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7-2015

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'Something really weird has happened':
Losing the 'big picture'
in emergency service calls

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Abstract: This paper is a single case analysis of an emergency service call in which the caller failed to convince the call taker that the request for service was urgent in what turned out to be a tragic event. The analysis of this call using the techniques and findings of conversation analysis reveals that the actions of both the call taker and the caller created an interactional context in which the "big picture" (the potential for danger), became repeatedly submerged in "small picture" details (such as the identity and location of the caller and her role in the situation). This paper builds on previous research on how callers can fail to construct convincing descriptions of the problem and extends this line of work by exploring how participants make or fail to make inferences

in order to construct a gestalt of big picture of the event being reported, how participants manage events that unfold during the call, and how callers convey their identity and role in the situation.

Keywords: emergency service telephone calls, conversation analysis, technologically mediated interaction, qualitative analysis

1. Introduction

Previous studies have investigated emergency phone calls in which a failure of communication led to a delay in the provision of service (e.g., Garcia and Parmer, 1999; Imbens-Bailey and McCabe, 2000; Whalen, et al., 1988; Svennevig, 2012). For example, in a call analyzed by Whalen et al. (1988) the emergence of an argument between the caller and the call taker changed the interactional structure of the call such that information was interpreted differently than it would have been in a more routine context. For this and a variety of other reasons, the call taker did not discern the legitimacy and urgency of the call. Unfortunately, because of the delay in providing service which resulted from this problematic interaction, the caller's mother died before an ambulance could reach her (Whalen et al. 1988).

Garcia and Parmer (1999) analyzed an emergency service call in which the call taker failed to treat the caller's report that two police officers had been shot as a high priority emergency, thus delaying the provision of service. Although the caller made repeated attempts to get an ambulance for the dying officers, he also produced unresolved disjunctures (Clayman, 1985) and unwarranted topic shifts, and failed to produce a coherent narrative description of the events he was reporting. These actions led the call taker to doubt the veracity of the caller's claims.

Maynard's (2005) analysis of how participants form a gestalt is useful to frame the discussion of how emergency call takers may fail to see the "big picture" in calls reporting unfolding or ongoing emergencies:

"[P]articipants' social actions have a gestalt character to them in the
original social psychological sense of that term, where the whole is
somehow larger than its constituent parts. Mostly, investigators have
treated gestalt coherence as inhering in perceptual objects, whereas the
thesis here is that participants also produce and understand the relevance
of particular forms of talk-based activity through an orientation to gestalt
assembly." (Maynard 2005: 499)

For example, Drew (1985) analyzes an accessory to murder trial in which the
meaning of the mundane act of knocking on a door was in contention. The defendant
had preceded an accomplice up the stairs in the victim's building and knocked on his
door. The attorney asked questions designed to show that the defendant's intention in
knocking was to lure the victim to open the door so that her accomplice could shoot him,
while the defendant's answers were designed to show that she knocked on the door to
warn the victim that the shooter was coming—each participant worked to create a
different gestalt from the same series of actions.

Maynard (2005) describes the social practices involved constructing a gestalt in
interaction by analyzing how autistic children respond to questions in a diagnostic test.
In the testing situation, the tester routinely produces a sequence of questions and
proceeds from one question to the next regardless of whether the question has been
"correctly" answered. While in the testing situation the tester may ignore the substance
of an incorrect response and simply record it as incorrect, the call taker in an
emergency call ignores "incorrect" or incomplete responses at their peril. If information
is not received, instead of simply going on to the next question the call taker may try to
repair an absent or inadequate answer or use other techniques to pursue an answer,
including repetition of the question. The big picture or gestalt of the action (e.g., as a
"test" or as a "911 call") therefore is tied to the actions participants take in the exchange,
as well as their interpretation of each other's actions.

This paper builds on previous research on how callers to emergency service
lines can fail to construct convincing descriptions of the problem. It extends this line of

work by exploring how participants make or fail to make inferences in order to construct a gestalt or big picture understanding of the problem. I will show how in one particular 911 call, due to actions of both participants, the call taker fails to draw upshots from the caller's informings and to make connections between information provided at different points in the call. I will show how the call taker's failure to see the "big picture" was accomplished through their joint actions, in particular how the interrogative series was constructed, and how the caller's identity and role in the situation was understood.

2. Data and Methods

In this paper I conduct a single case analysis of an emergency service call in which the actions of both participants contribute to the failure of the call to obtain a timely police response for a potentially dangerous unfolding emergency. The call is related to a high profile murder suicide which occurred in 2012. A man had been suspected of killing his wife several years previously, and had recently lost custody of their two children (Losavio, 2012). When a social worker took the children to his house for a supervised visit, he locked her out of the house, killed the children and set the house on fire. The call analyzed in this paper is the first emergency service call received about the incident and was placed by the social worker shortly after she was locked out (a few minutes before the fire occurred). While the social worker tried to warn the call taker that the children might be in danger, the call taker did not discern the urgency of her request so an immediate police response was not provided.

With hindsight, many have asked why help was not provided more quickly (Crimestopper Staff, 2012; Duke, 2012; Johnson and Baker, 2012; Mungin, 2012). Media reports focused on several problematic aspects of the call including the call taker's apparent confusion over the identity of the caller and the large number of questions he asked, some of which seemed unnecessary given the events that unfolded (Crimestopper Staff, 2012). Although the "Mark Howell" case had been a high profile news story for a number of months prior to this incident, this call taker either did not know of the case or did not recognize the name in the context of this call (Duke, 2012). An investigation revealed that the call taker thought the caller was the mother of the children and did not understand that her role was the social worker supervising the visit

(Duke, 2012). The call taker thought the caller's perception of urgency was due to the emotionally laden nature of family problems, rather than a realistic fear of imminent danger (Duke, 2012). The call taker ordered a police response about seven minutes after the call began—about five and a half minutes after he obtained the address from the caller (Losavio, 2012). He gave the call a priority two ranking, indicating an "imminent danger to life or property" (Caulfield, 2012). Even had this call proceeded much more quickly, help would probably not have arrived soon enough to prevent the tragic events that occurred (Sullivan and Clarridge, 2012; Warren, 2012). However, lessons learned from this call may help future call takers and callers conduct these interactions more effectively and efficiently.

In this paper I analyze the social worker's call using the techniques and findings of conversation analysis (Garcia, 2013a; Heritage, 1984; Heritage and Clayman, 2010; Hutchby and Wooffitt, 2008; Liddicoat, 2007; Sacks, 1984a; Schegloff, 2007a; Sidnell, 2010; ten Have, 2007). Because participants display an orientation to the procedures they use in the utterances they produce (see also Heritage and Atkinson, 1984; Schegloff and Sacks, 1973), analysts are able to discover conversational procedures by analyzing the talk itself. The sequential context (immediately prior utterances and those earlier in the interaction) and the setting and institutional context are potentially relevant to participants as they structure their talk (Goodwin and Duranti, 1992; Heritage, 1987; Heritage and Atkinson, 1984).

The purpose of a single-case analysis is to use findings from previous conversation analytic research to understand a particular event (e.g., Osvaldsson et al., 2012; Whalen et al., 1988; Schegloff, 1987a) in order to gain insights and new understandings of potential causes of call failure. A complete conversation analytic investigation of the entire call is impossible in the space allowed in the current paper. This analysis will therefore focus on specific aspects of the call that are relevant to determining the reasons for its failure as the communication of an urgent and unfolding emergency.

