large department store.<sup>18</sup> Social disjunction obtained between sales personnel because of the competition to increase their individual sales, while social conjunction obtained because of the cooperation required to insure the success of the department store itself. By teasing and joking one another about their work, it was possible for these persons to release the antagonisms generated by their competitive relationship and, thus, enabled them to continue their cooperation. Joking relationships were also observed between supervisors and their subordinates. Joking was often used by the former as a means of dissipating the latter's hostile feelings, or as a means of reprimanding them without arousing unnecessary antagonism. The joking relationship served then to eliminate the various potential conflicts

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<sup>17</sup>Radcliffe-Brown, pp. 96-97.

<sup>18</sup>Pamela Bradney, "The Joking Relationship in Industry," Human Relations, X (1957), pp. 179-187.

between parties set into opposition by virtue of their social positions.

Olesen and Whittaker drew similar conclusions from their investigation of faculty-student relations in a nursing education program.<sup>19</sup> They found that strains of process and structure resulted from ongoing shifts in role awareness, the balance between desired professional intimacy and prescribed structural hierarchical distance, and the existence of student-faculty audiences. These strains were, according to the researchers, frequently experienced as tensions, which generated emotional outbursts such as laughter. It was observed that the faculty often relied upon humor to reprimand their students and to increase their awareness of professional demands. This finding is commensurate with those of Bradney and Radcliffe-Brown as reported above, which relate to the function of humor in the relations between persons of unequal status. They reached the conclusion that humor is an invitation to collective laughter which highlights or stimulates group consensus.

The results of a study of the relationship between humor and the social structure of a hospital bears relevance

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<sup>19</sup>Virginia Olesen and Elvi Whittaker, "Adjudication of Student Awareness in Professional Socialization: The Language of Laughter and Silences," Sociological Quarterly, VII (Sum., 1966), pp. 381-396.

to the question of humor's role in social control.<sup>20</sup> A sharp power differential was observed between the hospital authorities and their patients. Consequently, the latter group experienced feelings of powerlessness, insecurity, and loss of personal identity. An analysis of the jokes circulated by the patients revealed that they provided a re-evaluation of the situation in which its threatening aspects were played down.

The humorous reporter modified reality by denying the objective justification of the fears common to all, namely that some confusion in administering medication might occur. By making the story sound funny and by implicitly contrasting, through ridicule, the plight of the victim to the good luck of those present, the patient implied that such fears are not grounded in reality, that even if a confusion occurs it is simply the very thing to jest about.<sup>21</sup>

So goes the analysis of a typical jocular reaction to a significant event in the hospital ward. Humor was also found to perform a socializing function for the newly admitted patients. Patients who were already familiar with the routine of the ward often conveyed normative expectancies by means of joking and humorous stories. It was concluded, therefore, that humor functioned to maintain the social organization of the hospital by providing for the release of structurally induced tensions and by socializing patients into the hospital subculture.

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<sup>20</sup>Rose L. Coser, "Some Social Functions of Laughter," Human Relations, XII (1959), pp. 171-180.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

In a second study conducted by the same researcher, the joking that occurred between persons of unequal status was found to be directed downward for the most part.<sup>22</sup> The implication of this finding was that such humor served to reduce the social distance between persons occupying different status positions by permitting them to share pleasurable experiences and to focus their attention on less serious matters.

In his well-known and highly respected study of social relations in the South, Davis noted the frequent occurrence of joking by whites involved in situations in which traditional Negro-white relations were reversed.<sup>23</sup> The relationship between a white sales person and a Negro customer epitomized such status contradictions. Davis surmised that "The force of white subordination was broken by joking with Negro customers about their purchases."<sup>24</sup> Consistent findings were reported by Blau, in his analysis of the social structure of a state employment agency.<sup>25</sup> Examination of the jokes circulated by the agency's personnel showed that they typically concerned the inconsiderate treatment accorded the very persons whom they were supposed to serve.

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<sup>22</sup>Rose L. Coser, "Laughter Among Colleagues," Psychiatry, XXIII (Feb., 1960), pp. 81-95.

<sup>23</sup>Allison Davis et al., Deep South (Chicago, 1941).

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 459.

<sup>25</sup>Peter M. Blau, Dynamics of Bureaucracy (Chicago, 1963), pp. 109-113.

"The integrative experience of common amusement was based on common disidentification with ridiculous clients."<sup>26</sup> Humor served, posits Blau, to protect the agency personnel against the ego-damaging effects of the status reversals that they experienced in the course of their everyday work life.

The comparison of the conflict and control functions of humor was the focal point in a study conducted by Stephenson.<sup>27</sup> He concurred with the position that humor primarily functions as a conflict technique in inter-racial and inter-ethnic relations. However, he seriously questioned the generalizability of this function to non-conflict situations. Thus, he examined the functions of humor in instances where persons of different social class backgrounds were involved. A content analysis of jokes concerned with social and economic differences revealed that the tendency of such humor was to reaffirm traditional values and enhance social solidarity.

The emphasis (in these jokes) minimizes the importance of economic differences, stresses the notion and value of equality, ridicules the concept of any basic conflicts, asserts the soundness of the American system, and emphasizes the virtues of charity, initiative and ambition.<sup>28</sup>

Deviation from these values drew the direct aggression found in the humor. Jocular ridicule then tended to be leveled

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>27</sup>Richard M. Stephenson, "Conflict and Control Functions of Humor," American Journal of Sociology, LVI (May, 1951), pp. 569-74.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 574.

at the extremes of the status hierarchy: the nouveau riche and the old aristocracy at the top and the foreign-born, unskilled laborers at the bottom. The relative absence of conflict humor in the stratification situations examined lends support to the notion that humor serves a control function rather than a conflict function in such situations.

A cross-level analysis of the social control functions of laughter was carried out by Piddington, an Australian psychologist.<sup>29</sup> He attributes an essentially negative sanctioning power to laughter. Socially, laughter functions to discourage potentially disruptive behavior through public humiliation of actual or perceived deviants. Psychologically, laughter was found to serve as a compensatory reaction for the avoidance of psychic conflict. Every situation may be assessed by the individual in terms of two alternative social evaluations: the first in accordance with internalized normative expectations, the second in opposition to these expectancies. Faced with an ambiguous situation involving these conflicting social evaluations, society mobilizes within the individual a biologically determined reaction which obviates the possibility of an anti-social judgment; he argues: "... as McDougall points out, it (laughter) breaks up every train of thought and so prevents the possibility of a change in social evaluations

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<sup>29</sup>Ralph Piddington, The Psychology of Laughter (New York, 1963).



from even so much as coming to consciousness."<sup>30</sup>

In sum, the findings of these various studies lead to the conclusion that humor and laughter may indeed serve to maintain and strengthen social relationships. This function is performed by providing persons in inconsistent status-role relationships with a means of venting resultant tensions without necessitating withdrawal from the field of action. Humor and laughter serve in another capacity to preserve the structure of social relationships, and that is in sanctioning behavior. Jocular ridicule and scornful laughter may be viewed as attempts to bring the deviant into conformity with relevant social norms. Conforming behavior, on the other hand, may be met with humorous approval or acceptance as implied by laughing with another person. In these ways--providing for psychological tension release and sanctioning behavior--humor and laughter make a positive contribution to the structure of social relations. This contribution may be measured in terms of the increased stability and order in social systems.

