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Some Standard Uses of "What about"- Prefaced Interrogatives in the Broadcast News Interview

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Interrogatives (as linguistic objects, described by their grammatical features) and questioning (as a social action, responsive to prior actions and consequential for subsequent ones) can both serve as vehicles for a range of social activities. This article reports on one distinctive form of interrogative, the "what about"-prefaced interrogative, with a particular focus on its uses in broadcast news interviews. We analyze the internal composition and sequential position of "what about"-prefaced interrogatives and identify four standard uses of them by interviewers: pursuing a prior interviewee's response, juxtaposing multiple interviewees' positions, invoking a prior agenda, and proposing membership in a category. On the basis of this analysis, we consider how the recurrent use of this particular interrogative form can serve as an interactional means of instantiating a particular broadcasting "style," thus contributing to distinctions among various public affairs programs.

GRAMMATICAL FORM, QUESTIONING, AND SOCIAL ACTION

The observation that an utterance takes the grammatical form of a interrogative does not guarantee that the action it implements is questioning (Schegloff 1984). An utterance's status as an interrogative is defined in terms of grammar (see, e.g., Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik, 1985, pp. 806ff.); however, the uses of interrogatives in the commission of actions are not limited to - and, therefore, are not to be described exclusively in terms of - the activity of questioning. Instead, *interrogatives* (as linguistic objects, described by their grammatical features) and *questioning* (as a social action, responsive to prior actions and consequential for subsequent ones) can both serve as vehicles for a range of social activities. Thus, utterances that take the form of an interrogative can be (and are) relevantly treated—by their addressees, in the first place—for their capacity to implement a range of other actions, such as requesting (e.g., the often cited hypothetical illustration, *Can you pass the salt?*), or inviting (e.g., *Wanna cum down'n*

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av a bighta l:unch with me:?, [see Drew, 1984, p. 135]), or even affiliating (see, e.g, Schegloff's [1984] analysis of the utterance *By what standard*).

This article provides a preliminary report on one distinctive form of interrogative, which we call the "what about"-prefaced interrogative. Fragment (1) exhibits an instance of a "what about"-prefaced interrogative (arrowed, at line 10), taken from ordinary conversation:[1]

```
(1)  [SN-4:1]  ((Mark has been asking Sherry about the plans for her
               upcoming wedding.))

1    Mark:     Didja e- by the way didja ever call up uh: Century City
2              CMMHotel 'n
3              (1.0)
4    Sherry:   Y'know h'much they want fer a wedding¿ It's incredible.
5              (0.5)
6    Sherry:   We'd 'aftuh sell our house 'n car 'n evryt(h)hing
7              e(h)l(h)se [tuh pay fer the wedding .]
8    Mark:                [Shhh'er house 'n yer car.]
9    (??):                [(hh  heh heh huh huh )]
10   Mark: —> .hh What about the outside candlelight routine izzat
11             still gonna go on?
12   Sherry:   No yih can't have outside candlelight it's a fi:re hazard.
```

Focusing on lines 10-11, notice that, although the initial unit of Mark's turn (*What about the outside candlelight routine*) takes the syntactic form of a WH-interrogative (Quirk, et al., 1985, pp. 817-823), Sherry does not respond to that unit as a question. Put another way, although Sherry might have treated Mark's turn as *possibly complete* on the production of *routine*, she does not begin to respond then, waiting to do so until Mark brings a second unit (*izzat still gonna go on?*, lines 10-11) to possible completion (on "possible completion" see Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Ford & Thompson, 1996). Although Sherry's response treats the "what about"-prefaced interrogative as *part of* a turn at talk that accomplishes questioning, she does not treat it as accomplishing that activity on its own. This raises the following issue as a topic for investigation: If the "what about"-prefaced interrogative is not accomplishing questioning *per se*, then what action(s) is it accomplishing?

In addition to occurring in ordinary conversation, as shown in the exchange between Mark and Sherry, "what about"-prefaced interrogatives also appear in a range of *institutional* settings (on "institutional" talk, see Drew & Heritage, 1992), including doctor-patient interactions, Presidential press conferences, and broadcast news interviews. In this article, we focus on the deployment of "what about"-prefaced interrogatives by interviewers in broadcast news interviews. Our immediate aim is to identify and describe four standard uses of "what about"-prefaced interrogatives in that institutional context. However, in developing an analysis of the different activities that a particular grammatical form (the "what about"-pref-

aced interrogative) can accomplish, we also undertake a more general investigation of the intertwined relationships between grammar, interaction, and institution (on grammar and interaction, see the contributions to Ochs, Schegloff, & Thompson, 1996; on grammar and institution, see Heritage & Roth, 1995): Thus, we pursue an account of how the recurrent use of this particular interrogative form might constitute one basis for differentiating various public affairs programs, and of how it might serve interviewers as a means of interactionally instantiating a particular broadcasting philosophy for such programs.

THE PHENOMENON

Described in grammatical terms, "what about"-prefaced interrogatives consist of *at least* the interrogative *what* in combination with the preposition *about* plus a nominal (e.g., a noun, noun phrase or clause, or a pronoun). The following instances of "what about"-prefaced interrogatives from our corpus of broadcast news interviews exemplify interviewer turns that take this distinctive interrogative form.

(2) [Which Way L.A.? 03/21/95:34]
Interviewer: What about that David Koren?

(3) [Meet the Press 04/16/93:18]
Interviewer: What about Phil Gramm. Do you think...

(4) [Which Way L.A.? 04/13/95:4-5]
Interviewer: ...Now what about the race tracks (.) They are also...

(5) [MacNeil/Lehrer 07/19/93b:3]
Interviewer: ...Mister Terwilliger
—> what about (.) Mister Session's defense of not stepping down::. Did he do thuh right thing?...

By noting that such turns consist of "at least" *What about + [nominal]* we mean to draw attention to features of examples (2) - (5) such as the following:

- In actual, naturally occurring use, interviewers deploy "what about"-prefaced interrogatives in *both* turn-initial position (e.g., examples [2] and [3]) and in subsequent positions within a turn at talk (e.g., after an address term, as in example [5], or after the turn-initial "Now", as in example [4]); and
- A great many of the interviewer turns at talk in which "what about"-prefaced interrogatives occur consist of *two or more* "turn constructional units."[2] In the cases above, only in example (2) does the turn constructional unit containing the "what about"-prefaced interrogative constitute the entire turn at talk; in instances (3)-(5), by contrast, the "what about"-prefaced interrogative constitutes the first turn constructional unit of a *multi-unit* turn (recall, also, example [1], above).