Pseudonyms are used for all identifiers (such as names, addresses, and phone numbers). The call was transcribed using the conventions of conversation analysis

which are based on the transcription system developed by Gail Jefferson (Jefferson, 1984; 2004). A guide to transcription conventions is in the appendix.

After a brief summary of previous research on the interactional organization of emergency service calls, the social worker's call is analyzed to show how both participants' actions contributed to the delay in providing service. In short, the participants created an interactional context in which the "big picture" (that the father was a potential danger to his children), became repeatedly submerged in "small picture" details (such as the identity of the caller and her relationship to the children). In addition, there were problems in how the participants constructed working identities and depicted the nature, severity, and location of the problem as the call and the ongoing events unfolded.

3. Interactional Organization of Emergency Service Calls

Emergency service calls differ from ordinary telephone calls in the design of the opening sequence, the organization of the body of the call, and the differentiation of the roles of participants. Emergency call takers answer the call with institutional identifications rather than with a "hello" (Whalen and Zimmerman, 1987; Zimmerman, 1984). The nature of the call taker's identification can have consequences for how callers construct their first turns (Cromdal et al., 2012a). Callers typically begin with a "yes" or "uhm" that serves to acknowledge the call taker's institutional identification, and usually do not provide a personal identification (Zimmerman, 1992a). However callers may use categorical self-identifications to convey an institutional relationship to the events they are reporting (Zimmerman, 1992b).

Participants in conversation may make social or institutional roles or membership in specific categories relevant for the interaction. Interactional identities—the alignment of participants in terms of speakership and the performance of specific interactional actions (Zimmerman, 1998) may or may not be linked to these roles. In emergency service calls the caller's role includes producing a description of the problem and requesting help, while the call taker's role includes conducting the interrogative series and granting the request for help. Participants thus create their identities (e.g., as caller and call taker) through the actions they take in the interaction.

The caller's first turn may be framed as an explicit request for help or as a statement of a problem (a report or a description) which functions as an implicit request for help (Cromdal et al., 2012b; Heritage and Clayman, 2010; Whalen and Zimmerman, 1987; Zimmerman, 1984, 1992b). Callers also state or display their relationship to the event and if relevant, their identity in relation to the problem being described. For example, they may identify the organization they work at or their job in that organization (Whalen and Zimmerman, 1987).

Problems can arise from the nature of the event, how the caller categorizes or describes the event, or how the caller conveys their relationship to the event (Whalen and Zimmerman, 1990). Whalen and Zimmerman (1990) found that callers must construct their description of the event to show that it deserves police, fire, or medical assistance (see also Cromdal et al., 2008; Sharrock and Turner, 1978; Tracy and Anderson, 1999). While callers may occasionally assume that receiving help is a given (e.g., Whalen et al., 1988; see also Heritage and Clayman, 2010; Paoletti, 2009; Zimmerman, 1992b); most callers display an orientation to the need to justify their request for service. When necessary, call takers will verify the need for service (Larsen, 2013; Whalen and Zimmerman, 1990), typically by asking a series of questions (the interrogative series; Zimmerman 1984; Whalen and Zimmerman 1990). Participants in emergency service calls routinely display an orientation to the time sensitive nature of emergency service calls by producing concise opening sequences followed by an interrogative series (Zimmerman, 1984; Whalen and Zimmerman, 1987; 1990).

Some calls "concern problems that are absolutely clear-cut, while others involve situations that are ambiguous or only potentially problematic" (Heritage and Clayman, 2010: 53). Justifying the request for help is even more challenging when the emergency is unfolding during the course of the call (Heritage and Clayman, 2010; Meehan, 1989). The unfolding nature of events can be handled successfully if the caller clearly states what they think will happen (Heritage and Clayman, 2010; Meehan, 1989). In the call analyzed in this paper several of these potential challenges came into play at once. There were problems due to the unfolding nature of events, the construction of working identities in the interaction, the caller's statement of the problem and her relationship to the problem, and the construction of the interrogative series. In this call the interactional

sequence of events led to a situation in which the caller did not succeed in conveying the potential for danger of the unfolding events, and the call taker failed to put together the "big picture" of potential danger from the details and informings that occurred at various places during the call. By focusing on the turn-by-turn completion of the task of call-completion, the call taker did not successfully draw the import of the caller's communications, and service was unfortunately delayed.

4. Analysis of the Social Worker's Emergency Service Call

4.1 The Caller's First Turn

The opening sequence of this call differs in several respects from typical emergency service call openings (Zimmerman, 1984). Aspects of the caller's first turn which are potentially problematic for the effectiveness of the call include how she identifies herself, constructs her report of the problem, and manages the display of emotion.

4.1.1. Self-Identification through Category-bound Activities. Previous researchers have investigated how people construct identities in talk (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998; Heritage and Clayman, 2010; Sacks, 1992). People can be referred to by recognitional terms (e.g., names), by categories (e.g., age, gender, profession), or by reference to activities that are tied to a specific category—"category bound activities" (Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 2007c: 470).

The caller's self-identification conveyed ambiguity as to whether she was reporting a serious emergency. Rather than using a categorical identifier specifying that she is the social worker supervising the children's visit, she used a category bound activity to implicitly identify her role in the events she is describing (Excerpt 1, line 3, "I'm on uh supervised visitation...'") (Antaki and Widdicombe 1998; Tracy and Anderson, 1999; Zimmerman, 1992b). She then specifies that the visitation is "for uh court ordered visit?," (lines 3-4), a description which is consistent with her role as social worker. In addition, her use of the phrase "thuh biological parent" (line 5) to describe the father of the children does not sound like a type of referent she would use if she were the mother of the children. However, as will be shown below, these implicit identifiers failed to successfully frame the call as being from one professional (a social worker) to another

(the emergency services call-taker). The category-bound activity of "supervised visitation" does not unambiguously identify a specific role (while social workers go on supervised visitations, so do parents).

Excerpt 1: Transcript lines 1-9

```
1      CT:    morning?
2             (0.5)
3      C:     'kay, i'm on uh supervised visitation for uh court ordered
4             visit?, (0.3) .h  A:nd something really weird has happened
5             thuh kids went into thuh house and thuh- PArent (.) thuh
6             biological parent whose name is Mark Howell will not let me
7             in thuh door.
8             (0.9)
9      C:     h  what should i do hh=
```

The call taker's mistaken assumption about the caller's identity and role in the "supervised visit" have repercussions for the unfolding of the call in the minutes that follow. It is not until much later in the call that the call taker displays an orientation to the caller's role as a social worker rather than the children's mother (to be discussed below). In addition, while the call taker mistakenly assumes that the caller is the mother of the children, he does not display this misunderstanding. It therefore remains a "hidden repairable" which the call taker can not repair. Garcia (2013b: 92) describes "hidden repairables" as "misunderstandings which are not repaired because none of the participants are aware that there is a misunderstanding." While well-documented procedures exist for speakers or recipients to locate and repair errors (e.g., Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks, 1977) misunderstandings can be missed and not repaired or only repaired after extensive talk has occurred (for example, Schegloff, 1992; Varonis and Gass, 1985). In this call the misunderstanding over the role of the caller in the supervised visitation is a hidden repairable that is not recognized and repaired until much later on in the call.