#### Implications of the Review of the Literature

Having reviewed the relevant literature, it was found that humor and laughter have been treated as Janus-faced phenomena. On the one hand, they appear to serve as highly

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

efficient though questionably effective conflict techniques; and, on the other hand, they appear to contribute to the maintenance of social order and stability. Moreover, it would seem logical that the conflict and control functions might operate simultaneously in the process of intergroup, or interpersonal relations. So, as Freud has pointed out, the proliferation of jocular ridicule and sarcasm in social conflict situations might serve to enhance the collective egos of the respective parties, while, at the same time, doing damage, however symbolic, to the ego of the opponent. For the in-group, the circulation of such humor helps to construct and communicate an image of the out-group couched in ridiculous stereotyped terms. This image not only deprecates the out-group, but implies the superiority of the in-group and in so doing further integrates the latter. Acceptance of the humorous definition then connotes the existence of a common frame of reference, which binds persons together into solidary groups.<sup>31</sup>

It was the relationship of humor and, particularly, laughter to the forces that operate in social relations to bind individuals into functioning social groups that gave impetus to the present study. Although several of the works

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<sup>31</sup>Laughter in response to humor might be interpreted as a form of approval or acceptance, an indication that participants evaluate the object of the humor in similar ways. Reciprocal or social laughter may then be conceptualized as a channel for the transmission of actors' opinions, attitudes, values, and beliefs. Insofar as laughter is social, it promotes unity among those who share in it.

reviewed implied the existence of such a relationship, none could be found that systematically explored this possibility. This study was conceived to do just that; namely, to establish the existence of a relationship between laughter and social integration. It was believed that the incidence of laughter would be relatively more frequent in those interaction situations in which social integration is also in evidence. Based on a structured observation methodology, this study suffers some of the same ambiguities and shortcomings common to other studies that have relied primarily on such techniques.<sup>32</sup> However, an effort was made to alleviate several of these problems by referring directly back to the protocols of the social interaction used in the analysis when necessary.

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<sup>32</sup>For an informative discussion of the relative merits and demerits of the structured and unstructured observational methodologies, see Robert F. Bales, "A Set of Categories for the Analysis of Small Group Interaction," American Sociological Review, XV (1950), pp. 257-63; and Howard S. Becker, "Problems of Inference and Proof in Participant Observation," American Sociological Review, XXIII (1958), pp. 652-60.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY

#### Definitions and the Hypotheses

The focal point of this study was the relationship that obtains between the variables of laughter and social integration. Specifically, an attempt was made to determine the nature and extent of this relationship in a particular social context; namely, the contact dyad. The contact dyad has been defined by Allen as a social encounter in which two persons engage in direct face-to-face communicative interaction for a discrete period of time.<sup>1</sup> Although it was recognized that the contact dyad is hardly representative of the variety of contexts within which social interaction occurs, it is isomorphic to those brief, but frequent social encounters of everyday life. It was thought that an analysis of laughter and its relation to social integration within this context would provide valuable insight and understanding of these real life situations. However, before going on to an analysis of this relationship, it will be necessary to

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<sup>1</sup>Donald A. Allen, "A Definitive Exploration of the Contact Dyad," (unpublished research proposal, University of South Florida, 1967), pp. 9-12.

explicitly define what is meant by the terms "laughter" and "social integration".

### Social Laughter

Laughter per se is a semivoluntary physiological response to a variety of stimuli. The origins of an episode of laughter may be traced to one or more of the following sources: the physical, the psychological and/or the social. The notion of multiple causation was touched on by Darwin when he wrote that laughter was a consequence of encountering something incongruous or unaccountable that excites surprise, coupled with a sense of superiority or mastery over the situation.<sup>2</sup> He pointed out, though, that laughter is frequently used to conceal some other state of mind, even anger. A resonant note was struck in the work of Bliss, who wrote that laughter is the expression of subconscious satisfaction which may derive from expectancy, pleasurable anticipation, or relief from tension.<sup>3</sup> In fact, a typology might be constructed according to the various antecedent conditions giving rise to laughter. The following conditions might be included in such a typology: incredulity, irony, anger, frustration, fear, joy, relief, approval, acceptance, superiority, deprecation, or neurosis. It was not intended

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<sup>2</sup>Charles Darwin, The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals (Chicago, 1965), pp. 196-212.

<sup>3</sup>Sylvia Bliss, "The Origin of Laughter," American Journal of Psychology, XXVI (1915), pp. 236-246.

that these conditions be mutually exclusive, nor the typology exhaustive; rather, it was merely meant to illustrate the variety and the complexity of the underlying factors that may give rise to an occurrence of laughter. Moreover, this partial delineation of underlying conditions was also intended as a warning to those who would impute a simple and sovereign explanation of even so common and so taken for granted a phenomenon as laughter.

The focal point of the present study was the relationship between laughter and social integration. It was thought that laughter, whatever its specific causes, would have certain measurable consequences for the forces that bind persons together. Considering this objective, only those instances of laughter which occurred as the direct result of the actions, verbal and/or nonverbal, of persons engaged in dyadic interaction were recorded and used in the study. Such instances of laughter are hereafter referred to as social laughter because of the element of reciprocity implied in the definition. The frequency of social laughter was counted for each dyad in the sample. One unit of social laughter was recorded for each sequence of laughter so defined, regardless of its duration. Then the dyads were arrayed and ordered on this variable. The median frequency was computed and the dyads dichotomized into either high or low categories depending on whether their laughter score fell above or below the median, respectively. The median frequency was chosen as the criterion of differentiation in

order to guard against the possible effects of extreme cases, whose influence might otherwise be overrepresented.

### Social Integration

The second variable of interest was social integration, the social property of the dyad that laughter was thought to effect. This concept refers to the mutual attractions that emerge in the process of social interaction, and which serve to bind persons together in action and in purpose.

Since social cohesion is not a directly observable property, it was necessary to devise an index from which inferences could be made about its relative absence or presence. In a study of small group interaction, Lott and Lott found a significant, positive correlation between the variables of group cohesiveness, communication level, and social conformity.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Back found that the level of communication was relatively low in problem solving groups characterized by a low level of social integration.<sup>5</sup> He attributed this fact to the observed tendency on the part of actors in the latter groups to withdraw from the interaction situation when interpersonal differences arose. In sharp contrast, participants in the former groups tended to increase their communications activities in order to eliminate

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<sup>4</sup>Albert Lott and Bernice Lott, "Group Cohesiveness, Communication Level and Conformity," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, LXII (1961), pp. 408-412.