To understand the action(s) that an interviewer can implement through use of a "what about"-prefaced interrogative, we must consider not just the turn's *composition*, but also its sequential *position* within some ongoing talk (on turns' "composition" and "position", see, e.g., Schegloff, 1995, p. 194). Consider the example, in fragment (6), of a "what about"-prefaced interrogative (arrowed, at line 12), presented in its sequential context. (Here and throughout the rest of the article, we use the abbreviations *IR* and *IE* to refer to *interviewer* and *interviewee*, respectively.)

(6) [Meet The Press 04/16/95:18] ((IR=Lisa Myers, IE=Bob Dole))

```
1   IR:       Senator a moment ago when you said the American people
2             d:on't want extreme:s, I wondered who you were thinking
3             of.=Do you th:ink (.) that President Clinton represents
4             an extreme: point of view?
5             (0.2)
6   IE:        .hh No: I'm just suggesting that Bob Dole would n:ot. Ah
7              I-I think in some cases ah- (.) I think thuh President's
8             a li'l' extreme on ta:xes fr:ankly, .hhh (.) ah: a little
9             extreme on government activity, but ah::: I- I'm not going
10            to refer to Pres:ident Clinton as an extremist....
11            ((8 subsequent lines of IE response deleted))
12  IR: —>    What about Phil Gramm?=Do you think he represents an
13            extreme point of view?
14  IE:       I don't think so.  I think Phil: ah: (0.2) keeps saying
15             he's more conservative, but I'm reminded of th' Na:tional
16            Journal report las:t year that showed me ten points more
17            conservative than Phil Gramm.
```

Observe the following features of these two question-answer sequences:

- The IR depicts the first of these questions (spanning lines 1-4) as having been prompted by a combination of (i) something the IE said earlier (i.e., *the American people d:on't want extreme:s*, at lines 1-2) and (ii) the IR's own reaction to that statement (*I wondered who you were thinking of.*, lines 2-3).
- The formulation of this utterance projects that the ensuing question may involve a search for membership in a category.
- The interrogative unit (*Do you th:ink that...*, lines 3-4) solicits the IE's opinion (e.g., the stress on *you* and the cognizing verb *think*) as to whether a particular person (*President Clinton*, line 3) belongs to the category in question (i.e., *represents an extreme: point of view*, lines 3-4).
- The IE response, although hedged in certain respects (see, e.g., lines 7-9), rejects depicting Clinton in those terms (i.e., *No:*, at line 6, and *I'm not going to refer to Pres:ident Clinton as an extremist*, lines 9-10).
- The IR's subsequent *What about Phil Gramm?* - a "what about"-prefaced interrogative - maintains the activity focus of the IR's prior questioning turn, by proposing another possible candidate (so to speak) member - *Phil Gramm* - of the

category of people whom the IE might consider as representing *an extreme point of view* (lines 12-13).
The IE declines to characterize Gramm as "extreme" (*I don't think so.*, line 14), and then shifts to compare and evaluate Gramm and himself in terms of their "conservative" status.

The IR's construction of the "what about"-prefaced interrogative - and, of the turn it inhabits - constitutes a choice among alternatives: The IR could have posed an altogether different question (e.g., pursuing the adequacy of the IE's response regarding Clinton, or initiating a new topic of questioning); likewise, the IR could have constructed an alternative version of the question actually posed (e.g., as a single-unit turn, "Does Phil Gramm represent an extreme point of view?").

On the basis of observations such as those above, a set of research topics arises: What does the IR accomplish by constructing her turn at lines 12-13 in just this way, with the "what about"-prefaced interrogative? Is this usage at all standard (i.e., recurrent and orderly) in the broadcast news interview? And, are there other, related but distinct standard uses of "what about"-prefaced interrogatives?

THE DATA COLLECTION

Our analyses are based on a collection of 32 "what about"-prefaced interrogatives, drawn from a corpus of tape-recorded radio- and television-broadcast news interviews, and the transcripts of them. This collection includes every instance of the phenomenon in that corpus. Except as otherwise noted, the particular instances presented in this article are representative of the collection as a whole.

The corpus from which the collection is drawn comprises more than 20-hours of news interview interaction, taken from nationally-televised public affairs programs (ABC's *Nightline*, PBS's *MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour*, NBC's *Meet the Press*, CBS's *Face the Nation*, and ABC's *This Week with David Brinkley*) and a local, radio-broadcast program, KCRW's *Which Way L.A.?*.[3]

Although readers may be somewhat familiar with the format and organization of the nationally-televised interview programs, they may not be similarly acquainted with the radio-broadcast program, *Which Way L.A.?* (hereafter referred to as *WWLA*), which differs in significant ways from its televised counterparts. Here we briefly introduce a few of *WWLA*'s distinctive features as a backdrop to the analyses that follow, and as a point of departure for a subsequent discussion of how one might investigate institutional differences among various broadcasting formats for public affairs programs.

All of the *WWLA* interviews in the corpus involve interviews conducted by telephone, an arrangement that is typical for the program: During the hour-long program, interviewees - who have been recruited to represent a range of perspectives on some topical issue, and whose "appearances" have been pre-scheduled - call into the studio; from the studio, the program's host and regular interviewer, Warren Olney, typically questions seven or eight such guests, none of whom are

necessarily "on the air" for the entire duration of the interview: Although many interviewees monitor the program's progress by telephone connection as they wait to be questioned, others may only be "on-line" via telephone during the segment of the interview in which they participate directly (see Collins, 1995). We refer to this organization of interviewee participation as a "revolving door" panel discussion; in our corpus, it is unique to *WWLA*.

This organization of interviewee participation presents the IR with practical issues regarding the maintenance and presentation of coherent interview agendas: The IR must maintain a coherent agenda as different IEs join and/or leave the program, with each IE possessing more or less knowledge of what positions have already been taken, by whom, and so forth; equally, the IR must present this dynamic arrangement of interviewee participation for members of the "overhearing" audience (Heritage, 1985), who may also be joining the program "in progress" (e.g., after the particular program's theme has been projected, after particular guests have been introduced, after some topics of questioning have been concluded, and as a current topic of questioning is underway).

