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Reasons for Reason-giving in a Public-Opinion Survey*

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores why respondents to a telephone public-opinion survey often give reasons for answering as they do, even though reason-giving is neither required nor encouraged and it is difficult to see the reasons as attempts to deal with disagreement. We find that respondents give reasons for the policy claims they make in their answers three times as frequently as they give reasons for value or factual claims, that their reasons tend to involve appeals to personal experience, and that they often talk about their thought processes, especially when the evidentiary stakes are high. We then explore several ways of explaining these findings. We suggest that one useful approach is to see the reason-giving in the survey interviews as deliberative, reflexive argumentation of the sort described as 'critical thinking.' We further suggest that the reason such argumentation is often conducted out loud in the interviews, rather than internally, is that it functions in the service of rhetorical ethos, in particular the need to display the fact that one is human, with human autonomy and agency. Doing this may be particularly important in contexts such as anonymous survey interviews in which people are at risk of being treated like machines.

KEY WORDS: critical thinking, deliberation, ethos, reason, survey

INTRODUCTION

The following excerpts from transcripts of anonymous telephone public-opinion survey interviews raise the issues we deal with in this paper. In each excerpt, an interviewer, reading from a script, asks a respondent to answer a multiple-choice question. The interviewer will encode the answers by circling the number next to 'better off,' 'same,' 'worse off,' 'don't know,' or 'refused/NA' on her script, in the first example; the number next to 'agree,' 'disagree,' 'don't know,' or 'refused/NA' in the second; and the number next to 'strong' or 'not very strong' in the third.[1] The interviewer has not asked the respondent to explain or justify answers previously and will not do so in these cases; once she[2] encodes the answer she will move immediately to the next question on the questionnaire in front of her (probably signaling the transition with 'okay'). In examples (1)–(3), we have highlighted the parts of the answers that are not relevant to the interviewer's goal.

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(1) Interviewer: Now looking ahead, do you think that a year from now you and your family living there will be better off financially, worse off, or about the same?
Respondent: Probably worse off *because I will have two kids in college. One of them next year.*

(2) Interviewer: It is proposed that Texas pass a law requiring everyone riding on motorcycles to wear helmets. Do you agree or disagree with requiring helmets?
Respondent: Yes, *I never rode a motorcycle, but there's plenty of head injuries and you can get killed that way.*

(3) Interviewer: Would you call yourself a strong Republican or a not very strong Republican?
Respondent: *Uh, I'm a member of the Young Republicans at school, so* I guess strong (0.5), strong.

In these segments, the respondent answers the question and, in the highlighted portion, gives a reason for his or her answer. The connection between claim and reason is often signaled explicitly, with *since, so*, or *because* (Fisher, 1988). The reason has not been requested, will not be acknowledged, and will not change the course of the interview conversation or even the wording of the interviewer's next contribution. The respondents represented in examples (1)–(3) are not atypical in doing this. In fact, almost nine out of ten respondents to this survey gave at least one unsolicited reason of this kind, and many did so over and over. We wonder why people do this.

Giving reasons is sometimes claimed to be a way of anticipating and/or repairing disagreement among interlocutors (Jacobs and Jackson, 1982; Jacobs and Jackson, 1989; van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson and Jacobs, 1993), and it is thus crucial in many conversational genres. But why should reason-giving occur in a survey interview like this one, in which agreement is not the goal, disagreement not an issue, and extra talk of any sort irrelevant to the task? Why do survey respondents seem to be compelled to give reasons for their answers, even when their reasons are not solicited, when their interlocutors are extremely unlikely to express disagreement, when their reasons receive minimal, if any, uptake from interviewers, and when giving reasons slows the task for interviewer and respondent alike?

We will be concerned in what follows with unsolicited reason-giving by 36 respondents in the course of an anonymous telephone public-opinion survey. Thirty-two of these respondents (or 89%) provided at least one unsolicited reason during the interview; many provided more. Our corpus consists of 174 responses that include unsolicited reasons. We first characterize the reasons and the interview questions to which they were responses. Then we suggest several ways of answering the question why

unsolicited reasons should be so common in the interviews. We show that unsolicited reasons perform functions related to the demands of conversation in general (Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2000) and telephone talk in particular, to linguistic politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987), to deliberative 'critical thinking,' and to rhetorical ethos.