<sup>5</sup>Kurt Back, "Influence Through Social Communication," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, XLVI (1951), pp. 9-24.

their differences. Commensurate findings were reported in a study of communications length and communicator's attitudes conducted by Mehrabian.<sup>6</sup> He found that letters written about liked subjects tended to be lengthier than those written about disliked subjects. The length of communications appeared, then, to be a direct function of the communicator's attitude: the more positive the attitude, the greater the communication and, conversely, the less positive the attitude, the less the communication.

These research findings support the proposition advanced by Homans regarding social interaction and interpersonal attraction.

The more frequently persons interact with one another, when no one of them originates interaction with much greater frequency than the others, the greater is their liking for one another and their feeling of ease in one another's presence.<sup>7</sup>

Following this lead, the quantitative level of communication was utilized as a component part in the index of social integration.

It was realized, however, that some persons just talk more than others. This fact prompted the inclusion of a second component in the index of social integration to be used in conjunction with the quantitative level of

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<sup>6</sup>Albert Mehrabian, "Communication Length as an Index of Communicator Attitude," Psychological Reports, XVII (1965), pp. 519-522.

<sup>7</sup>George C. Homans, The Human Group (New York, 1950), p. 243.



communication. For example, a high level of quantitative communication might be observed and yet the social integration of the dyad might in fact be relatively low. This would probably be the case if one actor completely dominated the situation by controlling the time available for communication and, thus, forcing the other actor out of the field. The involvement of the low output actor would likely be minimal and the integration of the dyad would be low, as a consequence. Again, Homans recognized this possibility in his proposition relating the distribution of communication to the strength of the social bond.

The strength of sentiments of friendliness and freedom from restraint between two men varies directly with the frequency of interaction between the two and inversely with the frequency with which one originates interaction for the other.<sup>8</sup>

The state of communicative balance, he continues, is most likely to be characteristic of relations between persons of equal or nearly equal social status. A high level of communication coupled with more or less equality in its origination is likely to be conducive of social integration.

Similarly, Blau argues that time, like any other scarce resource, is in great demand by persons engaged in communicative relations.<sup>9</sup> The accordance of power, prestige, and respect, as well as other rewards, is contingent on the

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>9</sup>Peter Blau, Exchange and Power in Social Life (New York, 1964), pp. 125-126.

individual's ability to communicate his qualifications to his fellows, which, obviously, takes time. The differential distribution of communications time not only affects the allocation of such rewards, but directly influences the individual's commitment to the group. Convergent findings were reported by Bales, who found a direct and positive relationship between a group-member's status and the proportion of communications time he controls in small, task-oriented groups.<sup>10</sup> He observed that task-leaders tended to control the greatest proportion of communications time, while members of successively lower statuses controlled progressively less of that time.

These findings point to the conclusion that a significant relationship does in fact exist between the distribution of communication within social systems and the integration or cohesiveness of those systems. This fact would seem to be particularly important in small groups having a limited time for interaction. Thus, it would be expected that those groups characterized by a skewed distribution of time usage would manifest relatively lower levels of integration than those characterized by a more normal distribution.

Social integration was then operationally defined in terms of the quantitative level of communication and the

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<sup>10</sup>Robert F. Bales, "Channels of Communication in Small Groups," American Sociological Review, XVI (1951), pp. 461-468.

communicative balance. The quantitative level of communication was taken to be the total number of verbal outputs generated by dyadic participants, where a verbal output was any remark regardless of its duration. The communicative balance was defined as the ratio of the verbal outputs of the first actor to the verbal outputs of the second, where those of the second actor exceeded or equaled those of the first.

Formally, the quantitative level of communication is given by the equation

$$CQ = \Sigma V,$$

where  $\Sigma V$  is the sum of the total verbal outputs generated in the dyad. The communicative balance is given by the equation

$$CB = \frac{\Sigma V_1}{\Sigma V_2} \times 100,$$

where  $\Sigma V_1$  represents the lesser and  $\Sigma V_2$  the greater sum of the verbal outputs of the respective actors.

The CQ was computed for each of the contact dyads. The scores were then arrayed and the median was computed. Those dyads having scores less than or equal to the median CQ were categorized in the low CQ-group, while those having scores exceeding the median were categorized in the high CQ-group. CB scores were computed for each of the contact dyads. A score of one hundred indicated a state of perfect communicative balance, while a score of zero indicated a state of

absolute communicative imbalance. For purposes of the present study, a CB-score that exceeded sixty was taken to indicate a state of relative communicative balance, while a CB-score equal to or less than forty was considered to indicate a state of relative imbalance. So, for example, a CB-score of ninety-six would indicate that the second actor used fifty-one per cent of the communication time and the first forty-nine per cent. Such a distribution would be considered balanced. On the other hand, a CB-score of thirty-three would mean that the second actor used seventy-five per cent of the time available as opposed to the first actor's twenty-five per cent. In this case, the dyad would be rated as communicatively imbalanced.

Together, these measures were used to distinguish dyads having high and low levels of social integration. The former category included those dyads having both a high CQ-score and a high CB-score. The latter category comprised those dyads having any one of the following combinations of scores: high CQ and low CB; low CQ and high CB; or low CQ and low CB.

These measures were devised and applied with the purpose of elaborating the nature and extent of laughter's relationship to social integration in the contact dyad. The hypotheses that guided the study are formally stated below.

Hypothesis: The occurrence of social laughter is directly related to the level of social integration manifest in the interaction of the contact dyad.

Hypothesis: The relationship between laughter and social integration will be maintained regardless of the sex structure of the contact dyad.

Hypothesis: The relationship between laughter and social integration will be maintained irrespective of differences in the age structure of the contact dyad.

Hypothesis: The relationship between laughter and social integration will be maintained irrespective of differences in the race structure of the contact dyad.

#### Data and Method

##### The Sample

The data utilized for purposes of testing the hypotheses were collected by Allen with some assistance by the present researcher for use in a definitive study of the contact dyad.<sup>11</sup> With the exception of Professor Allen himself, the subjects were all junior and senior college students enrolled on the Tampa campus of the University of South Florida during 1966, or on the Stillwater campus of the Oklahoma State University during 1967. Forty-five subjects were selected from volunteers in several sociology courses.

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<sup>11</sup>Allen, pp. 9-12.

They were matched according to a number of criteria in order to control for the effects of various extraneous factors. Based on their father's occupation, place of birth, and their cumulative grade-point average, subjects were typically middle-class, native-born American college students of about average or slightly above average ability. The subjects differed primarily in terms of sex, age, and race. Pairing these subjects in various combinations yielded seventy-four contact dyads, thirty-five of which were homogeneous in sex composition, fifty-seven homogeneous in age composition, and fifty-seven homogeneous in race composition; the heterogeneous groups numbered thirty-four, seventeen and seventeen, respectively.