4.1.2 Caller's Report of the Problem. Zimmerman (1992b: 439) found that when the event being reported was difficult to frame as a problem requiring emergency services, callers typically used story structure:

"It appears that narratives are employed when the event is impending or in some way ambiguous; that is, it is something that has not yet transpired but may be about to, or if it is in progress or has occurred, its features are such that C [Caller] cannot (or chooses not to) say, in so many words, just what has happened or is about to happen." (Zimmerman, 1992b: 439).

The caller uses story structure to present her statement of the problem in her first turn. After explaining that the event she is reporting is a supervised visit (lines 3 and 4), the caller prefaces her description of the problem with "A:nd something really weird has happened..." (line 4). This story preface (Goodwin 1984) serves as a presequence to get the space to produce an explanation of what happened (Schegloff, 1980; 1990). While working to project a description of a problematic event, the term "weird" in this context may not be strong enough to adequately convey the urgency and severity of the problem (Heritage and Clayman, 2010: 76; Zimmerman, 1992b).

How a caller formulates the problem he or she is calling to report can be consequential for the unfolding of the call and the ability of the caller to convince the call taker of the police relevance and urgent nature of the problem. Schegloff (2007c: 463) notes that when making references to persons, word selection "informs the hearing that the talk gets from recipients." For example, Garcia and Parmer (1999) analyze a problematic 911 call in which the caller was reporting the shooting at close range of two police officers, an event which he had witnessed. However, instead of communicating these facts to the call taker, the caller's first turn characterized the reason for the call as "shots fired." In contrast, Whalen and Zimmerman (1998: 146) give the example of a caller who characterized the reason for the call in his first turn as "GO::D!, MY WIFE (JUST SHOT HERSELF)!" While both callers were reporting injuries from gunshots, the implications of the two ways of stating the problem are very different.

In this call, the caller's initial description of the problem is ambiguous as to whether she is reporting a policeable problem. She provides a chronological narration of events (Excerpt 1 above, lines 4-7) rather than characterizing or "naming" the event, for example as a "parental kidnapping" (Sharrock and Turner, 1978; Zimmerman, 1992b). A label such as "parental kidnapping" could have succinctly summarized the nature of the problem and justified the need for help. Instead, the caller relies on the story to convey the nature of the problem rather than drawing those upshots for the call taker.

By referring to the children's father as the "biological parent" (note the caller's repair from "parent" to "biological parent" in lines 5-6), the caller displays the absence of a family relationship with him, thus leaving a professional relationship (social worker) as the default category (Schegloff, 2007b). The caller then inserts the father's name into her description of what happened (line 6). The name "Mark Howell" is used as a recognitional term (Kim, 2012; Sacks and Schegloff, 1979; Schegloff, 1996) to convey the seriousness of the events the caller is reporting. In Schegloff's (1996) terms, the caller is using the father's name as a recognitional descriptor—a way of referring to the "biological parent" such that the potential for danger to the children is implied.

The call taker does not display recognition of the name "Mark Howell" here or elsewhere in the call. If the caller had repaired this failed recognitional (Goodwin, 2003; Schegloff, 1996), for example by explaining who Mark Howell was or that he was suspected of killing his wife, this might have helped convey the seriousness of the situation she describes in her first turn.

In the context of a "supervised visit" the father's behavior is clearly a violation of procedure (the social worker is supposed to be present during supervised visits). However, the caller's description of the father's behavior fails as an informing of a serious emergency because the call taker does not share the same understanding of the identity of the father (and of the caller). The call taker fails to draw inferences from the caller's turn (Drew, 1984; Heritage and Watson, 1979).

Excerpt 2 shows the caller completing her description of the problem. Her utterance ends in line 7 with a possibly complete turn constructional unit which is a transition relevance place (Sacks, et al., 1974). Her intonation indicates she is done speaking ("... in thuh door."; line 7). After a 0.9 second pause, the caller initiates repair

of the call taker's absent response by asking "<u>what</u> should i do hh" (line 9). While a request for a police, fire, or ambulance response would be accountable in this position in an emergency service call (Zimmerman, 1984), the question's formulation as "advice seeking" rather than "help seeking" may contribute to the call taker's emerging assumption that the situation does not warrant an immediate police response. However, note that the call taker's initiation of the interrogative series in line 10 displays his understanding of the report as police relevant.

Excerpt 2: Transcript lines 6-10

6		biological parent whose name is Mark Howell will <u>not</u> let me
7		in thuh door.
8		(0.9)
9	C:	h <u>what</u> should i do hh=
10	CT:	=what's thee address?

4.1.3 The Display of Emotion. Whalen and Zimmerman (1998) provide several examples of emergency service callers reporting extremely urgent situations such as shootings or deadly fires (see also Fairhurst, 2007; Tracy, 1997; Tracy and Tracy, 1998). For some of these callers their emotional distress is unambiguously displayed in their first turns, however others remain calm and self controlled even under extremely challenging circumstances (Whalen and Zimmerman, 1998). For example, in one call about an injured person the caller's first turn begins with "It's my brother he had a <u>b</u>omb an' it blew up in=h=hand=hh" (Whalen and Zimmerman, 1998:150), while in another call about an injured person the caller's first turn begins with "HUHHHHHH .HHHHHH HHHHHHH .HHHHH HUHHHHH .HHH ((loudly gasping/out of breath))" (Whalen and Zimmerman, 1998: 148).

In her opening turn the social worker communicates calmly and coherently, without displays of hysteria or emotional distress. Given Sacks' (1984b) argument about how an individual's entitlement to experiences can be reflected in how they construct stories about events, the caller's calm demeanor is consistent with her professional role as a social worker supervising the children's visitation with their father. However, her

emotional self control may contribute to the call taker's failure to understand the urgency of the situation. The caller also does not avail herself of other ways of displaying urgency, such as specifically asking for help to come quickly (e.g., Svennevig, 2012).

One reason for this lack of urgency in her presentation of self may be due to the unfolding nature of the events she is reporting (see Heritage and Clayman, 2010; Meehan, 1989). If the seriousness of the event were unambiguously apparent to her from the outset, perhaps she would have communicated differently in these opening phases of the call. It may not be until she smells gasoline (see below) that her interpretation of the unfolding events shifts from merely troubling to potentially dangerous.

The caller does not explicitly articulate that the situation is a potentially life-threatening emergency until the closing sequence of the call seven minutes later (to be discussed below). That "informing" therefore does not have the effect it might have if produced in her first turn rather than at the end of the call (see Whalen et al., 1988). In short, the "big picture" of a potentially dangerous situation was not successfully conveyed by the caller's first turn.

The call taker's response (a request for the caller's address; Excerpt 1, line 10) displays his orientation to the problem's relevance for emergency services. He treats it as an "adequate complaint acknowledgment" (Sharrock and Turner, 1978:175). However, note that the caller's immediately prior question ("<u>what</u> should i do hh"; line 9), remains unanswered. As the analysis to follow will show, the call taker repeatedly fails to respond to the caller's unsolicited questions and informings.

4.2 The Problematics of Location

Determining the location of the problem is a critical step in the provision of emergency services (Larsen, 2013). However, in this call, the caller was unable to provide the address until almost two minutes into the call. As in Paoletti's (2012) study, the caller's delays in providing the address were due in part to lack of knowledge of the institutional procedures the call taker was following. The call center did not have a reliable system for locating mobile calls electronically, and therefore required callers to provide addresses (Sullivan and Clarridge, 2012). However, as the analysis below will

show, the caller apparently expected the call taker to obtain her location directly from her cell phone. The analysis below will show that the call taker's pursuit of the address took the place of responding to additional information provided by the caller as she attempted to upgrade the severity and urgency of the problem being reported.