QUESTIONING AND THE TURN-TAKING ORGANIZATION OF BROADCAST NEWS INTERVIEWS

As conversation analysts studying news interview interaction have noted, the activity of questioning "in large part, *constitutes* the news interview as a social institution" (Heritage & Roth, 1995, p. 2, emphasis added). In brief, news interview talk is organized in terms of a formal, institutional *turn-taking system*[4] that makes questioning the central activity for participants' conduct (see, *inter alia*, Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991, as well as the citations to Clayman, Greatbatch, and Heritage in the references, below). This turn-taking system *pre-allocates* the order and the type of permissible turns at talk (on "pre-allocations" of turn- order and type, see Atkinson & Drew, 1979, pp. 61ff.): Thus, participants acting in the institutional roles of *interviewer* (IR) and *interviewee* (IE) should restrict themselves to asking questions and responding to them, respectively (see, e.g., Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991, pp. 97-99). In consequence, news interviews typically progress as series of IR questions and IE responses (recall, e.g., fragment [6], above).

For our purposes, one consequence of this organization of IR-IE participation is paramount. As indicated, this turn-taking system makes the accomplishment of IR questioning criterial for turn-transfer from IR to IE: On the production of a recognizable question, turn-transfer from IR to IE is relevant.[5]

This organization of conduct differentiates turn-taking in the news interview from its counterpart in ordinary conversation in at least one significant way. In ordinary conversation participants use syntax, intonation, and pragmatics as resources to monitor the progress of a current speaker's turn for its projectable completion point(s) (Sacks, et al., 1974; Ford & Thompson, 1996); and, unless a current

speaker does something particular to project otherwise, the first possible completion point of the speaker's first turn constructional unit constitutes an initial transition-relevance place (Sacks, et al., 1974, pp. 704, 709, 723, *passim.*). By contrast, in the news interview, the pre-allocation of turn-types affords IRs the *systematic* opportunity to produce *more than one* possibly-complete TCU without having thereby arrived at a transition-relevance place: Until some unit of an IR's turn accomplishes questioning, the IR's turn cannot be treated as complete, and turn transition, from IR to IE, is not (institutionally) relevant. Thus, from an IE's perspective, the practical task of monitoring an IR's current turn for its transition relevance place(s) consists of analyzing each TCU not only for its possible completion point(s) but also for whether or not it accomplishes the activity of questioning. Distributional analyses (Heritage & Roth, 1995) show a robust convergence of this normative organization with actual news interview conduct, across different interviews, covering different topics, and across different broadcast formats and societal boundaries.

An initial and continuing focus of our investigation of "what about"-prefaced interrogatives involves the observation that IRs and IEs do not systematically treat utterances with this interrogative form as accomplishing the institutionally-specified activity of questioning: In less than one-third of the instances in our data corpus (10 of 32) do IEs treat a "what about"-prefaced interrogative as having accomplished questioning on its own, so that the possible completion of the "what about"-prefaced interrogative generates IR-IE turn-transition. In the other 22 instances, by contrast, IR-IE turn transition does *not* occur on possible completion of a "what about"-prefaced interrogative. We are currently investigating our collection of "what about"-prefaced interrogatives and the turns that they inhabit with the aim of determining whether variations in their design features (composition) and/or their sequential placement (position) might account for IEs' different treatments of them. We reserve a report on this important feature of "what about"-prefaced interrogatives for a future occasion.

FOUR STANDARD USES OF " WHAT ABOUT" -PREFACED INTERROGATIVES

If the "what about"-prefaced interrogative does not always or exclusively accomplish questioning *per se*, then what (other) action - or action*s* - does it accomplish? In what follows we describe four standard IR uses of "what about"-prefaced interrogatives: Broadcast news interviewers use "what about"-prefaced interrogatives as components of turns that:

- *pursue a response*, following an IE turn that the IR treats as a non-answer;
- *juxtapose IEs' positions*, in contiguously placed question-answer sequences addressed to two different IEs;

- *invoke a prior agenda* - often attributed to one IE - as organizing a current line of questioning, addressed to another IE;

- *propose membership in a category*, in search of consistency or inconsistency in an IE's position.

In each of these distinct usages, the "what about"-prefaced interrogative contributes to the accomplishment of both the institutionally-specified activity of questioning and the particular action that the questioning turn implements.[6]

Pursuing a Response

Interviewers use one form of "what about"-prefaced interrogative to depict the immediately prior IE turn as an inadequate answer to the previous question, and to pursue an adequate answer to that question. This use of "what about"-prefaced interrogatives is consistent with Greatbatch's account of IR *pursuits* (1986, pp. 108-118). In pursuing the prior turn as a non-answer, the IR selects the prior speaker as next speaker, as can be seen in example (7):

(7) **[MacNeil/Lehrer 07/23/93:4-5]** ((From a "debate" interview on the nomination of Joycelyn Elders as Surgeon General; IR=Jim Lehrer, IE=Walter Faggett, who supports her nomination; the proterm *she* at line 2 refers to Elders; *Mizz James* (line 4) refers to a co-IE, who opposes the nomination.))

```
 1  IR:        Ah: Doctor Faggett, how d'you- what is your::: ah: r-ah::
 2             v:iew:: of:: wh- of: whether or not she h:andled that
 3             defective condom problem correctly in Arkansas¿ >Thuh one
 4             that was from thuh tape, and you heard what Mizz James
 5             just said about it. Th[u h   d e C I  S  I O N]
 6  IE:                              [(Well) she's right on] target. Right.
 7             We have studie:s, Doctor Koenig and Doctor Leevy (.) ah in
 8             San Francisco have good studies, published (0.2) .hh in a
 9             journal in nineteeneightyni::ne .h ah in which is shown::
10             that (.) condoms used consistently and correctly pt have
11             a hundred- close to a hundred per cent (.) efficacy. I:t
12             depends a lo:t (.) on how they are used. Thuh studies that-
13             ah Miss James quotes in summa her articles, pt about three
14             hundred an' fifty patients, .h in Europe, (.) ah very
15             inconsistent use, .hh so again: itsa flaw::ed study, and it's
16             this [kinda] misrepresent[ation [that ( )]
17  IR: —>         [But- ]                  [.h h h[But what] about- what about
18             thuh speci:fic point that was rai:sed at thuh hearings today,
19             h'been raised before:, was rai:sed at thuh hearings today:
20             that it .hh <that some: f:aulty deFECtive condoms were::
21             distributed> to young people in Arkansas:, .hh the Arkansas
22             Health Department (.) under her: u- leadership found ou:t
```

23 about it, .hh did not make a public announcement about it,
24 decided to go ahead 'cuz they- .hh well you hear:d what she
25 said.=Do you think tha[t was] thuh right decision to ma:ke?
26 IE: [Y eh-]
27 (0.5)
28 IE: A(hh)h Know:ing that ah: the use of condoms has only a
29 ten to fourteen per cent efficacy .hh to begin with: a
30 five per cent e:rror weight- rate is really with:in ah::
31 thuh ran:ge of acceptability. And I would (.) would submit
32 hh tha::t ah: F D A ha:s ah:: certified that female condoms
33 are-are useful. .hh But I figure this particular instance
34 ah-it's an overstatement .h of a non issue...