The participants in each dyad were comfortably seated in a small observation area where their activities could be audio and video taped. All of the subjects were aware that their actions were being recorded. They were simply instructed to talk about anything they wished for a period of five minutes. At the end of the session at least one of the participants was enlisted to assist in transcribing and coding the proceedings of each dyad record. This served to reduce the possible effects of observer bias and, thereby, increased the reliability of the data. The outcome of this procedure was the transcribed and coded actions, both verbal and nonverbal, that were generated in seventy-four contact dyads of five minutes duration each. A sample of the data used in the analysis can be found in Appendix B.

### Statistical Analysis

The initial step in the statistical analysis was to test the original relationship between laughter and social integration. The statistical tests employed for this purpose were the chi-square test and Yule's coefficient Q.<sup>12</sup> These were a test of the independence of the classifications and a measure of the strength of the relationship between them. Since the sample size was small ( $N = 74$ ), the chi-square statistic was corrected for continuity.<sup>13</sup> Yule's Q was utilized because chi-square is a poor measure of association, since its limit increases with bound.

The remaining three hypotheses were then tested, while pertinent structural factors were controlled through use of a technique known as elaboration. Elaboration, originally formulated by Lazarsfeld, is a technique whereby the relationship between a pair of variables can be examined while the possible effects of one or more additional variables, called test factors, can be held constant.<sup>14</sup> Thus, for

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<sup>12</sup>Karl Schuessler et al., Statistical Reasoning in Sociology (Boston, 1970), pp. 435-437 and pp. 290-292.

<sup>13</sup>George Snedecor and William Cochran, Statistical Methods (Ames, Iowa, 1967), pp. 209-210.

<sup>14</sup>Paul Lazarsfeld and Morris Rosenberg (eds.), The Language of Social Research (New York, 1955), pp. 115-124. There are several good discussions of the elaboration technique. Two of the best are found in Herbert Hyman, Survey Design and Analysis, Ch. 7, "The Introduction of Additional Variables and the Elaboration of the Analysis" (Glencoe, Illinois, 1955); and Karl Schuessler, Analyzing Social Data (Boston, 1971), pp. 217-226.

example, the relationship between laughter (X) and social integration (Y) can be analyzed while holding the influence of dyadic sex structure (S) constant. This is done by computing the partial relationships between X and Y under the different conditions of S, and the marginal relations between X and S and Y and S. Formally, this process can be translated into the following equation:

$$(XY) = \alpha(XY.S) + \beta(XY.\bar{S}) + (XS)(YS).^{15}$$

This equation simply states that the original relationship is equal to the sum of the weighted partial relationships and the product of the relationships between the test factor and the original variables. If, on the one hand, the partials maintain themselves while the marginal term vanishes, then social integration may be partly attributable to the occurrence of social laughter. If, on the other hand, the partials vanish, then the effects of laughter on integration may be attributed to the sex structure of the dyad. Yule's Q was again used to test the strength of the partial relationships, and its variance was estimated by the statistic

$$s^2 = (1 - Q^2)^2 \left( \frac{1}{a} + \frac{1}{b} + \frac{1}{c} + \frac{1}{d} \right) / 4,$$

where:

a, b, c, and d denote the frequencies observed in

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<sup>15</sup>The  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  terms represent the proportion of the total cases distributed into the respective partials.



the corresponding cells of a 2 x 2 contingency table.<sup>16</sup>

If the Q-statistics computed for a set of partials diverged, then a possible interaction effect was revealed. Goodman's coefficient,  $W^2$ , was employed to test the significance of the difference between the partials.<sup>17</sup> The probability statements made about the chi-square tests and the  $W^2$  coefficients were acquired from the tables prepared by Schuessler.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>See M. G. Kendall and A. Stuart, The Advanced Theory of Statistics, Vol. 2 (London, 1961), p. 540.

<sup>17</sup>Leo Goodman, "On the Multivariate Analysis of Three Dichotomous Variables," American Journal of Sociology, LXXI (1965), pp. 290-301.

<sup>18</sup>Schuessler, Statistical Reasoning in Sociology, pp. 450-451.

## CHAPTER III

### FINDINGS

This final chapter concerns itself with the findings of the study, which were derived from the statistical analysis of the data. It has been divided into four individual sections, each dealing with a particular facet of the analysis. The first section was limited only to the presentation of empirical results. A number of questions regarding limitations and generalizability of the findings were considered in the second section. Section three was reserved for a detailed discussion of the findings and their implications. The final section includes a summary of the study and its findings, as well as a number of suggestions for future studies of the social functions of laughter.

#### Empirical Results

The major thesis of the present study is that laughter, which occurs in the context of social interaction, will have the effect of increasing the social integration of the contact dyad. Again, social integration was measured in terms of the quantitative level of communication and the degree of communicative balance observed in each dyadic encounter. This proposition was put to an initial test by

cross-classifying the total sample of dyads according to the frequency of laughter and the measured level of social integration. The results of this classification are presented in Table I.

TABLE I  
RELATIONSHIP OF LAUGHTER AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION  
FOR ALL CONTACT DYADS

Laughter	Integration		Totals
	<u>Low</u>	<u>High</u>	
Low	25	10	35
High	11	28	39
Totals	36	38	74
Results	$\chi^2_c = 12.20, p < .01$		
	$Q = .73, S^2 = .02$		

Applying the chi-square test of independence, the classifications were found to be statistically related well beyond the .01 level of significance. Moreover, the relationship was found to be relatively strong, as indicated by the computed Yule's coefficient. Particularly interesting was the nearly perfect symmetry observed in the data. Those dyads ranked high in social integration were

more than twice as likely as those ranked low to manifest a high frequency of laughter. These findings are in concurrence with the hypothesized relationship between laughter and social integration.

There were, however, several independent variables besides laughter that might account for the relationship observed above. The dyads included in the sample differed in terms of their sex structure, age structure, and race structure. Any of these structural variables, either individually or in their various combinations, might be found to be related to the frequency of laughter and, thus, to the social integration observed in the dyads. In order to determine whether or not the observed relationship between the original variables was influenced by their common relation to one or more of these structural variables, the total sample was decomposed into its various components by means of the elaboration technique. By elaborating the original relationship with respect to dyadic sex, age, and race structures, the effects of these variables could be determined. Tables II and III contain the results of this analytic procedure.