In Excerpt 3 the caller begins to provide the address (line 12), and then breaks off her utterance mid-production and initiates a self-repair (Jefferson, 1974). She states that she does not know the address (lines 12-13). While pursuit of responses to questions is a routine occurrence in interaction (Bolden and Mandelbaum, 2012; Pomerantz, 1984b), the call taker's line 15 ("'kay that's pretty important for me to know") is formulated as a criticism or complaint rather than a repeat question (Monzoni, 2009).

The caller displays an orientation to the call taker's request as a complaint by apologizing for not being able to find the address (line 17), and then states that she is going inside the car to search for the address (lines 17 and 18). However, instead of providing the address she elaborates her account of the problem she is calling to report (lines 18-22). Her elaboration works to upgrade the severity of the problem from the "something really weird has happened" formulation she used in her first turn (Gilsinan, 1989).

The caller first appears to be addressing her role as supervisor of the visitation: "i'm uh su-" (line 18), but then cuts off her utterance and initiates a self-repair (Jefferson, 1974). Her cut-off of this self-identification displays her orientation to her understanding that she has already communicated her role. Because the call taker's misunderstanding of her role in the interaction (as a parent instead of a social worker) is a "hidden" repairable, she is not oriented to the need to repair his understanding at this point. In any case, she replaces this utterance-in-progress with "nothing like this has ever happened before uh .h u:hm (0.7) these visitations so" (lines 18-19). Her use of extreme case formulations in this elaboration ("nothing... ever happened before", lines 18-19) displays that what has happened is not normal (Edwards, 2000; Pomerantz, 1986; Sacks, 1992). The caller then states rather than demonstrates that she is shocked by this unusual event (lines 19-20; "so (0.2) i'm really (.) uhm s:ho:cked?,"). As noted above, the caller's calm report of her emotional response may fail to convey urgency (Whalen and Zimmerman, 1998). While the caller then reports that one of the

children is crying and the father still will not let her in the house (lines 20 and 21), she does not explicitly connect this information to her earlier statements about the severity of the problem.

The caller has been searching for the address as she elaborates her story, and makes a second attempt to provide it ("hh okay, it is uh h ...."; lines 21-23). However, she then reveals that she still has not found the address by asking the call taker whether he can find her by GPS (line 23).

Excerpt 3: Transcript, lines 10-23

10	CT:	=what's thee address?
11		(0.2)
12	C:	.h its six two two five, and i- i think its sixty first u:hm uh- i
13		don't know what thee address is
14		(.)
15	CT:	'kay that's pretty important for me to know
16		(0.6)
17	C:	i'm sorry i can't just uh minute let me get in my car and see if
18		i can if i can find it. i'm uh=su- this- nothing like this has ever
19		happened before uh .h u:hm (0.7) these visitations so (0.2)
20		i'm really (.) uhm s:ho:cked?, and i could hear one of thuh
21		kids crying (.) .h but he still wouldn't let me in.=hh okay, it is
22		uh h (0.6) .h two=hh o::h (1.3) .h h >just uh minute< i have it
23		here. h (0.6) you can't find me by: (0.2) gee pee ess?

The caller makes a third attempt to communicate urgency by elaborating her description of the problem (Excerpt 4, lines 27-31). She prefaces this elaboration with a statement projecting an urgent situation ("but i think i need help right awa:y"; lines 27-28). The caller's use of an uncertainty marker ("i think") qualifies her claim of urgency.

The caller then states that the father is on a "very short leash" (line 28) with "DHS" (the Department of Human Services). Note that the phrase "very short leash", like her previous characterization of the problem with the utterance "something really

weird has happened", may inadequately convey the seriousness of the situation. Once a report has been made, it can be challenging to revise that report to a more extreme level:

> "According to Drew (1992), a characterization or description of an event contains a "maximal property." It shows the highest degree of severity that can be expected. For example, Drew compares an invitation to dinner with an invitation to cocktails. If invited to dinner, you would not be surprised if you were also served cocktails (or not), but if invited to cocktails you would be surprised if you were served dinner." (Garcia, 2013a: 307)

In terms of the caller's elaboration of her statement of the problem in Excerpt 4, the "maximal property" of the father's actions does not seem urgent or unambiguously dangerous. The caller therefore runs into trouble later in the call when she tries to get the call taker to accept an upgraded version of her statement of the problem (to be discussed below).

By indicating that "CPS" (Child Protective Services) have been involved in the case (line 29) she conveys that this is not a routine parent-child visit. Note that her use of membership category bound language, including acronyms, displays that she is approaching the interaction as one professional talking to another professional.

The caller then produces another preface ("and this is thuh craziest thing."; line 30). This preface sets up the call taker to hear something "craziest" next. However, what she says is "he looked right at me and closed thuh door." (lines 30-31). From the caller's perspective, the fact that the father shut the door intentionally, in conjunction with "who he is" demonstrates that the father may have malicious intent. Recall that the social worker knows that the father has been suspected of murdering his wife (the mother of the two children). She has earlier (Excerpt 1, line 6) used the father's name ("Mark Howell") as a recognitional in an attempt to convey this information to the call taker in a short hand way. However, as the analysis below will show, the call taker did not recognize the name and here in Excerpt 4 he fails to draw the upshot of these

elaborations. The shutting of the door has a different meaning if the caller is the mother of the children engaged in a custody dispute with her husband as opposed to being the social worker in a high profile case.

Excerpt 4: Transcript, lines 23-33

```
23              here. h (0.6) you can't find me by: (0.2) gee pee ess?
24              (0.2)
25    CT:   no.
26              (6.0)
27    C:     o:ka:y, it is uhm (0.6) °oh i still can't find it° (3.8) but i think i
28              need help right awa:y he'- he's (0.1) on uh very short leash
29              with DHS and CPS has been involved .h
30              and this is thuh craziest thing. he looked right at me and
31              closed thuh door.
32              (1.2)
33    C:     are you there?
34              (0.2)
35    CT:   yes ma'am i'm just waiting to know where you are=
36    C:                                            =okay, it's
37              six two two sixty first street south west smithtown five three
38              six one two.
```

In a call analyzed by Cromdal et al. (2008) the call taker was able to reassure the caller by explicitly drawing the upshot that help was on the way. That caller was then able to focus on the business of the call. In this call, the call taker's absent response to the caller's elaborations of her story (note the 1.2 second pause in line 32) may work as a declination to change the focus of the talk from the address. If the call taker had provided a continuer, to encourage the caller to elaborate on her revised description of the problem, the search for the address would be put in the background.

While the mobile nature of the call enabled the caller to search for the address and talk to the call taker simultaneously (because she could bring her phone into the

car), this multi-tasking may have caused problems for the exchange between them. From the caller's perspective, searching can be carried on simultaneously with talking about the problem she is calling to report. But from the call taker's perspective, the caller's elaborations of her story during the search process may appear to distract her from the task of searching for the address. His lack of response in line 32 may therefore be designed to avoid interfering with this search for the address. His failure to engage with her elaboration of her story ultimately contributed to his lack of ability to pull together the "big picture" of the call, because the details the caller gives in Excerpt 4 are yet another attempt to convey the potential danger to the children.