A brief, by no means exhaustive, description of the IR's question and the IE's response spanning lines 1-16 is necessary to appreciate the IR pursuit at lines 17ff. (arrowed): The first of the two IR questions shown here formulates a particular issue (*whether or not she handled that defective condom problem correctly in Arkansas?*, lines 2-3); the question also identifies the particular issue in terms of previous references to it in the broadcast: i.e., *Thuh one that was from thuh tape*, lines 3-4, referring to a pre-recorded report on the nomination hearing, broadcast prior to interview; as well as *you heard what Mizz James just said about it.*, lines 4-5, referring to a co-IE's (James') assessment of Elders' handling of the Arkansas case (as a potentially disqualifying aspect of the Elders' record).

When the IE responds in terms of studies that do not directly relate to the Arkansas case (e.g., lines 7-12, 12-15), focusing on the "flawed" character of those studies, the IR intersects the IE's turn-in-progress (note the overlapping talk at lines 16-17, initiated by the IR at points of the IE's TCU-so-far that are *not* possible completion points) with a distinctive form of "what about"-prefaced interrogative: *But what about...* (arrowed, lines 17ff.). The initial unit (which spans lines 17-24 in the transcript) of the IR's turn re-raises the issue of the distribution of defective condoms in Arkansas, under Elders' direction, as a matter for the IE to address. In doing so, it treats the IE's prior turn as a non-answer to the initial question (see Greatbatch, 1986).[7]

In our collection of "what about"-prefaced interrogatives, those that take the form *But + what about + [nominal]* systematically, and without exception, engage in the activity of pursuing a response. It appears that, in the context of broadcast news interviews, the construction *But what about...* is "virtually dedicated" (cf. Schegloff, 1995, p. 194) to accomplishing this particular activity.

A reconsideration of example (6), above—especially of the utterance *What about Phil Gramm?*—might seem to suggest that it, too, is deployed in pursuit of an answer. There is, however, a significant difference between the instances of *But what about...* (which we characterize as pursuits) and the IR's *What about Phil Gramm?...*, in (6). This difference hinges on the IRs' different treatments of each IE's prior turn: Whereas the IR's *But what about*-prefaced utterance in (7) treats that IE's prior turn as an inadequate answer to the question (that is, the IE has not

addressed the *specific point* regarding the *faulty defective condoms*), in fragment (6) the IR's *What about Phil Gramm?...* does *not* contest the adequacy of that IE's response as an answer to the question. The IR does not, in other words, pursue the IE's assessment of Clinton, as something other than an *extremist*.

Rather, the IR's *What about Phil Gramm?* and its continuation *maintain an activity* that the prior question initiated and constituted one particular instantiation of: The search for people whom the IE considers *extreme,* a category of persons that can have more than one candidate member. In asking *What about Phil Gramm?=Do you think he represents an extreme point of view?* the IR maintains the activity of searching for possible members of that category (see the discussion of "proposing membership in a category," below). Thus, rather than understanding *What about Phil Gramm?...* as a pursuit of the prior question-answer sequence, it is to be understood as the continuation of an activity—proposing membership in a category—that spans multiple sequences (cf. Heritage & Sorjonen, 1994). In this view, the action undertaken by the IR's *What about Phil Gramm?* goes beyond the phenomenon Greatbatch (1986, pp. 108-118) identifies as "pursuing," and the two IR turns in (6) and (7) cannot be treated as undertaking similar actions.

Juxtaposing Perspectives

Interviewers use "what about"-prefaced interrogatives to solicit juxtapositions of IEs' positions on some matter. This usage is characterized by IRs' deployment of the indexical *that* as the nominal following *what about*. Situated just after one IE's response, an IR can accomplish questioning by asking *What about that*, which is typically deployed in conjunction with an address term, to specify a new next speaker (recall, e.g., [2], above). A particular sequential context, involving the participation of multiple IEs, is thus constituted through the design of the IR's "what about"-prefaced interrogative:

1	IR:	Question, addressed to IE1
2	IE1:	Response
3	IR: —>	*What about that* - addressed to IE2
4	IE2:	Response

Interactionally, the *What about that* construction allows the IR to engage two IEs in a *mediated* exchange of alternative (and perhaps contesting) perspectives.

In this sequential environment, IEs' sometimes treat the formulation *What about that* plus an address term as accomplishing questioning in its own right. Fragment (8) is an example of this sort:

(8) [Which Way L.A.? 04/25/95:20-22] ((On possible connections between Republican rhetoric and extremist violence, in the aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing; In this fragment, IE1 (Mark Milman, a leading strategist for the Democratic party), has just contrasted the position of certain Republican members of Congress before and after the bombing, especially with regard to those Republicans' stance toward militias.

IE2 (David Brooks, an editor for the *Wall Street Journal*) has earlier contended that the incident is "not related to Republican versus Democratic politics."))

```
1   IE1:      ...so now wha- we're talkin' about a debate that- that
2             is about how to .hh increase the investigative powers of
3             the F B I:: (.) in dealing with these cases.=but you had met
4             Republican members of Congress (.) before this incident
5             took place .hh saying get off the backs of these militias
6             let's restrict (.) the fa- ability of the Federal government
7             to investigate these militia[s.=so]
8   IR: —>                                [umhm ] .hh what about that
9             eh Mister Brooks.
10  IE2:      Well I think uh we do need to give them more power....
```

The IR's interrogative *what about that* deploys the indexical *that* to refer to the position IE1 has taken, without explicitly formulating that position in any way (on IRs' "formulations", see Heritage, 1985). By responding after the IR selects him as next speaker (line 9), IE2 displays his understanding of the IR's turn as having accomplished questioning. In responding to the IR's question, the IE takes a position on one aspect of IE1's prior turn, the issue of whether the FBI and, more generally, the Federal government (see lines 2-3 and 6, respectively) should have more investigative powers; in doing so, IE2 does not address a potentially more divisive aspect of IE1's turn, the suggestion - implemented through a contrast-structure (cf. *Now ... we're talking about...*, at lines 1-3, and *but you had...*, at lines 3-7) - that Republicans have taken a potentially expedient, inconsistent stance toward the issue. In this instance, then, IE2 treats *what about that* as a solicitation of his viewpoint on (an aspect of) IE1's turn, but does not treat it as having solicited a contrasting perspective from him.