TABLE II

RELATIONSHIP OF LAUGHTER AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION WITH  
RESPECT TO THE DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF THE STRUC-  
TURAL ATTRIBUTES OF SEX, AGE, AND RACE

L A U G H T E R	SOCIAL INTEGRATION								T O T A L S
	SAME SEX								
	SAME AGE				DIFFERENT AGE				
	SAME RACE		DIFFERENT RACE		SAME RACE		DIFFERENT RACE		
	Lo	Hi	Lo	Hi	Lo	Hi	Lo	Hi	
Lo	5	6	4	1	2	0	0	0	18
Hi	2	8	1	2	3	1	0	0	17
TOTALS	7	14	5	3	5	1	0	0	35
Q	.70		.78		1.00		∅		
s <sup>2</sup>	.06		.11		0		∅		

TABLE II (Continued)

L A U G H T E R	SOCIAL INTEGRATION								T O T A L S
	DIFFERENT SEX								
	SAME AGE				DIFFERENT AGE				
	SAME RACE		DIFFERENT RACE		SAME RACE		DIFFERENT RACE		
	Lo	Hi	Lo	Hi	Lo	Hi	Lo	Hi	
Lo	3	2	2	1	6	0	3	0	17
Hi	3	13	1	3	1	1	0	0	22
TOTALS	6	15	3	4	7	1	3	0	39
Q	.73		.84		1.00		ø		
s <sup>2</sup>	.04		.06		0		ø		

TABLE III  
 $W^2$  INTERCORRELATION MATRIX\*

$Q_i$	$Q_j$							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	1.00	.04	.02	∅	0	.16	0	∅
2		1.00	.71	∅	.02	.02	.71	∅
3			1.00	∅	.18	.42	0	∅
4				1.00	∅	∅	∅	∅
5					1.00	.12	.18	∅
6						1.00	.43	∅
7							1.00	∅
8								1.00

- $Q_1$ . Same sex, same age, same race group.  
 $Q_2$ . Same sex, same age, different race group.  
 $Q_3$ . Same sex, different age, same race group.  
 $Q_4$ . Same sex, different age, different race group.  
 $Q_5$ . Different sex, same age, same race group.  
 $Q_6$ . Different sex, same age, different race group.  
 $Q_7$ . Different sex, different age, same race group.  
 $Q_8$ . Different sex, different age, different race group.

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$*W^2 = \frac{(Q_1 - Q_2)}{s_1 + s_2}$  distributes as chi-square with one degree of freedom.

The sex structure of the dyads was the first test factor to be considered.<sup>1</sup> In order to evaluate its effects, it was necessary to control the influences of the other two factors; namely age and race composition. This was accomplished by examining the relationship of laughter and social integration between groups differing in sex structure but comparable in age and race structures. Examining between sex-group differences within age and race groups, it was found that the original relationship was maintained in all cases for which data were available. The strength of relationship varied from a low of .70 in the same sex, same age, and same race group to a high of 1.00 observed in the same sex, different age, same race and different sex, different age, same race groups. However, it should be noted that the number of cases in these latter groups was extremely small ( $n_1 = 6$  and  $n_2 = 8$ ) and none of the cases within these groups fell into the low-laughter, high-integration category, which accounts for the perfect association observed. Moreover, there were no cases in the same sex, different age, different race group and only three in the different sex, different race group, which precluded a comparison between these

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<sup>1</sup>Since the number of dyads composed of male and female interactants was double that of those composed of all males or all females, the former group was compared with a composite group composed of the latter two. The combining of the male and all female dyads into a composite group homogenous with respect to sex was justifiable, given that the between group differences in the original relationship was negligible, as indicated by Goodman's coefficient ( $W^2 = .03$ ,  $p(W^2) > .50$ ).



groups. Applying Goodman's test, no significant differences were found among the measures of association between dyads differing in sex structure. Furthermore, the strength of the relationship between laughter and social integration within the dyads differentiated by sex structure was found to be nearly identical to that found in the total sample. The empirical evidence then gives support to the second hypothesis which posits no difference between sex-groups in the direction and strength of the original relationship.

The third hypothesis predicts no difference in the relationship of laughter and social integration between groups differing with respect to age composition. Again, age-group comparisons were made within categories that were homogeneous in all other respects. Between age-group comparisons were somewhat difficult to make due to the small number of dyads having participants whose ages differed significantly. In fact, this group constituted only twenty-three per cent ( $N = 17$ ) of the total sample. Analysis of the available data, however, revealed that the original relationship was maintained within age groups. This was particularly evident in the same age group, where the strength of the partials was found to be equivalent to that observed in the total sample. The results of the between age-group comparisons were equivocal, but they tended to be commensurate with the hypothesis of no difference. The Goodman's coefficients computed for the age-group comparisons were all non-significant. Thus, on the basis of available evidence, the

age composition of contact dyads does not appear to significantly effect the direction or magnitude of the relationship between laughter and social integration.

The fourth and final hypothesis that guided the present study posits that the race structure of the contact dyad will not appreciably alter the relationship between laughter and social integration. Difficulties similar to those encountered in the age-group comparisons were again met in the comparison of racial groups. The dyads composed of racially different participants constituted only twenty-three per cent ( $N = 17$ ) of the total sample. Moreover, there were no data available for making comparisons involving the same sex, different age, different race group or the different sex, different age, different race group. These problems aside, however, the relationship of laughter and social integration between the groups composed of actors of the same or different race appeared to be of equal magnitude and direction. The comparison of between-group differences in measures of association did not yield even a single significant  $W^2$  score. Comparing the strength of the partial relationships with the total relationship between laughter and social integration showed no apparent difference beyond chance expectations. These findings appear then to corroborate the statement of the original relationship contained in the fourth hypothesis. Specifically, no differences were observed in the direction or strength of the relationship between laughter and social integration within or between

dyads regardless of their race structure.

To recapitulate, the empirical evidence has given qualified support to the hypothesis that laughter is conducive to the strengthening of social integration in the contact dyad. The second hypothesis was also confirmed which indicated that the sex structure of the dyad has no appreciable effect on the original relationship. Insufficient information precluded unequivocal testing of the third and fourth hypothesis, that posited no difference in the original relationship between groups composed of subjects differing in age or race. However, the evidence that was available tended to substantiate these hypotheses. In fact, the relationship between laughter and social integration was maintained while all of the effects due to sex, age, and race differences were statistically removed. Therefore, a high frequency of laughter in the communicative exchange of dyadic participants was found to be predictive of a high degree of social integration; conversely, a low frequency of laughter was found to be predictive of a low degree of social integration in the contact dyad.

#### Limitations

Before discussing the empirical findings presented in the preceding section, they should be placed in the context of the limitations and qualifications that apply to this study. Several possible sources of invalidity have already been alluded to, but will now be treated in somewhat more

detail. For the most part, the problems considered here derive from inadequacies in the research design and deficiencies in the data source utilized in the analysis. Their consequences were largely felt in reducing the generalizability of the data-based findings.