This project is situated in several related lines of research. In linguistics and anthropology, discourse analysts and ethnographers of communication have asked questions about the social functions and outcomes of argumentative conversation. Brenneis (1988) provides an overview of much of this work. Schiffrin (1984), for example, describes the rapport-building function of argumentative talk among American Jews; M. H. Goodwin (1983), Maynard (1986), Sheldon (1993) and others have studied children's disputes; Grimshaw (1990) and Briggs (1996) are collections of studies of conflict in discourse by sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists, respectively. Work by conversation analysts has addressed how argumentative strategies emerge in the sequential organization of conversation (Atkinson and Drew, 1979; Schiffrin, 1985; Goodwin and Goodwin, 1990). Our project contributes to this ongoing attempt to characterize how talk is organized and what it does in the world, and it shares with most of these studies its methodological reliance on discourse analysis, the close analysis of naturally-occurring speech, taped and transcribed.

Our study differs from these, however, in that we are not studying disputes, even friendly ones. We are examining reason-giving not in the context of conflict but in the context of a genre in which conflict almost never becomes immediately relevant. Although the survey-interview respondents sometimes object, occasionally forcefully, to the length of the survey and to the options they are given for some answers, the interviewers almost never express disagreement with the respondents about their answers. Since arguing about answers would only slow the interview down, and interviewers are paid by the completed interview rather than by the hour, there is little motivation for interviewers to discuss respondents' answers with them. In the 36 fifteen- to forty-five-minute interviews from which our corpus is drawn, there is only one instance of open disagreement about an answer, which occurs in an interview with a very uncooperative respondent whom the interviewer is humoring by engaging in off-script conversation with him. An interviewer whose supervisor heard her expressing disagreement with a respondent would probably lose her job. Reason-giving in our data is thus not connected to the signaling or resolution of conflict in the same way as it is in studies of 'conflict talk,' although it is possible that conflict is relevant in some other way.

We are looking at a genre of talk, scripted anonymous telephone interviewing, that is both very highly constrained and completely natural. (That is to say that while the conversation is designed to collect numerical data for quantitative survey research, it is not set up for the purposes of research such as ours.) The overall structure of the conversation and the sequence

of topics are identical from interview to interview, except for the systematic rotation of certain topics: the interviewer reads questions from the script, most of which are in 'fixed-alternative' (multiple-choice) format, the respondent answers them, and the interviewer records the answers, encoding the fixed-alternative answers as numbers and attempting to jot down the answers to open-ended questions verbatim. Interviewers are trained to stray as little as possible from the script, and they are paid, as we have said, for completing a quota of interviews quickly, not for drawing respondents out in conversation. In its focus on interview talk, our study adds to the considerable literature on research interviewing in general (Wolfson, 1976; Briggs, 1986; Mishler, 1986) and to a small but growing body of discourse-analytic literature on survey research in particular (Johnstone, 1991; Johnstone, Ferrara and Bean, 1992; Bean and Johnstone, 1994; Houtkoop-Steenstra, 1995, 2000; Schwarz, 1996). To the extent that answer-justification might influence answers, this work should also be of interest to scholars concerned with improving the validity of survey research techniques (Dijkstra and van der Zouwen, 1982; Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2000; Schwarz, 1996).

In rhetoric and argumentation research, there is growing interest in empirical, descriptive studies of conversational argument. Drawing on Conversation Analysis and speech act theory, Jacobs, Jackson, and their coworkers have developed a way of explaining how certain conversational moves get interpreted and responded to as arguments (Jacobs and Jackson, 1982; Jacobs and Jackson, 1989; van Eemeren et al., 1993). These are often moves oriented to the resolution of actual or potential disputes, although argument, and moves in argument, can serve other pragmatic ends as well. The general point is that 'the standpoints that get expressed and taken up for argument have their sense and relevance established by the purposes of the activity in which they occur' (van Eemeren et al., 1993, p. 94). Like these scholars, we are interested in describing the forms and functions of reason-giving in naturalistic (in our case, completely natural) data, and we share their interest in seeing the meaning of argument as arising from its context, asking how reason-giving in survey interviews is related to the purposes of the survey interview. The question is a particularly interesting one in this case, in that, as we have pointed out, reason-giving in the interviews is unlikely to be oriented to resolving conversational troubles related to dispute. We will need to look at the 'purposes of the activity' on several levels.

In that we look at the relationship between question-types and modes of justification in answers, our study also articulates with other studies of reason-giving and argumentative 'field' (Fisher, 1981; Rieke, 1981; Willbrand, 1981; Benoit and Lindsey, 1987). These scholars and others have explored the link between types and methods of reason-giving and argumentative genre. Fisher (1981) explores this theoretically. Benoit and

Lindsey (1987) investigated texts from various fields and found strong correlations between field and reason types.