The caller's "are you there?" in line 33 after the 1.2 second pause displays her orientation to the call taker's missing response to her story elaboration. The call taker answers that he is waiting for her to report the address (line 35). The call taker's third request for the caller's location (line 35) is also formulated as a complaint (Monzoni, 2009). While his focus on the location is justified, because he can not send help until he knows where to send it, his single-minded focus on getting the address before dealing with other issues prevents his acknowledging, or perhaps even noticing, the significance of the information the caller has been giving him during her search for the address. The call taker fails to draw the conclusion from the caller's story elaborations that the situation is urgent.

In short, the caller treats her story elaboration as the main activity, while the call taker treats finding the address as the main activity. His gestalt is to complete the interrogative series to ascertain the location of the problem, while hers is to repair the call taker's understanding of the severity of the event she is reporting.

4.3 The Unfolding Emergency and a Failed "Informing"

One source of difficulty the participants faced in creating a shared understanding of the severity of the problem was the unfolding nature of the events being reported. After providing the address the caller uses an "and-preface" (Heritage and Sorjonen, 1994; Nevile 2006; 2007) to connect an apparently unrelated utterance to prior talk: "and i'd like to pull out of thuh driveway because i smell gasoline and he won't let me in .h h" (Excerpt 5, lines 40-41). Her use of the "and-preface" displays her turn in lines 40-

41 as referring back to her previous turn in lines 27 through 31 (see Excerpt 4 above) rather than her immediately prior turn in lines 37 and 38 (Excerpt 5). In this utterance she connects the newly reported fact about smelling gasoline with her reiteration of the fact that the father would not let her in the house. The caller thus provides an account for why she wants to move her car, while simultaneously supplementing her previous elaboration of the problem in an ongoing attempt to upgrade the severity and urgency of the unfolding event she is reporting. However, the caller uses allusive language (Lutfey and Maynard, 1998) and leaves the implication of these informings to be drawn by the call taker rather than explicitly stating that she thinks the father is going to set the house on fire.

In addition to the use of allusive language and the absence of an explicit "upshot" in this utterance, lines 40-41 are also potentially problematic because of the ambiguous construction of the utterance. After informing the call taker that she intends to pull her car out of the drive way (thus alerting him in advance that she may be unavailable for conversation for a few minutes while she does this), she uses "because" (line 40) to present reasons for this action. If an account for moving her car was not provided, this might have worked against her attempts to convey the seriousness of the situation. But the account she attaches does not explicitly convey the reason she wants to move the car (which is also the same reason she thinks the children are in imminent danger)—the smell of gasoline. Note that there are several points in her turn in lines 40-41 in which a turn constructional component is "possibly complete" (Sacks et al., 1974): after "driveway", after "gasoline", and after "in", however she does not intonate any of these as unambiguous "transition relevance places" (Sacks et al., 1974). In fact, her slight stress on "smell" and "won't" provide a rhythm to the turn which, in conjunction with the absence of "completion intonation" after "gasoline" in line 41, present this *entire* turn as constituting her explanation for why she wants to move her car, rather than being two unrelated statements.

Excerpt 5: Transcript, lines 36-44

```
36    C:                                                    =okay, it's
37            six two two sixty first street south west smithtown five three
```

38		six one two.
39		(0.8)
40	C:	and i'd like to pull out of thuh driveway because i smell
41		gasoline and he won't let me in .h h
42		(0.2)
43	CT:	you want to pull out of thuh driveway because you smell
44		gasoline? but he won't [let you-
45	C:	[i smell- he- he won't let me in
46		(0.5)
47	CT:	he won't [let] you out of thuh driveway?
48	C:	[( )]
49		(0.4)
50	C:	he won't let me in thuh house
51		(0.3)
52	CT:	whose house [is it]
53	C:	[he's got] thuh kids in thuh house and he won't
54		let me in. it's uh supervised visit.
55		(0.3)
56	CT:	i understand. whose house is it.
57		(0.4)
58	C:	Mark Howell.

Unfortunately, the call taker does not draw the upshot from these informings. In Excerpt 5 the call taker displays his trouble in understanding the connection between the caller's statement about moving the car and the smell of gasoline (lines 43-44). The call taker uses a partial repeat of the trouble source to initiate an other-repair (Excerpt 5, lines 43-44; Schegloff et al., 1977), thus displaying his confusion with the caller's utterance in lines 40-41. In the caller's response she first begins to address the issue of the smell of gasoline, but then initiates a self-repair (Jefferson, 1974) with cut offs and hesitations and replaces it with a reiteration of her previous statement about the father not letting her in the house ("he won't let me in"; line 45). The caller is indexically

referring to her previous informings (from lines 6, 19, 27-29, and 41, above) in which she has repeatedly attempted to convey to the call taker that the problem is that the father won't let her in the house. This to her is a red flag that the father is up to no good.

However, as can be seen in Excerpt 5, the call taker still does not draw the upshot from these informings. Still not understanding what the caller is trying to say, the call taker initiates another other-repair in line 47, proposing a candidate understanding of the caller's conception of the problem: "he wont' [let] you out of thuh driveway?". The caller responds with "he won't let me in the house" (line 50), thus declining the call taker's candidate understanding and replacing it with yet another repeat of the point she has made several times earlier. Note that although she has repeated this statement several times, she does not explicitly draw the upshot of why it is important to understanding the urgency of the risk to the children.

In line 52, the call taker resumes the interrogative series ("whose house is it"), thus displaying that he now understands the problem is that "he won't let me in thuh house" (caller's line 50). However, since he still does not understand that the caller is a social worker rather than a parent, he is now unsure about whose house it is (for example, if the father was not letting her in her own house that would have different implications than if he is not letting her in his house). Instead of answering his question, the caller elaborates her explanation of the problem (lines 53-54). The call taker acknowledges this utterance ("i understand"; line 56), and then repeats his question. When the caller answers his question (line 58), her emphasis of the name "Mark Howell" shows that this is a repeat informing.

In short, the call taker does not put together the pieces of the caller's repeated informings and reformulations of the problem, and therefore does not see the "big picture" of a potentially dangerous unfolding event. Although his repair initiations in Excerpt 5 display that he clearly heard the caller mention the smell of gasoline, he does not display an understanding that the fumes were coming from the house. Media reports reveal that the call taker thought the caller was referring to her car's fumes (Crimestopper Staff, 2012). If he had understood that the fumes were coming from the house, his questions about whose house it is (Excerpt 5, lines 52 and 56) would not

have been accountable next questions in the interrogative series, nor would his delay in ordering a police response until much later in the call.

The call taker used this series of questions to direct the trajectory of the conversation (Heritage and Clayman, 2010). However, while the call taker is working to complete the interrogative series, he is missing the implications of the caller's informings and failing to put together the "big picture" of the urgency of the unfolding event. This interrogative series initiates a long exchange in which the call taker works to understand the caller's role in the event (discussed below). The issue of the "smell of gasoline" is not mentioned again, and there is no evidence in the remainder of the call that it enters into the call taker's understanding of the seriousness of the unfolding situation.