Regarding the first class of problems, the relationship between laughter and social integration was tested under only a single set of situational conditions. These conditions were at least highly atypical relative to those in which persons normally interact. The subjects were aware of the fact that their behavior was being recorded and would be used for data in studies of social interaction. The combination of a strange and unfamiliar environment coupled with the awareness that they were being observed probably influenced the subjects' performance. Actors were literally forced into face-to-face encounters and compelled to carry on a "casual" conversation for at least five minutes whether they liked it or not. Hence, the research situation itself most likely contributed to the variance observed in the relationship of interest. Also, the interaction situation was relatively ambiguous, the subjects only being instructed to carry on a conversation. With only five minutes of communications time perhaps it would have been more useful to structure the situation by specifying a particular topic or set of topics for discussion. This would have restricted the range of variation found in the quantitative level of communication by eliminating the subjects' need to grope

around for something to talk about. Finally, more conclusive evidence in support of the thesis might have been obtained had dyads of already known levels of social integration been used. Then the relationship between laughter and social integration could be more precisely established by comparing dyads of various levels of integration, rather than the two gross categories used for the purposes of this analysis.

Possible generalizations were limited for a number of other reasons. The scope of the data is extremely limited, since the majority of the subjects were young, white, middle-class, college students. It would be difficult indeed to generalize findings derived from such a limited and nonrepresentative sample to a more inclusive population. However, as Zetterberg has pointed out: "It is more probable that a hypothesis holds true outside the population on which it has been confirmed than that the contrary of the hypothesis holds true in the new population."<sup>2</sup> The problem of self-selection also enters here because the subjects included in the sample were all volunteers rather than a randomly selected group. Thus, there is no assurance that the relationship of interest was not introduced into the data by this selective sampling procedure. Related to this problem is the fact that most of the subjects participated

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<sup>2</sup>Hans Zetterberg, On Theory and Verification in Sociology (New Jersey, 1965), p. 128.

in several dyads, although with different partners, while each dyad was treated as an independent observation on the relationship between laughter and social integration. Prior participation would likely have had a sensitizing effect that might have caused the subjects' reactions to differ qualitatively from those observed in their initial dyadic encounter.

Finally, problems related to the statistical analysis resulted from the insufficient numbers of cases found in some cells when four-way elaboration was applied to the data. As mentioned previously, this produced corroborating, but highly tenuous evidence, in support of the hypotheses. Because the structural variables of sex, age, and race were represented in the sample used for the analysis, the multivariate technique had to be utilized in order to examine the original relationship under the different conditions imposed by these variables. Again, however, the small number of cases present in several of the partial relationships requires that extreme caution be exercised in the interpretation of these results.

#### Discussion

Any statements made about the findings of the study are necessarily provisional for the reasons cited above. The study itself may be best classified as exploratory. The thesis was not conclusively established, although several questions pertinent to a more complete understanding of the

interaction process were raised.

The study examined the effects on social integration when laughter varied in the context of the contact dyad. It was generally found that the level of integration was a partial function of the incidence of social laughter (see Table II). This relationship was relatively constant in the total sample of contact dyads, irrespective of the differences in their sex, age, and race structures. However, the relationship was far from perfect. The largest reliable measure of association was only .73 (Table II), which was observed in the group of dyads characterized by a heterogeneous sex structure and homogeneous age and race structures. This moderate degree of association suggests the obvious point that social integration is a complex social process. Laughter appears to be one of several possible factors that facilitates the integration of contact dyads. The question of how laughter functions in this capacity must now be considered.

The concept of cognitive similarity may prove useful in unravelling the answer to this question. Cognitive similarity refers to a certain kind of meshing that occurs or does not occur between the viewpoints which shape the communicative acts of two or more persons. When persons simultaneously orient themselves to their environment in similar ways, they share a common frame of reference which enables them to perceive and evaluate objects, events, or ideas along the same or parallel dimensions. The consequences of cognitive

similarity have been spelled out and discussed in numerous studies.<sup>3</sup> Cognitive similarity has been found to increase communicative effectiveness, the rate of interaction, and the level of interpersonal attraction. In turn, these outcomes themselves facilitate increasing levels of cognitive similarity.

The contact dyad represents a relatively non-competitive, informal social encounter. Actors are obliged to carry on a more or less "friendly" conversation for a short period of time. The laughter therein observed was, for the most part, directed to objects, ideas, or events related by the actors, rather than to the actors themselves. That is, "laughing with" as opposed to "laughing at" was the typically observed pattern. The generally non-aggressive quality of the laughter would likely have certain positive consequences for the dyadic interaction process. Lumley has provided some insights relevant to this point.

Nobody likes to be laughed at, unless highly paid for it. Conversely, almost everybody likes to laugh with others. In the latter case the effects are in the nature of closer cooperation, solidarity, social sympathy; while in the former they foster

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<sup>3</sup>The social consequences of cognitive similarity have received extensive consideration. See, for example, Theodore M. Newcomb, "The Prediction of Interpersonal Attraction," The American Psychologist, LX (1953), pp. 575-586; Harry Triandis, "Cognitive Similarity and Communication in the Dyad," Human Relations, XIII (1960), pp. 175-183; Philip Runkel, "Cognitive Similarity in Facilitating Communication," Sociometry, XIX (1956), pp. 178-191; and Yoriko Shibuya, "A Study in the Relationship Between Cognitive Similarity and Communication Effectiveness," Japanese Psychological Research, IV (1962), pp. 173-177.



dispersion and dissolution. Laughing with people attracts; laughing at people repels.<sup>4</sup>

Since social laughter is a response to a commonly perceived stimulus, it is a form of communication, a transmitter of information, an indication of the understanding of the stimulus presented by one person to another. The act of laughing in response to a certain stimulus conveys information to the "sender" about the "receiver's" orientation; and if the stimulus was sent with the intention of eliciting such a response, then the persons likely share a common orientation with respect to that stimulus. Hence, social laughter or, alternatively, "laughing with" another person functions to communicate the cognitive similarity obtaining between the interactants and, thereby, enhances the integrity of the social bond.

Therefore, laughter as a communicator of cognitive similarity appears to explain its covariation with social integration. Contact dyads ranking high on the dimension of social integration were most likely composed of cognitively similar actors. Mutual awareness of this similarity in co-orientation proceeded through the communicative process of which laughter is a part. Concomitantly, the level of interaction likely increased along with the level of interpersonal attraction and, hence, the level of dyadic integration.

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<sup>4</sup>Frederick Lumley, Means of Social Control (New York, 1925), p. 270.

### Summary

This study has been concerned with the proposition that a high incidence of social laughter facilitates increased levels of social integration in the contact dyad.

Social laughter was conceived as those incidences of laughter attributable to the verbal and nonverbal actions of persons engaged in dyadic integration. A dyad was ranked high on this dimension if the incidence of social laughter exceeded the median computed for all dyads. An index of social integration was constructed from the quantitative level of communication and the level of communicative balance. The level of communication exceeded the sample median and the communication balance equaled or exceeded forty (40) per cent.