In what follows, we begin by describing the survey interviews we are studying. Then we describe our corpus of unsolicited reasons drawn from the interviews, asking and answering two questions about it. First, in what contexts do respondents provide unsolicited reasons for their answers? We answer this question by examining the kinds of claims questions ask respondents to make: claims of fact, claims of policy, and claims of value. Second, what kinds of reasons do respondents provide? We answer this question by looking at whether the responses involved appeals to sentiment, fact, value, authority, cause and effect, analogy, or alternatives, and at whether the responses include qualifiers, reflection on the question, or reflection on the respondent's thought process. In addition, we look at how many of the reasons accompanied 'don't know' responses. We then discuss several possible reasons for the presence of unsolicited reasons in the interviews.

THE TEXAS POLL

In the late 1980s, when our interviews were recorded, the Texas Poll was sponsored by Harte-Hanks Communication. Each quarterly survey included questions asked by the Texas A&M University Public Policy Resources Laboratory (affiliated with the political science department), which conducted the poll. (Texas Poll operations have since moved and are under new sponsorship.) The answers to these questions were syndicated to the press. In addition, the survey asked questions for public agencies and academic researchers, who paid to have their questions included and for statistical analyses of the answers. Commercial business such as marketing research was not accepted. Respondents each quarter were approximately 1,000 residents of Texas, selected by means of a random telephone 'digit sampling frame.' Interviewers were trained and paid by the Public Policy Resources Laboratory. Most were college students, most were women, most were around 20 years old, and most were from middle to upper-middle class urban or suburban families. No attempt was made to match interviewers and respondents demographically, except when a respondent requested to be interviewed in Spanish; the bilingual interviewers were Hispanic Americans.

Like other such surveys, the Texas Poll is a standardized, scheduled interview (all respondents are meant to answer the same questions, and the wording and order of the questions is specified), which includes both open-ended and fixed-alternative questions. Interviews are structured around a schedule of questions which combines elements of a flow chart with elements of a script. Once the telephone is answered, the interview begins with an introduction by the interviewer and a question about whose

birthday is most recent which is designed to randomize which household member gets interviewed. If the appropriate person is the one who answered the phone, and she or he agrees, the questions begin; if not, the right person is summoned or arrangements are made for a callback.

Questions are asked in topical sets. In the survey we will discuss, questions include, for example, a set about how various public officials were performing, a set about skin cancer, a set about the supercollider which was then planned for construction in Texas, and a set about abortion. Whether or not some questions are asked depends on the answers to others (for example, if a person had never heard of the supercollider, no further questions about it were asked), and questions in some sets are rotated to minimize effects of question order. The questionnaire prescribes exact wording for the introductory portion of the interview and for each question, as well as for topic shifts between sets of questions ('On a different topic;' 'On another subject;' 'Now we want to ask some questions about families'). If it starts promptly and if nothing occurs except for question-asking and – answering, an interview lasts about 20 minutes. Not all are that short, however. The tapes on which the interviews were recorded lasted 45 minutes, and some interviews were longer than that.

For this analysis, we selected 36 interviews, taped and transcribed, from the January, 1989 run of the poll. These were chosen, for the purposes of another project, to include at least one from each of the 24 interviewers who conducted the survey as well as seven additional interviews by one of the female interviewers and five additional interviews by one of the male interviewers. There are of course 36 different respondents, since no one is interviewed twice. All the respondents in our sample are Anglo-American residents of Texas; they include men and women of a variety of ages and income and education levels.[3]

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Our primary analytical method is qualitative discourse analysis (Schiffrin, 1994; Johnstone, 2000; Johnstone, 2002). Discourse analysis is a heuristic approach to the analysis of linguistic data which adapts systematic approaches to close reading from literary studies, cultural anthropology, and descriptive linguistics. Discourse analysis shares with 'grounded theory' approaches to social research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) the idea that analytical validity is best approximated through repeated and systematic attempts to explore the fine details of social action and its situated, particular, local meaning to the people engaged it in. Discourse analysis differs from some grounded theory research in that the 'data' of discourse analysis is discourse: actual language, written or transcribed. Like conversation analysts (Ten Have, 1999) discourse analysts find the most reliable source of insight into what people are doing in social interaction

to lie in what they are saying. However, unlike many conversation analysts, most discourse analysts are willing to go beyond the particular text or transcript at hand in the attempt to explain the details of that text or transcript. In fact, many discourse analysts systematically query multiple aspects of context. While conversation analysts often focus exclusively on text-building and interpretive strategies that emerge in the course of interaction, discourse analysts ask questions about other, more sedimented, fixed sources of potential meaning such as genre and relatively durable social roles and cultural beliefs.