In terms of Maynard's (2005) analogy of building the gestalt, the call taker is focused on the structure of the interrogative series, and ignores the caller's informings, while the caller is focused on constructing an upgraded description of the problem from her informings, and largely ignores the call taker's interrogative series. Both are using their utterances to create a different "big picture" gestalt assembled from the individual utterances each is producing. The call taker's repair initiations seem to treat the caller's responses as "not answers to my question" rather than exploring what they actually are and putting together the pieces of her individual contributions into a "big picture" or gestalt understanding of what the problem is (Maynard, 2005). Taken together, the caller's responses attempt to "upgrade" her presentation of the seriousness of the unfolding events by repeated informings and reformulations of the problem she is reporting.

4.4 Misunderstanding the Caller's Role

A repeated source of confusion and delay in this call is the call taker's failure to understand that the caller is a social worker accompanying the children on a supervised visit rather than the mother of the children. This hidden misunderstanding first emerged when the caller constructed her first turn without an explicit self-identification of her role (Excerpt 1 above). The call taker's misunderstanding of the caller's role was not revealed in the subsequent exchanges of turns, so it remained a hidden

misunderstanding. This misunderstanding does not come to the foreground until Excerpt 6 when the call taker asks the caller whether she lives in the house (line 60). In her reply, the caller provides the first explicit formulation of her role in the supervised visit ("I'm contracted to thuh state to provide supervised visitation."; lines 62-63). The call taker quickly responds to this formulation ("°i see. okay.°"; line 65), and then asks "and and who is there to exercise their visitation?". This question is logical, given that she has stated that she is on a supervised visitation. However, the call taker's newly acquired understanding of the caller's role as a social worker is about to be challenged by her answer to this question. After a 1.1 second pause she emphatically answers "I am". She may have heard the call taker's indexical use of the pronoun "their" in line 65 as referring to the children, rather than the parent—this interpretation could explain her response in line 68, especially since in the continuation of her utterance she reiterates that the visit is with Mark Howell. The call taker then asks who is supervising the visit (line 70). The caller's response in line 71 ("and he's thuh husband that- I supervise") creates an unresolved disjuncture (Clayman, 1985). The call taker then asks a series of questions to repair this misunderstanding (lines 73-94). He does not display an understanding of the caller's role until lines 96-97.

Excerpt 6: Transcript, lines 56-99

56	CT:	i understand. whose house is it.
57		(0.4)
58	C:	Mark Howell.
59		(.)
60	CT:	okay, so you don't live there right?
61		(0.2)
62	C:	no I don't- no, I'm contracted to thuh state to provide
63		supervised visitation.
64		(.)
65	CT:	°i see. okay.° (0.2) and and who is there to exercise their
66		visitation?
67		(1.1)

68	C:	I am hh uh and thuh visit [is with] Mark Howell?
69	CT:	[(who)]
70	CT:	and who's [supervising]
71	C:	[and he's] thuh husband that- I supervise
72		(1.0)
73	CT:	so you supervise and you're doing thuh visit?
74		(1.2)
75	CT:	[you're supervising] yourself?
76	C:	[yeah eye supervise-]
77		(1.0)
78	C:	i supervise myself i'm thuh supervisor here.
79		(0.2)
80	CT:	>wait uh minute< (1.0) if it's uh supervised visit!?, you can't
81		supervise yourself?, (0.9) if you're thuh [visitor]
82	C:	[i can] supervise
83		myself. i'm thuh supervisor for thuh supervised visit.
84		(0.4)
85	CT:	okay, well aren't you thuh one making aren't you thuh one
86		making thuh visit?, or is there another [parent that]
87	C:	[(eye'm thuh one-)]
88	CT	you're supervising?
89	C:	no- (0.2) there's i'm thuh one that supervises I pick up thuh
90		kids at their grandparents?,
91		(0.2)
92	CT:	yeah. (1.5) and then who visits with thuh children?
93		(0.2)
94	C:	Mark Howell. h
95		(1.5)
96	CT:	okay so you're supposed to be there to supervise Mark
97		Howell's visit with thuh children.
98		(0.2)

99   C: <u>yes</u>, that's correct.

Emergency service call takers must screen calls to make sure that they are legitimate (e.g., Sharrock and Turner, 1978; Whalen et al., 1988). The call taker's attempts to solve the puzzle of the caller's role (her relationship to the problem) helps him determine whether the problem justifies emergency services (Whalen and Zimmerman, 1990). However, in the context of the caller's previous informings (that the father has intentionally locked her out of the house and that she smells gasoline), which taken together suggest malicious intent and potential danger, the call taker's focus on this relatively minor detail is unaccountable. The call taker seems to have lost sight of (or perhaps never really understood) the "big picture" which the social worker has tried to communicate. The call taker's actions, and his construction of the interrogative series, make sense in terms of the turn-by-turn sequential context of the interaction, but not in terms of the overall purpose of the call.

4.5 Two Competing Gestalts: Constructing the Interrogative Series and Upgrading the Statement of the Problem

In the next section of the call, the call taker works to resume the interrogative series now that the problem of the caller's identity and role in the event being reported has been resolved. This analysis will show that the participants are often out of synchronization with regard to the interactional context they are working to create. The call taker repeatedly focuses on constructing a series of questions to elicit information to help him understand what happened and to get information to forward to the police along with his request for help. The caller often answers these questions, but seems more focused on providing additional information to repair or upgrade the call taker's understanding of the seriousness of the unfolding events.

Three types of issues emerge in this section of the call. First, the call taker and the caller are not aligned in collaboratively constructing the interrogative series. Second, the call taker's questions display his failure to draw an upshot from the caller's elaborations and upgrades of her informings about the unfolding incident she is reporting. Third, the call taker's interrogative series appears to go beyond the need to

obtain sufficient information to provide help and ends up taking too much time getting
unessential details. Each of these points will be explained below.

Excerpt 7: Transcript, lines 96-119

96   CT: okay so <u>you're</u> supposed to be there to supervise Mark

97   <u>How</u>ell's visit with thuh children.

98   (0.2)

99   C: <u>yes</u>, that's correct.

100   (1.8)

101   CT: and how did=

102   C: =and he's thuh husband of missing Cindy

103   Howell?,

104   (0.3)

105   CT: how did he=

106   C: =(you)- this is a high profile case

107   (.)

108   CT: how did he: how did he gain access: to thuh children? (0.2)

109   before you got [there   ]

110   C: [he grab]bed (.) they- they- i was <u>one</u> step in

111   back of them h

112   (0.8)

113   CT: okay so they [went ahead into thuh house   ] and he locked

114   C: [(he shut thuh door in my face)]

115   CT: you out

116   (0.2)

117   C: yehs he [he   ] shut thuh door right in my face=

118   CT: [(okay)]   =alright.

119   °now it's clear.° your last name?

4.5.1. Misalignment in Constructing the Interrogative Series. After the confusion
over the social worker's role in the situation is finally resolved (Excerpt 6 above), the call

taker initiates the interrogative series (Zimmerman, 1984; Whalen and Zimmerman, 1990) to clarify his understanding of what happened. In Excerpt 7, the call taker's first question in this series (line 101) is interrupted by the caller. The caller's self-selected utterance in line 102 is not an answer to the call taker's question-in-progress. Instead, the caller works to revise the call taker's understanding of the severity of the problem by adding new information.