The "selective" character of IE2' response is possible, in part, because *What about that?* has been treated - by the IR and IE2 - as accomplishing questioning. This "free-standing" use of *What about that?* affords the IE a potentially wide range of interpretation due to the unspecified referent of the proterm *that*.

By contrast, in other instances when IRs deploy *What about that?* to elicit a position by one IE on a prior IE's talk, they construct the interrogative form as the *first* unit of a *multi-unit* turn. The turn's subsequent unit(s) can then specify the particular aspect of IE1's turn to which the indexical *that* refers. An example of this sort can be seen in (9):

(9) [MacNeil/Lehrer 7/19/93b:2-3] ((On the firing of FBI Director William Sessions; in lines 1-5, IE1 (George Terwilliger, who was involved with the Attorney General's report investigating Sessions' ethics) characterizes Sessions' refusal to step down, which forced the President to fire him. IE2 is Congressman Don Edwards, a member of the House committee that oversees the FBI; the IR is Charlayne Hunter-Gault.))

1	IE1:	...Ah that's fairly astounding in and of itsel:f to me.
2		I think if thuh President indicates to: .hh a high
3		government official that it's time to go:, then it's
4		time to go. .hh Absent s:ome very articulable (.) ah:
5		inappropriate reason for thuh reques::[t.
6	IR: —>	[.hhh What about
7	—>	that Congressman Edwards. Ah::: the- the abrupt calling
8		back and so on an::d the refusal- uh prompted in part by
9		thuh refusal .hh ah: of uh Mister Sessions to step down.
10		How do you think that part of it was handled?
11	IE2:	.Tch well: that has been h:andled ahm in a mixed way by
12		everybody over thuh past three months. But it was han:dled
13		so: badly (0.2) by former Attorney General Barr:: who'd
14		brought this report ou:t, gave it to reporters, didn't
15		(0.2) ah: even clue in the Director himsel::f....

At lines 6-7, the IR solicits a response to IE1's position by IE2; the IR's turn-so-far is thus similar with the IR turn in example (8). However, in contrast with the instance in (8), the IR in this example extends her turn (lines 7-10), both (i) specifying the particular referent of *that* (lines 7-9) and (ii) posing a particular question for IE2 to address (line 10).

In response, IE2 gives an answer that contrasts with the position taken by IE1. Whereas IE1 has taken the position that Sessions in particular is responsible for the situation that resulted in his refusal to resign and its consequences, IE2 suggests that *everybody* involved shares some burden of the responsibility (lines 11-12); furthermore, IE2 suggests that the handling of the report itself was done *badly* (lines 12-15), a position that not only contrasts with IE1's stance, but could also be taken as a challenge to IE1, who worked for Attorney General Barr in producing the report. Here, then, the IR's *what about that* plus the subsequent formulation, specifying the referent of the indexical *that,* serves to produce an instance of IR-mediated debate between the two IEs.

Invoking an Agenda

When IRs use a "what about"-prefaced interrogative to juxtapose two IEs' perspectives, the utterance has the effect of linking two *contiguous* question-answer sequences, addressed to different IEs. However, this is not the only sequential context in which an IR can solicit one IE's position on statements made by another IE: In a great many other cases, IRs use "what about"-prefaced interrogatives not to juxtapose the position of IE2 with the immediately prior talk by IE1, but rather as a device for invoking another IE's prior—but now remote (rather than contiguous)—talk as an agenda for questioning another, currently-addressed IE. This use of a "what about"-prefaced question thus constitutes a *different sequential context* than in the case of the juxtaposing positions usage:

1 IR: question, addressed to IE1
2 IE1: response
3 IR: —> *what about + [invocation of prior agenda]*, addressed to IE1
4 IE1: response

The crucial difference between this sequential context and that of the juxtaposing positions usage is that, in this case, the "what about"-prefaced interrogative addresses the prior speaker. Thus, to invoke another IE's position, the IR cannot simply *refer* to it with an indexical such as *that* (as in example [8], above); instead the IR must *formulate* the other IE's position. This difference inflects the construction of IRs' "what about"-prefaced interrogatives and the turns they inhabit in significant ways. Consider, for instance, example (10):

(10) [MacNeil/Lehrer 07/19/93a:7-8] ((On President Clinton's "don't ask, don't tell" policy for homosexuals in the military; here the IE (Tanya Domi, a supporter of the policy, and formerly a Captain in the U.S. Army) rebuts the charge of a co-IE (U.S. Army Colonel Bob Maginnis, referred to as *thuh Colonel* at line 10) that it will cause decreases in enlistment.))

1 IE: ...if they're not going to come in: .hh ah: because
2 of this policy .hh then perhaps that's probably best
3 ah in thuh long run I think thuh President wants tuh
4 .hhh set ah: a standard of how people should be treated.
5 I- I 'gree with uh Congressman Frank.=It's not anywhere
6 near what we wanted. .hh But ah he has attempted to move
7 this ah issue [f o rward.]
8 IR: —> [What about] the unit cohe:sion issue.=
9 You're a f:ormer company comma:nder,=your v:iew of what
10 thuh Colonel said.
11 IE: .hhhh Well everyone s:ays right now: that unit cohesion
12 (.) would be: uh denigrated .hhh by: ah allowing openly
13 gay and lesbian people to ser:ve: .hh but in fa:ct every
14 study that's been commissioned by thuh Department of
15 Defense .hh including thuh Government Accounting Office's
16 repor:t .hh has indicated .h that it should be lifted,
17 en that .h <it is on:ly> mere speculation on thuh part
18 of people, .h and we know, and thuh Colonel does know
19 this as well:, .hh is that positive leadership .hh is-
20 is the example of- <by which (.) military people f:ollow.

After Captain Domi has addressed (at lines 1-7) one of the criticisms made by another IE of the new policy, the IR's "what about"-prefaced interrogative (arrowed, at line 8) raises another facet of the policy for her to address, *the unit cohesion issue.* This formulation invokes her co-IE's (Colonel Maginnis's) earlier reference to, and expressed concern for, the policy's effect on "cohesion" (i.e., "We're concerned about cohesion....this is going to damage cohesion." *MacNeil/Lehrer*, 07/19/93a:6).