In order not to lose sight of the fact that the same linguistic move can do different things in different contexts, and that no two contexts are identical, discourse analysts do not start with the kinds of pre-defined coding schemes that are characteristic of content analysis (Berelson, 1952). In other words, we are reluctant, until relatively late in the analytical process, to separate form from 'content' by abstracting away from the linguistic material at hand. Instead, we allow analytical categories to emerge in an iterative process of close reading that involves querying each data point (each question-answer-unsolicited response) with this general question in mind: Why did this particular respondent answer in this particular way? In our case, the close reading was collaborative, so that what replaces formal measures of inter-coder reliability is an iterative, critical process of co-interpretation throughout the analysis.

CONTEXTS FOR UNSOLICITED REASONS

As mentioned above, 32 of the 36 respondents (or 89%) provided at least one unsolicited reason for an answer. The number of unsolicited reasons in these interviews ranged from one to twenty. As Table 1 shows, the 36 surveys included a total of 3,960 questions, of which 174, or 4.4%, were given answers that included unsolicited reasons.

The questions in the survey asked respondents to make either factual, policy, or value claims. Factual questions asked for some sort of objective

Table 1. Percentage of answers including unsolicited reasons by type of claim required

Type of claim required by question	Total answers to questions of this type in the 36 interviews	Number of answers including unsolicited reasons	Percentage of answers including unsolicited reasons
Fact	3168	119	3.7
Value	612	30	4.9
Policy	180	25	13.8
Total	3960	174	4.4

information, either personal or impersonal. For example, a personal factual claim question is, 'Do you regularly use a tanning booth or a sun lamp to work on your tan?' A policy question required respondents to advocate a course of public policy: 'Would you agree or disagree with a law that would require a one week waiting period before a hand gun could be purchased?' A value question asked the respondent to judge the goodness of something: 'How would you rate the job George Bush has done since the election-excellent, good, only fair, or poor?' Overall, there were 88 factual questions, 17 policy questions, and 5 value questions, for a total of 110 questions in the survey.

Fact and value questions were answered with reasons at roughly the same rate: 4.0% of the impersonal fact answers and 3.4% of the personal fact answers included unsolicited reasons, and 4.9% of the value answers included unsolicited reasons. Answers to policy questions, however, included unsolicited reasons at over three times this rate: 13.8% of the policy answers included unsolicited reasons.

TYPES OF UNSOLICITED REASONS

In a study asking people to say how they would convince a hostage-taker to release hostages, Rieke (1981) found that adults used several types of appeals. They sometimes appealed to authority, as when they said things like 'This court has judged that your holding of the hostages is against national law.' Alternatively, they appealed to social consensus or the applying of group pressure; to analogy ('How would you like it if, uh, if we held some of your people hostage and refused to let your brother or your friend see you?') or to moral obligation ('Well, first of all, they don't belong to you.'). We found that in addition to using these modes of appeal, Texas Poll respondents also appealed to sentiment, belief, personal fact, impersonal fact, and cause. An example of an appeal to sentiment is 'Uh, I'd just have to say fair *since I'm not real wild about him*,' in response to the question of how Bill Clements was doing as governor of Texas. The reason this respondent gives for making the claim 'fair' is that she is 'not real wild about him.' In contrast, one respondent answered the question about how George Bush was doing in office by stating that '*He just got elected, so*, uh, I guess good.' This respondent draws upon a fact, 'he just got elected' as grounds for his claim that Bush is doing a good job. Some appeals were to beliefs, as when one respondent said '*I don't believe in abortion*,' when asked about the circumstances under which abortion should be legal. An example of an appeal to cause is this response to a survey question that asked if the respondent had heard much about lung cancer lately: '*Uh, since AIDS it's been a little bit less, so* I'd say uh medium.' Table 2 displays which modes of appeal were most common in unsolicited reasons, across question types.