In lines 102-3 the caller attempts to repair the call taker's failure to understand the implications of the fact that "Mark Howell" is the father of the children. Schegloff (1996: 460) found that speakers could attempt to repair failed recognitionals by using upward intonation and a brief pause. If the "try marked" recognitional is not successful, repeated attempts could be made to convey the reference (see also Stivers, 2007). The caller says "and he's thuh husband of missing Cindy Howell?," with a questioning intonation (her "and-preface" and use of the indexical "he" marks this utterance as a response to the call taker's turn in lines 96-97 rather than a response to the call taker's line 101). Cindy Howell's disappearance and suspected murder had led to a highly publicized investigation in which her husband Mark Howell was suspected of involvement.

This is followed by a brief pause (in line 104), after which the call taker recycles the turn beginning (Schegloff, 1987b) he had previously abandoned ("how did he="; line 101) in line 105 ("and how did="). The call taker does not respond to this informing and instead pursues the interrogative series. Therefore the caller's use of this name fails as an informing of an urgent situation. The call taker is again interrupted by the caller, whose line 106 works to repair the call taker's understanding of the severity of the situation. The call taker does not respond to this utterance either, instead making a third (successful) attempt to complete his question (lines 108-9). The caller then answers the question (lines 110-111).

In short, the caller and the call taker are not aligned in the collaborative production of the interrogative series. The caller works to repair and upgrade the call taker's understanding of the severity and urgency of the unfolding events by providing more information; interrupting the call taker's attempts to initiate and restore the interrogative series in doing so. When the call taker is able to complete his question

and receives the answer, his next question deals with the explanation of what happened (lines 113-115) rather than with the new information the caller provided in lines 102 and 106, thus displaying his orientation to the work of completing the interrogative series.

    4.5.2. Failure to Draw an Upshot. Excerpt 7 also illustrates the problems introduced by the failure of the participants to produce explicit upshots. While the caller repeatedly produces unsolicited statements which work to elaborate or upgrade the caller's understanding of the severity and urgency of the problem, she does not explicitly draw the upshot for the call taker, and the call taker does not pull together the information from these informings to create an accurate "big picture" of the call. For example, in Excerpt 7 the caller volunteered information in lines 102, and 106, both times interrupting the call taker's question-in-progress. She attempts to repair the call taker's failure to display an uptake of the information she has provided about who Mark Howell is (line 106, "(you)- this is a high profile case"). The call taker does not respond to this turn either, and instead recycles his turn beginning (Schegloff, 1987b) for a third time to ask how the father got access to the children (lines 108-9). The call taker's pursuit of his questions leads him to miss the significance of her attempts to repair his understanding; he ignores these utterances and persists in his attempt to produce his question (lines 108-109). The caller's answer in lines 110-111 clarifies the issue for him. The call taker's "okay" in line 113 seems to be indicating closure of that topic (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). The remainder of that utterance displays his understanding of what happened, and is confirmed by the caller in lines 114 and 117.

    Gill et al.'s (2001) study of doctor/patient consultations showed that rather than making explicit requests patients often left these requests to be implied by their descriptions of their problems. Gill (2001) found that patients let doctors draw the upshot of the implicit request. Similarly, the caller in this instance does not explicitly draw the upshot of her elaborations. However, while in the doctor/patient interaction Gill et al. (2001) studied the doctor responded to the patient's implicit requests, this call taker does not appear to understand the implications of the caller's informing. His continuation of the interrogative series displays that he does not draw the implications himself.

4.5.3. Hyper-Complete Interrogative Series. Tracy (1997) observes that call takers are responsible for obtaining at least the information required to send help to the location requested, but that service providers often prefer more information because the extra details can help them once they arrive on the scene. However, if call takers spend too much time getting information this may delay service or result in caller dissatisfaction. The caller may feel that the call taker is wasting time by asking too many questions (Tracy, 1997).

In this call the call taker's interrogative series appears to be "hyper-complete"—to go beyond obtaining sufficient information to provide help. When the call taker resumes the interrogative series, the questions he asks fail to display an orientation to the "big picture" of the call as reporting an urgent event. For example, in Excerpt 8 the call taker asks whether the caller's last name is hyphenated (line 123), and which social service agency she works for (line 132). In line 144 the call taker asks for the father's last name, even though the caller has provided this information several times before, and asks her to verify the spelling after she has spelled it for him (line 147).

The call taker thus treats the case as mundane, and approaches his role bureaucratically rather than analytically (Svennevig, 2012; Tracy, 1997). The caller, on the other hand, displays an orientation to urgency by working to speed up the transfer of information by pre-empting some of the call taker's questions. For example, in line 142 the caller first answers a question about the number of children and then provides their names and ages without being asked. She provides the father's last name when requested and immediately spells it (line 146), thus displaying her orientation to the need to save time. When asked how tall the father is she answers "um five ten uh hundred and fifty pounds" (line 167); thus providing the father's weight without being asked. In short, the caller displays an orientation to urgency while the call taker does not; thus suggesting that the caller has not succeeded in conveying the potential dangerousness of the situation to the call taker.

Excerpt 8: Transcript, lines 120-212
120   (1.0)
121   C: my name is margaret garfield SMI::th?

122   (5.0)

123   CT: garfield smith is hyphenated?

124   (0.4)

125   C: <u>ye</u>hs.

((5 lines omitted))

132   CT: and what agency are you with

133   (0.3)

134   C: .h child assistance network.

135   (5.5)

136   C: .h and thuh kids have been in there approx- by NO:w,

137   approximately u:m (0.3) ten minutes.

138   (1.7)

139   C: and <u>he</u> <u>knows</u> [this is uh super   ]vised visit

140   CT: [how many children]

141   (0.1)

142   C: <u>two</u>. (0.1) michael is uh five and nicky is seven h

143   (9.0)

144   CT: and thuh dad's last name?

145   (0.3)

146   C: .h <u>how</u>ell, ache oh double you ee el (.) <u>el</u>

147   CT: °two ells?°

148   (2.0)

149   CT: two <u>ells</u> at thee end of howell?

150   (0.4)

151   C: yehs.

152   (0.2)

153   CT: °and his first name°

154   (0.8)

155   C: his first name is mark

156   (0.2)

157   CT: black white asian hispanic native?

158		(0.3)
159	C:	he's white.
160		(0.2)
161	CT:	date of birth
162		(0.2)
163	C:	.h i don't know he's about thirty nine h
164		(.)
165	CT:	how tall
166		(0.4)
167	C:	um five ten uh hundred and fifty pounds

4.5.4. Two Different Gestalts. The two participants in this call clearly have a different "gestalt" of the situation that is being reported. The caller repeatedly displays an orientation to the potential danger to the children, and, while she does not become emotionally distraught or expressive, her actions display an orientation to the time sensitive nature of the event she is reporting. The call taker, on the other hand, appears to view the event as a routine call about a problem which warrants a police response but which is not urgent.

4.6 The Closing Sequence

In emergency service calls the granting of the request for help initiates the closing sequence of the call (Zimmerman (1984). Excerpt 9 shows the call taker grant the request in line 212. The caller's response to the granting of the request begins with a typical preclosing move ("okay"; line 214; Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). However, she immediately moves out of closing (Button, 1987) by asking "how long will it be h". The call taker's response to this question (lines 216-217) displays that he does not think this is a life threatening emergency, although he does upgrade his response from its first iteration by adding "thuh first available deputy,..." (line 230). While the completion of this utterance is inaudible because it is overlapped by the caller, the call taker appears to be saying that the first available deputy will be sent out.