The hypothesis was tested by comparing the incidence of social laughter and the level of social integration for a small, non-representative sample of contact dyads composed largely of white, middle-class, college students. In order to evaluate the plausibility of a number of alternative hypotheses, the original relationship was elaborated with respect to sex, age, and race structures. The incidence of social laughter was found to be predictive of the level of dyadic integration under all structural conditions of the dyad for which data were available. Between-group comparisons revealed no appreciable differences in the original relationship. Specifically, it was found that social integration tended to be high when the incidence of laughter was

also high and, conversely, low when laughter was infrequent. The relationship was explained by invoking the principle of cognitive similarity. Laughter was conceived as a communicator of homogeneity in co-orientation. By indicating commonality with respect to a stimulus situation, laughter enhances cognitive similarity and, hence, social integration.

Because of the many deficiencies in the design of the study, the findings are inconclusive. In response to these problems, several considerations relevant to future studies will be mentioned. First, a more complete understanding of laughter's social functions will require an analysis of its temporal aspects. For example, Bales has postulated the following sequential relationship in the functional problems of social groups: problems of orientation, evaluation, control, decision, tension-management, and integration.<sup>5</sup> If social laughter is related to social integration, then one would expect a proportionately higher incidence of laughter to occur in the latter stages of the interaction sequence. Also, the literature suggests that laughter functions differently under different social circumstances; included here are differences deriving from power and status differentials. The relationship between laughter and integration should be analyzed under a variety of these social situations.

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<sup>5</sup>Robert F. Bales, Interaction Process Analysis: A Method for the Study of Small Groups (Cambridge, 1950), pp. 8-13.

Finally, regardless of the specific research objectives, problems of sample adequacy and representativeness deserve careful consideration.

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APPENDIX A

ACTOR CHARACTERISTICS

## APPENDIX A

ACTOR CHARACTERISTICS														Dyads	Race	Potential Control	New Number
Old Number	Age	Sex	Grade	Full Time	Resident	Social Class	Parents Together	Fraternity	Talk	Control	Marital	Family Religion	Own Religion	Power			
D. Nelson	28	21	F	1	1						S				1	W	28
Hazel A.	30	21	F	1							S				1	W	30
D. Allen	15	47	M	9	1	0	UM	0	1	1	M	P	P	H1	2,6,29,30,31,32	W	15
Nancy Olsen	38		F	1							S				2	W	38
Hazel B.	52	21	F	4	1	1	UM	1			S	P	P	Lo	3	W	52
Sue	54	20	F	3	1	1	UM	0			S	C	NP	Lo	3,5	W	54
Paul	17	21	M	4	1	1	UM	1			S	P	P	Lo	4,5	W	17
Dan	21	21	M	4	1	1	UM	0			S	C	NP	Lo	4	W	21
J. Cullman	22	22	F	4	1	1	UM	0			S	NP	NP	Lo	6	W	22
J. Davis	25	22	M	4	1	1	LM				S	J	J		10,7,11	W	25
G. Kelly	24	52	F	3	0	0	LM	0			M	P	P		9,8,7	W	24
J. McKinney	48	24	F	2	0	0	LM	0			S	C	C		8,11,12	W	48
R. Williams	23	30	M	5	0	0	UM	0			M	P	P		10,9,12	N	23
N. Simmons	19	19	M	3	1	0	UM	1	0	1	S	P	P		13,14,18,19,36,39,41,42	N 0 1	19
D. J. Cason	50	20	F	3			UM	0	0		S	P			13,16,15,20	W 0 0	50
Tom Scanio	27	22	M	4			LM	1	1	1	S	C			14,17,15,21	W 1 1	27
Marion Young	40	20	F	3	1	0	UM	0	1	0	M	NP	NP		15,17,16,18	W 1 0	40
Bill Sitar	29	31	M	2	1	0	UM	0	1	0	M	NP	NP		19,20,21,22	W	29
Jim Kerwik	1	22	M	4	1	1	UM	0	1	1	S	C	C		23,25,29	W	1
Martha Meadows	2	21	F	4	1	1	UM	1	0	0	S	P	NP		23,24,26,27	W	2
Susan Cumble	4	22	F	3	1	1	UM	0	1	1	S				30		
Larry Fulop	3	24	M	4	1	0	UM	1	0	0	S	P	NP		25,27,28,32	W	4
B. Cushing	6	24	F	3	1	0	LM	1	1	0	M	P	P		24,26,28,31	W	3
Ron Alvarez	7	22	M	4	1	1	UM	1	1	0	S	P	P		33,34,35,36	W	6
Sandra Essig	8	22	F	4	1	0	LM	0	0	1	D	NP	NP		33,37,38,39	W	7
Neal Rosen	37	20	M	3	1	1	UM	0	1	1	S	J	J		34,37,40,41	W	8
E. Henderson	10	36	F	4	0	0	UM	0	0	0	M	P	NP		43,48,52,56	W	37
W. Coleman	9	20	M	4	1	0	UM	0	0	0	S	P	P		35,38,40,42	W	10
															43,59	N	9

## APPENDIX A (continued)

	Old Number	Age	Sex	Grade	Full Time	Resident	Social Class	Parents Together	Fraternity	Talk	Control	Marital	Family Religion	Own Religion	Power	Dyads	Race	Potential Control	New Number
Pat Allen	42	21	F	4	1	0	LM	1	0	0	S	C	C		44,57,60	W		42	
Pat Bell	20	23	F	4	1	0	UM	1	1	1	S	P	NP		44,46	W		20	
Don Richards	5	20	M	3	1	1	UM	1	1	1	S	P	P		45,48,54,60	W		5	
															62				
Gilbert Hall	39	20	M	3	1	0	UM	0	0	0	S	P	P		45,49,51,55	N		39	
															61				
J. Breuggeman	12	20	F	3	1	0	LM	0	1	0	S	C	NP		47,49,52	W		12	
Nancy Start	46	20	F	4	1	1	UM	1	1	1	S	P	P		46, 54, 61	W		46	
L. Bishop	26	20	F	3	1	1	UM	0	0	0	S	C	C		47,58	W		26	
Kay Adams	14	20	F	3	1	0	LM	1	0	1	S	P	NP		50	W		14	
Jan Schobert	18	21	F	4	1	1	LM	0	0	1	S	P	NP		50,53	W		18	
V Piniella	16	22	F	4	0	0	LM	1	0	1	S	C	NP		51,56,58	W		16	
E. DiMeglio	44	20	F	3	1	1	LM	1	0	1	S	C	C		53	W		44	
Ronald Boston	11	21	M	3	1	1	UM	0	0	1	S	P	NP		55,57,59	N		11	
Carl Buick	13		M					1							62	W		13	
Wm. Finley	31	22	M	4	1	1	UM	1	1	0	S	P	P		63,65,70,72	W		31	
Judy Deiro	34	21	F	4	1	1	UM	1	1	1	S	C	C		63,66,71,69	W		34	
Gay Crocker	32	19	F	2	1	1	UM	1	1	1	S	P	C		64,66,68,74	W		32	
T. Mailkowski	35	22	M	4	1	1	UM	0	1	1	S	C	C		64,67,72,74	W		35	
Sue Fox	36	21	F	4	1	1	UM	0	1	1	S	C	C		69,68,71,73	W		36	
Neal Leader	33	22	M	4	1	0	LM	0	0	0	S	C	NP		67,70,73	W		33	

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE VERBAL TRANSCRIPT

## Dyad 3

V4 Ahem, well did you have a nice weekend?  
V2 Well it was

V4 oh, no  
V2 pretty nice. It would have been, my aunt died.