Table 2. Types of appeals used in unsolicited reqsons by types of claims required

Type of claim required by question: / Type of appeal used in reason:	Personal fact		Impersonal fact		Value		Policy	
	# of interviews	# of reasons	# of interviews	# of reasons	# of interviews	# of reasons	# of interviews	# of reasons
sentiment	5	5	5	6	3	3	3	3
personal fact	14	23	7	8	6	6	2	2
impersonal fact	0	0	5	5	3	4	4	7
value	0	0	1	1	3	3	4	4
authority	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	2
alternatives	4	4	3	3	1	1	4	5
cause	1	1	11	17	5	6	5	5
analogy	5	8	0	0	1	1	2	2

Several observations suggest themselves on the basis of this analysis. First, personal fact is the most common mode of appeal in the unsolicited reasons. People say things about themselves, in other words, to explain why they are answering as they are. This is particularly the case when people are asked about themselves: when people are asked about facts about themselves, they give reasons for their answers involving other facts about themselves. Twenty-three of the 174 reasons we studied were of this kind. An example is (4):

(4) Interviewer: We are interested in how people are getting along financially these days. Would you say that you and your family living there are better off or worse off than a year ago?
Respondent: *Since I'm retired and drawing a Social Security check*, I guess I'm in the uh, the same.

People also appeal to facts about themselves in other contexts, when giving answers that make claims about impersonal facts, values, and, to a lesser extent, policy.

Although, as noted, people relatively often give reasons related to their own authority, rooted in their own experience, appeals to authority other than the authority of the speaker him- or herself are rare in our corpus, no matter what type of claim is called for. Also relatively rare overall are appeals to values – though it should be noted that appeals to values would be unlikely in connection with claims about facts in any case (arguing about what is true on the basis of what should be true apparently seems fallacious to people), and most of the questions required claims about facts.

META-THINKING

As we studied the responses, we noticed that some of the extra talk in the answers involved what we call *meta-thinking*. We use this label when the respondent mitigates a claim or talks about his or her own thinking process or knowledge state, or about the question itself. For example, one respondent said '*I'm too uneducated to tell you*' in response to a question about nuclear energy. Meta-thinking took several different forms: qualification, when respondents used phrases such as *I guess* and *I think* which mitigate the knowledge claim being made; *self-reflection*, when respondents made comments about themselves; *comment on question*, when respondents directly commented on the question; and *don't know* when the respondents talked about why they did not know the answer. Instances of meta-thinking, while they are not explicit reasons for answers, also appear to serve as justifications for respondents' answering as they did; they seemed to us to be worth considering as part of the same general phenomenon.

As Table 3 shows, meta-thinking of all kinds is most common in

Table 3. Types of meta-thinking corresponding to types of claims required

Type of claim required by question: / Type of meta-thinking in response:	Personal fact		Impersonal fact		Value		Policy	
	# of interviews	# of instances	# of interviews	# of instances	# of interviews	# of instances	# of interviews	# of instances
qualifier	4	5	13	19	4	5	3	4
self-reflection	0	0	13	18	4	4	1	1
reflection on questions	0	0	4	4	2	2	2	2
don't know	0	0	13	16	8	9	4	5

responses to questions that ask the respondents to make factual claims about things other than themselves. Whether people do or do not know the answers to such questions, they are more likely to talk about the questions and their state of knowledge in this context than when they are asked about themselves or asked to make value or policy claims. This may have to do with the fact that the evidentiary stakes are highest in responses to impersonal factual questions: you can be wrong about answers to questions like these in a way you cannot be wrong in your answers to questions about yourself or about what is good or bad or what policies should be adopted. This could explain the increased use of qualifiers in this setting, as people try to lower the stakes somewhat by mitigating their claims. Why it should lead to increased thinking aloud, though, is not obvious. We return to this question later on.

REASONS FOR REASONS

To summarize, we would like to be able to suggest explanations for the following observations to which our study gives rise:

1. People give reasons for claims even when they are not required to and when it is not obvious what purpose it serves in the activity.
2. The survey respondents give reasons for policy claims three times as frequently as they give reasons for value or factual claims.
3. In the reasons overall, respondents appeal to their personal experience, not to external authority.
4. Respondents talk about their thought processes, especially when the evidentiary stakes are high.

In what follows, we explore three avenues of explanation. The first has to do with the possible relationship between reason-giving and the demands of conversation, particularly conversation over the telephone, regarding turn-taking and linguistic politeness. The second has to do with the role of argument in conversation, and with the possibility that conflict-management may not be the only reason for the conversational display of processes of reasoning. The third has to do with the role of overt, verbalized deliberation in the creation of rhetorical ethos.