The caller's interruption (lines 219-220) challenges the call taker's assumption that it is not a life threatening emergency. She uses a dispreferred format (for example, the disagreement implicative "well" in line 219; Pomerantz, 1984a). Her interruption also has an argumentative structure—it is an adjacently placed, oppositional utterance, and uses format tying (Goodwin and Goodwin, 1987). The caller concludes with "I'm afraid for their li:ves" (line 223). She repaired her turn-in-progress several times before producing this statement, which positions it at the end of the utterance in which she is working to upgrade the call taker's understanding of the urgency of the incident. Note also that this is the first time she has explicitly conveyed the upshot of her informings and elaborations throughout the call. On previous occasions she has implied rather than explicitly articulated the upshot, in spite of the call taker's continued displays of his lack of uptake of the "big picture" of her utterances. Note also that this turn is communicated without displays of emotion, which can help communicate to call takers the urgency of a call (Whalen and Zimmerman, 1998).

The first evidence that the call taker considers the possibility that this call requires an immediate police response is his question in lines 225-226 ("okay has he threatened thuh lives of thuh children previously?"). He is responding to the immediately prior turn rather than incorporating the upshot of her previous informings into his interpretation of this prior turn. When the caller responds that she does not know (line 228), the call taker reissues the granting of the request, thus moving back to closing (Button, 1987). This time he upgrades his response to "we'll have thuh first available d- deputy contact you" (lines 230). While giving a nod to timeliness, the offer of a detective to "contact you" is not the strongest possible response to a call for help.

Excerpt 9: Transcript, lines 212-230

```
212   CT:   alright we'll have somebody look for you there
213         ( 0.3)
214   C:    okay how long will it be h
215         (.)
216   CT:   i don't know ma'am they have to respond to emergency, life
217         threatening situations first. (0.2)  thuh first available deputy,
```

218   [(   )]
219   C: [well <u>this</u>] could be life threatening he went to court on
220   wednesday and he- an' he <u>didn't</u> get his kids back=
221   CT: =('kay)=
222   C: =.h
223   and this is really- i'm uh- i'm afraid for their <u>li:ves</u>
224   (0.2)
225   CT: okay has he threatened thuh lives of thuh children
226   previously?
227   (0.4)
228   C: i have <u>no</u> idea.
229   (.)
230   CT: alright. we'll have thuh first available d- deputy contact you

5. Conclusions

As in previous research on problematic emergency phone calls (e.g., Garcia and Parmer, 1999; Imbens-Bailey and McCabe, 2000; Svennevig, 2012; Whalen et al., 1988), this caller failed to convince the call taker that she was reporting a serious, urgent emergency. A delay in providing service unfortunately resulted. As the analysis above has shown, there are a number of reasons for the problematic trajectory of this emergency service call. Both the caller and the call taker's actions contributed to the failure of the call taker to form a gestalt of the call as a communication of an urgent and potentially dangerous unfolding situation which required prompt assistance. The caller did not convincingly construct a big picture of the call, and the call taker repeatedly focused on understanding the call on an utterance by utterance level rather than pulling together details from different places in the call to form a big picture of a serious, urgent event.

5.1 *Caller's Actions*

There were several aspects of the caller's actions during the call which contributed to the call taker's failure to see the "big picture" of a potentially dangerous

unfolding situation. The ambiguity with which she conveyed her role in the supervised visit, her failure to successfully repair the use of a failed recognitional to upgrade the call taker's understanding of the incident, her use of story prefaces in a way that minimized the impression of the severity of what she was reporting, her emotional control which, although consistent with her professional role (Sacks 1984b) could have contributed to the call taker's sense that there was no imminent danger (Whalen and Zimmerman 1998), and her failure to draw explicit upshots of her informings until the closing sequence of the call, all contributed to the failure of the call.

A major difficulty in this call was confusion over the caller's professional role in the supervised visitation. The caller's failure to use a categorical self-identification in her first turn thus had major implications for the trajectory of the call. While one could argue that the call taker should have realized that his understanding of the caller's role was flawed, one can not repair a misunderstanding if unaware that there is a misunderstanding (Garcia, 2013b; Schegloff, 1992).

The caller's reliance on what she assumed was common knowledge (the publicity around the "Mark Howell" case in the media) also contributed to the call taker's failure to understand the urgency of the call. When the recognitionals "Mark Howell" and "Cindy Howell" failed, the caller could have more quickly resorted to other methods of conveying the seriousness of the situation.

The caller's use of story prefaces (such as "something really weird happened") minimized the severity of what she was attempting to convey, especially in comparison to emergency service calls in which callers unambiguously display a need for a swift emergency response (Whalen and Zimmerman, 1998). Although this caller's emotional self control enabled her to communicate clearly, if she had displayed more emotion she might have gotten help sooner by more successfully conveying the seriousness of the situation. The caller uses some effective techniques when communicating with the call taker. For example, when the call taker is collecting information toward the end of the call the caller speeds up the process by providing information before it was asked, thus forestalling the need for additional questions.

5.2 Call Taker's Actions

The call taker's actions during the call worked against getting a "big picture" understanding of the caller's report, because he repeatedly focused on turn-by turn exchanges and sequences (such as the interrogative series), rather than pulling together information from various parts of the call and drawing upshots from them. The call taker repeatedly fails to respond to the caller's self-selected utterances, in particular when she is elaborating her story in an effort to upgrade his understanding of the severity of the problem. If the call taker had briefly acknowledged these contributions, the call might have unfolded more quickly. However, the problem ultimately seems to be not just the failure of the call taker to acknowledge the caller's interjections and thus effectively redirect her, but his failure to see the big picture of the severity of the situation.

One reason for this failure was the unfortunate concatenation of a caller who described events but failed to draw upshots from these informings, with a call taker who was focused on a sequential, turn by turn exchange of questions and answers and did not pull together a big picture from information obtained at different points in the call. While the call taker displays an orientation to his responsibility to record information about the caller's identity and location and to screen calls for legitimacy and urgency, he repeatedly focuses on clarifying minor details while ignoring potentially important issues (such as the smell of gasoline) that could have reframed the information he was receiving in a far more sinister light. Call takers should be alert to the specific techniques callers may use to create interactional contexts or frames for the stories they are telling and know how and when to shift from control of the interrogative series to pulling together information from disparate parts of the call.

6. Appendix

Simplified version of Gail Jefferson's transcription conventions (see Atkinson and Heritage, 1984: ix-xvi):

Symbol	Definition
.hh hh	Inhalations and exhalations, respectively
ta::lk	Colons indicate a syllable is drawn out
that-	Dash indicates a word was cut off abruptly

<u>lot</u>	Underlining indicates stress or emphasis
YOU	Capital letters indicate increased volume
°cost°	Degree signs indicate decreased volume
(1.4)	Numbers in parentheses indicate length of pauses (in seconds)
(talk)	Words in parentheses are tentative transcriptions.
( )	Empty parentheses indicate non-transcribable talk
.,?!	Punctuation generally indicates intonation, not grammatical structure.
heh, hunh	Laughter particles are transcribed as pronounced.

A: [a copy of it]

B: [I have   ]   Brackets indicate simultaneous speech.

A: yeah=

B: =in order   Equal signs indicate one word is placed immediately after another without pause or overlap.

A: are yuh gonna?   Words spelled as pronounced.

7. Acknowledgments

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