V4 ha ha/ Sorry/  
V2 This weekend ha ha/ And uh that was the

V4 funeral I attended, and uh, I really didn't know what to  
V2 expect. But uh/ The first one you ever went to? oh  
uh huh/

V4 I don't think I want to go to another one, either ha ha  
V2 I don't blame you ha. I don't like to go to funerals.

V4 Did you go to the fair? oh/  
V2 No, huh uh No I just went home.

V4 For some reason the, uh, Gasparilla just doesn't inter-  
V2 est me ha. ha. Yeah I saw it inside the fair grounds.

V4 It was where they come out of the race track. I guess  
V2 is what you call it, and half the girls were already off  
the floats. and they had taken some apart so they  
V2 um/ could get through the gate. Ha ha ha/  
V2 They had taken

V4 They had to take parts of the float off because  
V2 what? oh

V4 they were too large to get through the gate. And  
V2 oh I see

V4 let's see, I went Saturday night, and I think I rode two  
Saturday?

V4 rides, and we walked all over the fair. Then I went  
V2

V4 again Monday with my cousin and girlfriend.  
V2 Is there any

V4  
V2 difference now that they don't have any of those barkers

V4 It seems so different ha ha ha/ Yes,  
V2 on the side? It does?

V4 because there's nothing to win and if you want to do  
V2 oh

V4 something it's just for fun. I heard the midway made  
V2

V4 lots more money this time. Um huh yes.  
V2 Oh really. Do the

V4 um hum ha ha ha/There's  
V2 people really enjoy themselves?

V4 lots more rides. And let's see, I went to the woman's  
V2

V4 world and saw all the fashions, that won first prize.  
V2 Oh?

V4 Well they had a contest. I entered it but  
V2 What is that?

V4 I didn't win anything. You make a dress or crochet or  
V2 oh?

V4 knit something and they had all the fashions. Um hum.  
V2 Oh These were at

V4 They had them in the regular showcase windows like Maas  
V2 the exhibit uh huh

V4 Brothers or a department store like that.  
V2 Oh I see and

V4 uh huh  
V2 these were people from around town that had uh/that had

V4 Well they were all over the  
V2 designed and made dresses?

V4 state of Florida. You have to be a Florida resident,  
V2

V4 and then they pick the winners and they also have a  
V2

V4 fashion show but I didn't see that/ and/  
V2 um It sounds

V4  
V2 really interesting. I was going to major in home eco-

V4 uh huh  
V2 nomics in Tallahassee but uh, it just wasn't challenging

V4 uh huh You went to Tallahassee?  
V2 it just wasn't enough for me.

V4 Oh I went to Gainesville ha ha ha uh huh  
V2 uh huh Oh you did.

V4 uh huh At Gainesville?  
V2 I was there for just one trimester

V4 At Tallahassee uh huh/  
V2 No, no at Tallahassee. How did you

V4 It was fund. There were football games  
V2 like Gainesville?

V4 and fraternity parties.  
V2 Yeah I don't know, I really didn't

V4 uh huh  
V2 do too much of that at Tallahassee. I like it.

V4  
V2 It's a good school. I think if I had gone there as a

V4 uh huh uh huh Did you  
V2 freshman started out there as a freshman/and really

V4 go here first? uh huh that's what happened  
V2 yeah, uh huh/

V4 to me. I went here for about two and a half years then  
V2

V4 I went to Gainesville a trimester then came back.  
V2 uh huh/

V4 ha ha ha ha Well I  
V2 Why why did you decide to come back?

V4 was going to major in elementary education and I didn't  
V2

V4 like it up there, so I came back. Then I started major-  
V2

V4 ing in English, then changed to sociology. I think I've  
V2 Oh

V4 majored in about everything there is to major in.  
V2 uh huh

V4 ha ha ha ha/  
V2 Really it's hard to transfer. I have found

V4  
V2 that it's hard to transfer to a major after two years.

V4 uh huh/  
V2 I should have started out as a freshman in my

V4  
V2 major. And that was one thing which made me decide to

V4 uh huh/  
V2 change. I didn't want to stay an extra trimester.

V4 I know a girl that went to  
V2 I couldn't/I couldn't do that.

V4 Kent State and she had two years of home economics.  
V2

V4 Then she transferred down here and now she's in elemen-  
V2

V4 tary; and she has all these all these extra credits ha ha  
V2

V4 ha  
V2 Oh I'll be graduating with two extra credits. Big deal!

V4 Maybe in December ha ha ha ha  
V2 When do you graduate? I will

V4 Really? Oh did you find out about the job he  
V2 in June.

V4 was talking about? ha ha ha  
V2 uh huh ha ha ha Well he said

V4 oh ha ha  
V2 come back next week. I really I don't know any-

V4  
V2 thing about it because he hasn't talked to the man who



V4  
V2 needs the girls. But uh I have a feeling/ I don't know

V4  
V2 there will be so many graduating in psychology and

V4 uh huh  
V2 sociology that uh he'll probably grab them up pretty

V4  
V2 fast. He wants people now so if he can get them/I don't

V4 ha ha ha ha  
V2 know what I will do. I sure would like to have

V4 I know it  
V2 that job. That's really what I would like to do. He

V4  
V2 told me that if I uh wanted to do any kind of counselling

V4  
V2 work that I would have to go on extra uh trimester and

V4 ha ha oh  
V2 have a certificate in counseling from education from the

V4 uh huh If/  
V2 education school so but I won't be able to do that.

V4 what are you going to do after you graduate? Just work,  
V2

V4 or are you going to get married, or what?  
V2 um huh no.

V4 uh huh  
V2 I'll uh be working. I would like to go to uh a

V4 um huh like New York or/  
V2 larger city just for the experience. No probably

V4 uh huh That'd be a nice place to go.  
V2 Atlanta. or Miami/ uh huh/

V4 Maybe we're supposed to talk louder ha ha ha I don't  
V2 Why?

V4 know. Excuse me.  
V2 um The only problem in uh going to a

V4  
V2 larger town would be going alone. Then you have to, uh,  
V4  
V2 somebody to live with, and uh find place to live.

VITA

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