Managing the floor and being polite. Telephone talk is unlike face-to-face conversation. For one thing, telephone talk is missing many of the paralinguistic cues on which people rely in face-to-face talk to tell whose turn it is to talk and when the current speaker's turn is over. Because gesture and facial expression are not available, people speaking on the phone sometimes need other ways to show whose turn it is and when one's turn is over. The survey interviews we are studying are highly repetitive in structure, with the interviewer controlling the flow of topics and turns to talk, so turn-taking cues can come from the structure of the question (it is the

respondent's turn to answer once the list of alternatives in the question is over) or via discourse markers (Schiffrin, 1987) such as *okay* and *now* that signal that the interviewer is starting a new question. If respondents give only the answers they are asked for (one choice from a list of alternatives, or a short phrase in answer to an open-ended question), then it is also clear when the respondent has completed his or her turn.

A potential turn-taking problem arises, however, if the respondent is hesitant about how to answer. Since silent hesitation could be misinterpreted as not having heard or understood the question, hesitations need to be filled with audible indications that the respondents have heard the question and are in the process of answering. Some of the anticipatory (i.e. before the answer) reason-giving in the interviews may serve this function. 'Thinking aloud' may, in other words, sometimes be a way of showing that one is getting ready to answer. This explanation does not work, however, for reason-giving that occurs *after* the answer to the question. This sort of reason-giving can in fact blur the boundaries of turns at talk, since the interviewer has reason to expect the respondent's turn to end with the answer to her question.

On a more general level, interviewers and respondents are both constrained by the expectations for linguistic 'politeness' (Brown and Levinson, 1987) that pertain to all conversation. Interactants expect one another to balance their need to be treated in a friendly, equal way (their 'positive face') with their need not to be imposed on (their 'negative face'). Since 'cold calling' of the sort the survey requires is felt by most Americans to be an egregious threat to negative face (that is, an enormous imposition), the survey's script and the interviewers' behavior include many ways of redressing this threat, many extra indications of respect, hesitancy to impose, and friendliness.[4] Respondents do not have the same need to make extra moves to express politeness, since they are the ones being imposed on. In fact, in some cases, they apparently feel free to act rudely and condescendingly. But they are obviously still sensitive to the fact that the one-word answers they are asked to provide can sound brusque and insufficiently friendly. One-word or one-phrase answers can also sound insufficiently informative (Grice, 1975), even though, from the perspective of the interviewers and their employers, such answers are precisely informative enough. This is because people bring to the survey conversation expectations from more casual, friendly, genres of interaction. Houtkoop-Steenstra (2000) has observed in her work on standardized survey interviews that respondents interact with interviewers using the rules of mundane conversation, even though the rules of standardized interviewing differ significantly. So, for some respondents, giving reasons may be related to the felt demands for politeness and cooperativity in conversation.[5]

Arguing and disagreeing. The demands for politeness and cooperativity help explain, then, why respondents sometimes say more than they need

to in the interviews. We still need to ask, however, why politeness and cooperativity should be expressed in exactly this way – through reason-giving. Since reason-giving is often thought of as an indication that argumentation is in process, we are led to consider the role of argumentation in conversation.

As Jacobs and Jackson (1982) point out, argument often arises in conversations in which people have not set out to talk about disagreement (as they do, for example, in formal debate or conflict-mediation). Jacobs and Jackson draw on the Conversation Analytic insight that agreement is 'preferred' over disagreement in conversation, so that disagreement or potential disagreement has to be pointed to and worked on in ways agreement does not. As they put it, 'Our central empirical claim is that the structure of conversational argument results from the occurrence of disagreement in a rule system built to prefer agreement,' so that 'conversational arguments are, first and foremost, disagreement-relevant speech acts' (p. 224). Arguments are 'repair mechanisms,' in other words (van Eemeren et al., 1993, p. 95) that identify and bridge 'disagreement spaces' in talk.

Jacobs and Jackson are clearly right about one thing argument does in conversation. But can it be said that reasons have this function in the survey interviews? It could, of course, be claimed that disagreement is *potentially* relevant with every question, since there are multiple choices for its answer, but if our only evidence that disagreement is *actually* relevant is the fact that respondents give reasons, then we are simply begging the question as to the function of reasons. And, as we have pointed out, there is no independent evidence that disagreement is at issue in the surveys, no independent evidence that, for either interviewer or respondent, agreement or disagreement has any bearing on the outcome of the conversation. Ideally, respondents should not have any idea whether interviewers agree with them or not, and interviewers are trained – and almost always manage – not to react any differently to a response they agree with than to one they disagree with.