In the subsequent units of his questioning turn, the IR describes Captain Domi in terms that portray her as comparable to the co-IE, Colonel Maginnis (line 9),[8] and the IR solicits her reaction to the position taken by *thuh Colonel* (lines 9-10). The IR's turn can thus be understood as implementing a particular sort of challenge to Captain Domi's position that the policy is good for the military: First, the IR's turn proposes *the unit cohe:sion issue* as an aspect of the policy that might undermine Captain Domi's position; second, by attributing "cohesion" as a concern to the co-IE (Colonel Maginnis), the IR's turn portrays the co-IE as the source of the challenge, so that the IR's turn may serve to generate disagreement between the two IEs (see Clayman, 1992, pp. 176-178; Greatbatch, 1992, pp. 277-280).

By invoking aspects of Colonel Maginnis's prior-stated (but now sequentially remote) position for Captain Domi to respond to, the IR in effect constitutes one type of a *line of questioning*: Specifically, in this case, having addressed a prior series of questions to Colonel Maginnis to solicit *his* concerns regarding the new policy, the IR deploys the points made by Colonel Maginnis in response as a template for a series of questions addressed to Captain Domi, with the upshot that each of *her* responses can be understood as counterpoint to what the Colonel said earlier.

Another instance of the role that "what about"-prefaced interrogatives can play in constituting a line of questioning can be seen in (11):

(11) [Which Way L.A.? 4/13/95:26-28] ((On proposed legislation to expand legal card-club gambling in California. Here, IR Warren Olney questions Los Angeles Police Department Captain John Higgins, a vice detective; *Mister Carger*, mentioned by the IR at line 3, is a co-IE, who earlier in the interview advocated expansion. In beginning to interview Higgins, the IR has asked about the nature of gambling in Los Angeles and how it would change on implementation of the proposed legislation. At lines 1-2, Higgins completes a response to the question of "How much [illegal gambling] goes on anyway?"))

```
1   IE:      ...but certainly book-making: is uh (.) pretty prevalent
2            throughout the city.
3   IR: —>   Um hmm .h uh:: what about uh uh: Mister Carger ta- Carger's
4            contention that there's enough gambling going on and it's
5            going to go on anyway illegally .h we might as well let it
6            go on legally and uh tax it. get some revenue off it.
7   IE:      Well I think that's a: position a lot of people use
8            (.) when you just worry about chasin' the dollars, and
9            not worrying about thuh quality of li:fe and the impact
10           it has on the community. .hhh I have a report that was...
```

The IR's "what about"-prefaced interrogative links the turn it is a part of (lines 3-6) with two prior question-answer sequences. Most proximately, it builds on the immediately prior question-answer sequence (described above), which has, in effect, involved Higgins in confirming the premise of Carger's position, that illegal

gambling occurs in Los Angeles. At the same time, the "what about"-prefaced interrogative re-presents Carger's position—elicited by the IR in an even earlier question-answer sequenc—for Higgins's response.

Here, then, the "what about"-prefaced interrogative brings a line of questioning, addressed to Higgins, to its culminating question: If Carger is correct regarding the extent of gambling in Los Angeles (as Higgins has just confirmed), then does Higgins also support Carger's proposed solution, i.e., to legalize gambling so as to collect tax revenue on it? Higgins' response rejects his co-IE's position, by characterizing it as popular (i.e., *a: position a lot of people use*, at line 7) but only under specific, undesirable conditions (i.e., *when you just worry about chasin' the dollars...*, at lines 8ff): The contrast structure (*just worry about ..., and not worrying about ...*, lines 8-10) provides an ethical rationale for Higgins's opposition to his co-IE's contention. Moreover, in the next unit of his turn, Higgins invokes *a report* (line 10), as further, "factual" support for his position (data not fully shown). (Cf. example [10], above, for a similar contrastive construction, in which the IE [Captain Domi] differentiates between a popularly-held position [i.e., *everyone s:ays...*, at lines 11-13] and what she presents as evidence that undermines its credibility [i.e., *but in fact every study...*, at lines 13ff.)

The analyses of examples (10) and (11), as well as of comparable instances from other multi-IE interviews, suggest that IRs use "what about"-prefaced interrogatives to invoke an aspect of a prior (but now sequentially remote) agenda, involving IE1, where that prior agenda serves as the template for a current series of questions, addressed to IE2, that constitute a *line of questioning*. In a line of questioning of this particular type, the "what about"-prefaced interrogative recurrently serves as a *subsequent* or *culminating* component (e.g., fragments [10] & [11], respectively) in the line of questioning.

Proposing Membership in a Set

IRs use "what about"-prefaced interrogatives to solicit an IE's confirmation - or rejection - of a nominal object as a proposed member of some categorization device. We have already considered one such instance of this sort, example (6). This usage of "what about"-prefaced interrogatives is *reflexive*: In offering some *X* as a member of a categorization device, the device itself is constituted; at the same time, it is the operation of this categorization that informs the participants' (and the audience members') understanding of the relevance of any particular potential member. To make this concrete: Consider the following representative case, from an interview with Attorney General Janet Reno. In the questioning turns prior to this fragment, the IR asked Reno to comment on whether the government might begin to regulate the level of television violence. In responding, Reno has rejected direct government regulation as a possibility and, instead, has emphasized the need for both the industry and the audience to be self-regulating.

(12) Meet the Press 10/24/93:10

1	IE:	...No:body is immune: .h from: a role: in addressing thuh
2		issue of violence in Ameri[ca.
3	IR: —>	[.hhhh What abou:t sex? (.) Thuh
4		level of sex seen on thuh afternoon soap operas? Is tha:t
5		(.) something that children should be exposed to, and would
6		you (.) take that off: the afternoon hours?
7	IE:	I think you've g- again: have got to loo:k: at working wit
8		the: television industry...

In this sequential context, the IR's *What about sex?* (arrowed, line 3) can be understood as proposing that *sex* is similar—in some way—to *violence*. A determination of *how* they are similar depends on the IR conveying—and the IE and audience recognizing—a coherent link between this questioning turn and the immediately prior agenda. Following a question-answer sequence addressing the possible government regulation of programs with violent content, the IR's reference to *sex* and subsequent specification of it as *the level of sex seen on thuh afternoon soap operas* is hearable as a *second* instance of what can now be appreciated as a more general category: troublesome television content that the IE, in her role as Attorney General, might treat as subject to government regulation. In this way, the IR's "what about"-prefaced interrogative contributes to the realization of this question as linked-to and dependent-on the prior question-answer sequence. Notably, the design of Reno's answer displays her orientation to this as well: Having begun to respond (*I think you've g-*, line 9), Reno re-starts her response to include *again*, invoking her prior response regarding violence, and projecting that her position on this issue will be similar.