For Jacobs and Jackson and their colleagues, argument is a process that takes place in talk, not in individuals' minds. In their words, 'Argument is not a process whereby a single individual privately arrives at a conclusion; it is a procedure whereby two or more individuals publicly arrive at agreement' (Jacobs and Jackson, 1982, p. 215). This is a theoretical axiom, not an empirical finding, so empirical results such as ours bear on it only indirectly. We think, though, that it may be useful in coming to understand reason-giving in our data to explore the idea that argument might sometimes be connected to respondents' arriving at answers in the first place, rather than (or sometimes maybe in addition to) a way of situating already arrived at answers in 'disagreement spaces.' We think it may be useful, in other words, to explore the role of deliberative argument in conversation.

Deliberation, ethos and humanness. The acts of reason-giving in the survey answers might be viewed as instances of critical thinking. Rieke and Sillars (1997, p. 9) describe critical thinking as 'a mini-debate you carry on with yourself.' They differentiate critical thinking from argumentation by the fact that it is internal and personal rather than external and public: 'While argumentation is a social process (audience-centered), [critical thinking] involves engaging individuals in making up their minds on how to act through communication with other people' (Rieke and Sillars, 1997, p. 8). Others in informal logic and critical thinking characterize the latter as the justification of beliefs or reflective thought (van Eemeren, Grootendorst and Henkemans, 1996, p. 165). Of particular interest to informal logicians has been Fisher's (1988, p. 131) 'Assertability Question': 'What argument of evidence would justify me in asserting the conclusion C?' Further, Siegel (1988, p. 34) defines a critical thinker as one who 'must be able to assess reasons and their ability to warrant beliefs, claims and actions properly.' The reason-giving by the respondents to the Texas Poll survey can be read as efforts to assess the reasons they have to warrant a claim. Examples (5)–(7) show survey respondents engaged in this process:

(5) Interviewer: Texas has been chosen as the site of the supercollider. Have you ever heard anything about the supercollider?
Respondent: It's something about atoms. (1-second pause) Yeah, I've heard a little bit.

(6) Interviewer: [Do you] strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree [that] nuclear power plants lead to higher electric bills?
Respondent: (3-second pause) What's the one between agree and strongly disagree?
Interviewer: Disagree.
Respondent: Um, just plain old disagree. Uh, mmm (4-second pause) I agree. I guess you have to pay for it, so I guess it would bring your electricity bill up.

(7) Interviewer: How serious do you think sunburns are in increasing the future risk of skin cancer for children? Very serious, somewhat serious, not very serious, or not serious at all?
Respondent: Uhh, maybe not as much as adul- Well, I guess I'd have to say serious since they would uh (2-second pause)
Interviewer: Okay.
Respondent: Because it can develop over time. They're not going to happen overnight.

Note in particular the long pauses in these examples, as the respondents seem to be searching to see what evidence they have that would justify their making one claim or another. In this sense these instances of reason-giving can be viewed as moments of critical thinking aloud in which the respondents articulate their thinking process in coming to a claim.

While we can identify these instances of reason-giving as critical thinking, we still have not answered the question why some respondents express their thinking *aloud*, to an audience who is not interested in their reasons. One explanation for this phenomenon might be the conscious or unconscious construction of the speakers' rhetorical *ethos*, the need for some people (perhaps all) to present themselves as persons, not machines, with individual, unique reasons for their opinions (Johnstone, 1996). One of the criteria of ethos discussed by rhetoricians (Kaufer and Butler, 1996) is 'be human': be an individual person who thinks and acts consistently. Alvin Goldman's theory of personal justification (Goldman, 1997) helps us see why reason-giving might be one strategy for presenting an individual human ethos.

In 'Argumentation and Interpersonal Justification' (Goldman, 1997, p. 156), Goldman maintains that 'there is such a thing as personal justification (P-justification), which is an individual matter, and that a cognitive agent can be personally justified (P-justified) in believing a proposition without having any relevant justificational relation to other people'. Further, he states, 'in saying . . . that there is a core nonsocial notion of justification, I mean that a belief can be justified in virtue of such condition as the believer's perceptual experiences and/or prior beliefs, rather than his/her relations to other thinkers' (ibid.). Thus, for Goldman (p. 160), all justification is based on personal justification, that first, one must be personally convinced of a claim before one can convince someone else:

> If we think of a person's justification as a matter of the evidence possessed by the person, and if evidence-possession consists of the person's having certain beliefs and/or perceptual experience, then we have a personal interpretation of the justification condition, an interpretation that readily comports with the assumption that one person might be justified in believing a given argument's premises while another person might not be so justified.

The heavy reliance on personal experience found in the survey reasons supports Goldman's claim that people must be personally justified in holding a belief, and that for different people, the acceptability of reasons for making claims will be different. In this survey, for example, respondents were asked to rate the job George Bush had done since his election two months earlier as President. Most people heard the question as being about Bush's job since his inauguration, which had taken place only a few days previously, and they seemed surprised by the question. Here are four different responses to this question:

(8) Respondent: It's only a couple of days. Can't tell.

(9) Respondent: Well I would say only fair, because he hasn't really done anything yet.

(10) Respondent: Well he hasn't been there very long. I don't know. Can't comment on that. He's only been in office one day.
Interviewer: So you don't know?
Respondent: No.
Interviewer: Okay.
Respondent: He hasn't made it . . . committed himself yet.

(11) Respondent: Well, he just got elected, so uh, I guess good?

All four respondents cite the fact that Bush had only just entered office, but they use this to warrant three different answers. Two say they don't know or can't comment, one answers 'fair,' and another answers 'good.' Using the same evidence, these respondents make different claims. This highlights the very personal nature of justification. The goal of giving reasons here is not to persuade the interviewer of the validity of the claim. Rather, the respondents are trying to persuade the interviewer that they are justified in their opinions, by displaying their personal reasoning. The goal, in other words, is not to resolve or stave off disagreement, or even to persuade, but to display the speaker's human ethos.

DISCUSSION

We have explored a variety of ways of explaining why people give reasons in a situation in which reason-giving is neither necessary nor expected. The fact that respondents in our survey data say more than they need to is partly the result, we claim, of the need they feel to act polite and informative in the way they would in more rapport-building, egalitarian kinds of conversation. But this does not explain why their extra contributions so often consist of or contain reasons. Since conflict and disagreement very rarely arise in the interview conversations, it is difficult to see the reasons as responses to conversational troubles. It is still tempting, however, to see them as instances of argumentation. We suggest that the argumentation that goes on in the survey interviews is deliberative, reflexive argumentation of the sort described as 'critical thinking.' We further suggest that the reason such argumentation is often conducted out loud in the interviews, rather than internally, is that it functions in the service of rhetorical ethos, in particular the need to display the fact that one is human, with human autonomy and agency. Doing this is particularly important in contexts in which people are at risk of being treated like machines. An anonymous survey interview is just such a situation.

There is a sense, then, in which the drive for communicative efficiency that leads people to design survey interviews to be as mechanical as possible may have the effect of creating resistance to the task. Survey interviews ask people to slot themselves into demographic categories by choosing numbered answers to questions read from scripts. Extraneous talk may not be just an unwelcome but inevitable concomitant to this task, but rather an actual consequence of the task. This is the main implication of our study for communication design in general. In particular, our study suggests that argumentation may be emergent and jointly constructed in some cases, as Jacobs and Jackson suggest, but still personal and strategic in other cases, or sometimes in the same cases. The reason-giving in the survey interviews is, we claim, most usefully seen from both perspectives. This brings us to the methodological implications of our study: we would probably not have noticed this had we not been engaged in empirical research involving close reading: studying the details of transcripts of actual talk with an eye, at first, to identifying surprising moments. Discourse analysis is a relatively new tool for argumentation research. We hope that this study illustrates its usefulness.

NOTES

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[1] A typical question, as it appears on the questionnaire, is this:

TQ1.	Overall, how would you rate Texas as a place to live . . . [READ LIST]	
	Excellent	1
	Good	2
	Only Fair	3
	Poor	4
	Don't know	8
	Refused/NA	9

The interviewer must get one of these answers; if the respondent says 'Great,' or 'I like it just fine,' she must do what is necessary to find out what that corresponds to on her list.

[2] Twenty-two of the 24 interviewers for the interviews we studied were female, so we use *she* as the generic form for interviewers.

[3] This sample, though not designed with this project in mind, is unlikely to favor either people who give especially many reasons or people who give especially few. A study that compared reason-giving across demographic groups, or that made claims about the frequency or the characteristics of reason-giving among human beings as a whole, would have to be based on a more systematically representative sample. But since our goal here is simply to

show that reason-giving occurs in a situation in which it might not be expected, to make some observations about when it occurs and what it is like, and to suggest some reasons for it, our sample is adequate.

[4] Johnstone (1991) discusses the interviewers' deviations from the interview script in detail.

[5] It should be noted that it is also possible to be cooperative as a respondent without giving reasons. Some respondents (usually female and fairly well educated) make displays of providing only the requested information, in the requested format, as quickly as possible.

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