DISCUSSION: ON THE AVAILABILITY OF VARIATION IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROGRAMS

Based on preliminary data analyses, we first expected that variations in the deployment of "what about"-prefaced interrogatives might be one basis for differentiating news interview programs, and that expectation motivated our initial investigation. Although subsequent, intensive data analyses suggest that the fundamental interactional nature of these turns (including their composition, their position, and *in toto* the actions that they implement) is consistent across the programs in our data base, we conclude this paper with a brief discussion of how the comparative study of different public affairs programs might profit from investigating the design features of various questioning forms and variations in their use across different broadcasting formats.

This study started with an interest not only in the uses of "what about"-prefaced interrogatives, but also in the ways that their deployment might distinguish the local National Public Radio broadcast *Which Way L.A.?* from its nationally-broadcast television counterparts such as *Nightline* and the *MacNeil/Lehrer News*

Hour (now, after Robin MacNeil's retirement, just *The News Hour*). As for the uses that this interrogative form is put to, we found no differences between programs: Across all the programs in our data base, IRs use "what about"-prefaced interrogatives, and the features of these interrogatives' construction and their uses are robust across the different programs, across different broadcasts within each program, across a variety of topical agendas, and across different IRs and IEs.

These findings provide a preliminary basis for considering one potentially significant difference in IRs' deployments of "what about"-prefaced interrogatives: Comparing *WWLA* with the other news interview programs in our corpus, we find a potentially significant difference in the *frequency* with which IRs deploy "what about"-prefaced interrogatives. It appears that on *WWLA* Warren Olney uses them significantly more often than do his counterparts from the other programs in our data corpus.[9] In fact, the frequency of the "what about"-prefaced interrogative in *WWLA* makes it a readily recognizable trait of the program and Olney's interviewing style. However, variations in frequency of use might simply reflect an IR's personal speaking style or habit rather than an interactionally-significant speaking practice. Although we do not yet have a final account of this issue, we do have some preliminary explanations suggesting that variations in the frequency of this practice may be linked to programming formats as well as constitutive of a particular program's (i.e., *WWLA*'s) tone and character.[10]

We suspect that the apparently more frequent use of "what about"-prefaced interrogatives on *WWLA* may be linked to the program's distinctive format, which involves a greater number of IEs on the broadcast at one time than the other interview programs in our data base. And, in turn, that format is inextricably linked with the program's stated aim of providing in-depth news coverage of, in the words of *WWLA*'s tagline, "issues Southern Californians care about", with a designedly multi-perspectival, problem-solving orientation. Thus host and interviewer Warren Olney describes the *WWLA* format as aimed at "surrounding an issue with multiple points of view."[11] In the discussion that follows, we offer a preliminary attempt at drawing linkages between this goal of *WWLA* as a public affairs program and the interactional practices through which participants on *WWLA* construct their contributions *as* news interview talk. This discussion introduces some themes for subsequent investigation.

We begin by noting that, as (part of) a philosophy of public affairs broadcasting, the goal of "surrounding an issue with multiple points of view" is *fundamentally interactional in character*. For any given broadcast, Olney depends on a number of participants to *instantiate*—interactionally—those "multiple points of view," and he depends on the actions implemented through his questioning turns as the means of managing those participants' contributions to the program and their conduct towards one another. Specifically, as *WWLA* co-producer Daniel Hinerfield describes, "What we're trying to do is make sure that whatever important arguments one guest will make, the others will be able to respond to it" (Collins, 1995, p. 4). In consequence, *WWLA* may be understood as an institutional setting

in which confrontations are not forced but juxtapositions are required (recall, e.g., the differences noted above between examples [8] and [9], above).

In its various uses, the "what about"-prefaced interrogative seems specially suited to meeting this interactional/institutional requirement. Its utility in this regard hinges on what we will call the "what about"-prefaced interrogative's *pointing* character, which we intend in at least two senses. First, the grammatical construction of this interrogative form *directs attention to* the nominal object of *about* as a matter for comment by the addressed interviewee, much as a hunting dog's stance directs attention to the presence and place of game. As an attention-directing device, the "what about"-prefaced interrogative handles one of the basic tasks charged to Olney, the "live" and "on-air" management of multiple IEs' participation in a revolving door panel discussion. With this interrogative form, Olney can invoke (and *re*invoke) a point of view, which may have preceded a particular IE's participation, for comment by that IE (recall the discussion of "Invoking an Agenda," above). Thus, the pointing character of the "what about"-prefaced interrogative —as a device for drawing attention to a particular object of questioning—makes it a powerful questioning practice for the construction and maintenance of an interviewing agenda; indeed, it may contribute to the overhearing audience's sense of an ongoing, coherent, and even "seamless" dialogue, even as different interviewees join and/or leave the program.

The "what about"-prefaced interrogative exhibits a second, related pointing character: This interrogative form allows Olney (and other IRs) to, in effect, *sharpen* a juxtaposition, between two or more interviewees and the alternative perspectives that they may represent. The *What about + [nominal]* format allows the IR to formulate (or refer to, in the case of *What about that?*) the gist of one IE's perspective as the nominal object of the interrogative, for another IE's comment. By presenting one IE's position to another IE for comment, this interrogative form *establishes relationships, potentially of juxtaposition, between co-interviewees and the positions that they represent* (see, e.g., examples [8-11]). Thus presenting the play of multiple opinions - rather than two-sided, agonistic debate - is one interactional product of this form of questioning.[12] Indeed, we propose that it is this organization of interviewee participation, more generally, that contributes to the character of *WWLA* as a sort of "town forum" in which IEs' alternative perspectives are mediated by the IR's questioning turns, and this focus differentiates the "content" of *WWLA* from that of the other news interview programs in our corpus.

As this concluding discussion suggests, this outcome (or the lack of it) is the result of a process that cannot be accomplished in the abstract, as if it were exclusively a matter of alternative broadcasting philosophies, but instead must be progressively talked into being through situated interactional practices whose organization and consequences are available for detailed analysis. Further advances in our understanding of significant variations in interviewing styles, the broadcasting philosophies that underlie them, and the public affairs programs with which these

are associated will depend on just such detailed, interactionally-grounded analyses.

CONCLUSION

We have described a particular form of interrogative, the "what about"-prefaced interrogative, and four standard uses of it in the context of the broadcast news interview. In characterizing the form and the actions that IRs implement through it, we have considered the composition and position of IRs' turns, as well as IEs' responses to them, as resources for our analysis. Such an investigation further underscores the importance of understanding utterances in terms of their *relevances as and for actions*, and in terms of the *sequential contexts* in which they occur, two themes that are systematically emphasized in conversation analysis and related forms of inquiry into talk-in-interaction.

At the same time, we have sought to extend that analysis - in what is presently a preliminary and speculative manner - by considering some possible linkages between the recurrent uses of the "what about"-prefaced interrogative and the broadcast philosophy that underlies a particular public affairs program, *Which Way L.A.?* In doing so, we aim to suggest the possibility for and the desirability of grounding analyses of variations in the ideological "content" of different public affairs programs (which are typically treated as matters of *mass* communication) in the details of interactions between IRs and IEs and among IEs (which might be conventionally analyzed as instances of *interpersonal* communication). Though the claims made here in this regard are admittedly preliminary in character, they seem sufficiently robust to encourage subsequent investigation of public affairs programs along the lines sketched in this report.

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APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

This paper uses transcript conventions originally developed by Gail Jefferson and now widely used by analysts of talk-in-interaction. In our transcripts, speakers are identified in terms of the institutional roles of *interviewer* (IR) and *interviewee* (IE). The following list explains the transcription symbols used here:

IR: What about <u>that</u>?	*Underlined items* were markedly stressed.
IR: What about tha::t?	*Colon(s)* indicate prolonging of the prior sound.
IR: What- what about that?	*A hyphen* denotes a "cut-off" sound.
IR: What about .hh that?	*Strings of "h" preceded by a period* mark audible inbreath. The longer the string, the longer the inbreath.
IR: What about (0.3) that?	*Numbers in parentheses* indicate elapsed silence in tenths of seconds; a period denotes a micropause of less than 0.2 seconds.
IR: What about that?= IE: =Well Jim... IR: What about th[at? IE: [That's not so.	*Equal signs* indicate one event following another with no intervening silence. *Brackets* mark the onset of simultaneous talk.

Punctuation (periods, question marks, and commas) denote changes in intonation, rather than conventional grammatical units.

IR: What about that.	*Periods indicate falling intonation*, but not necesarily the end of a sentence.
IR: What about that?	*Question marks indicate rising inflection*, but not necessarily a question.
IR: What about that,	*Commas indicate continuing intonation*, but not necessarily between clauses of sentences.

For a more detailed account of transcription conventions, see Atkinson and Heritage (1984, pp. ix-xvi). The transcripts presented in this paper have been simplified from more detailed originals.

NOTES

[1] See the Appendix for an explanation of the transcription symbols used in this paper.
[2] *Turn constructional units* (or TCUs) are the grammatical "building blocks" with which speakers set out to construct turns at talk. These units include sentential, clausal, phrasal and lexical constructions; see Sacks, et al. (1974) and Ford & Thompson (1996).
[3] KCRW is the Santa Monica-affiliate of National Public Radio.
[4] Accounts of *turn-taking* in the news interview (as well as in other institutional contexts) are premised on pioneering work by Sacks, et al. (1974), who described the organization of ordinary conversation in terms of a locally-managed turn-taking system, and argued that the organization of turn-taking in other, institutional contexts could be understood as *specializations of* this most basic system (see also, Drew & Heritage, 1992, pp. 25-27).
[5] The management of turn-transition - from IR to IE, on the production of questioning - is the *interactional* product of (i) conduct by IRs - in designing each successive unit of their turns to be recognizable as accomplishing questioning or not - *and* (ii) the withholding of conduct by IEs - who refrain from talking until an IR's turn-so-far accomplishes questioning. See Clayman (1988), Heritage & Greatbatch (1991, pp. 99-101), and Heritage & Roth (1995, p. 18).
[6] The four standard uses of "what about"-prefaced interrogatives that we identify and describe in this article are systematic and massively recurrent in our data corpus. However, it would be premature to claim that these four standard uses are the only standard uses of this interrogative form; indeed, we anticipate that there may be other systematic, recurrent uses, which await identification and analysis.
[7] Note that, in doing so, the IR starts and restarts his turn at least three times (*But- ... .hhh But what about- what about thuh...*), a phenomenon that Schegloff (1986), studying the production of overlapping talk in ordinary conversation, characterizes as a "recycled turn beginning." In example (7), the IR's recyclings of *But* and *what about* underscore the importance of these particular lexical items to the action that the IR undertakes.
[8] On the relevance and consequentiality of the IR's description of the IE as *a former company commander*, see Roth (1998).
[9] We say "It appears...", thus hedging this claim, in acknowledgement of the complex issues - as raised by Schegloff (1993) - that investigators must address in order to undertake quantitative analyses of interactional conduct (see also, Heritage & Roth, 1995). Our analysis of "what about"-prefaced interrogatives does not depend on a quantitative assessment; however, claims about variation in the relative frequency of the use of this interrogative form across broadcast formats do. Rather than undertaking such a quantitative analysis, this article contributes a foundation on which it might be built: If the aim of subsequent research is to evaluate variations in the *frequencies* with which different IRs deploy "what about"-prefaced interrogatives (cf. Schegloff, 1993, pp. 102-103), then (i) describing the construction of the "what about"-prefaced interrogative contributes to our understanding of the appropriate *numerator*; and (ii) describing an array of its standard uses contributes to an understanding of the *denominator*, by beginning to specify what Schegloff (1993, p. 103) refers to as the "environments of relevant possible occurrence" for the phenomenon.
[10] Some anecdotal evidence that the practice is linked to the format and style of the program as opposed to the interviewer's personal habits can be found by comparing interviewer Olney's questioning practices in a live debate between two public figures on a California ballot initiative (*WWLA*, 22 October 1996). Although Olney moderated this debate as an

installment of *WWLA*, the format differed significantly from the usual call-in organization: The program was cast *as* a debate, with just two guests; and it was held in the ballroom of an elite hotel, with the interviewer and guests speaking from podiums before a co-present audience. Of note in the part of the debate conducted in interview format is the absence of any "what about"-prefaced interrogatives, even when Olney sought to elicit one debater's response to another's positions. The differences of format, of the participants' co-presence, and of the formality of the occasion may all be significant in this absence.

[11] Interview (by D.O.) of Warren Olney, November 10, 1996.

[12] For a critique of public affairs programs' over-reliance on two-sided, agonistic debate (typically pitting Democrat versus Republican) and an analysis of how it limits public, democratic discourse about politics, see Croteau & Hoynes (1994). Media critics have lauded *WWLA* for breaking from this convention of public affairs reportage. For example, according to Marde Gregory, Associate Director of UCLA's Center for Communication Policy, *WWLA* "explores every possible point of view, not just 'both' points of view, allowing the listener to make his [or her] own decisions..." (quoted in Collins, 1995, p. 1)

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