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Biographical note

Angela Cora Garcia is a professor in the Department of Natural and Applied Sciences at Bentley

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and political speeches and interviews. She is the author of a textbook on conversation analysis,

An Introduction to Interaction: Understanding Talk in Formal and Informal Settings

(Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2013), and a conversation analytic study of mediation, *How Mediation Works: Resolving Conflict through Talk* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

Abstract

In this paper I use conversation analysis to investigate how participants in emergency telephone calls in the United States use racial/ethnic categories to describe persons of interest such as suspects, victims, or persons needing assistance. This paper problematizes the use of racial/ethnic categories in these calls by first analyzing an instance of a caller's racial profiling (in which racial categories are used to justify the call). This instance of racial profiling is then compared with the results of the analysis of 15 routine emergency service calls. I found that racial/ethnic categories were routinely introduced by call taker's requests or by callers volunteering such information. I describe how both deviant and routine uses of these categories could lead to racial profiling and/or displace information that might be more effective in creating useful descriptions of persons of interest. The conclusion addresses ideas for further research and practical implications of these findings for emergency telephone call takers and those working to transform the way race is tied to policing in the United States.

Introduction

Racial profiling has increasingly been recognized as a social problem facing American citizens, law enforcement, governmental agencies, and organizations (e.g., Desai, 2019; Johnson et al., 2020; Morales & Curry, 2021; Mov.BlackLives, 2016; Murakawa, 2019; Pitman, 2020; Rutland,

2020; Van Cleve & Mayes, 2015). Correia and Wall (2018, p. 30) define racial profiling as "the practice among police of choosing whom to search, whom to stop and frisk and whom to arrest based on race." African Americans are more likely to be the target of profiling (see also Butler, 2018; Gentithes, 2020; Greenberg, 2021). One outcome of 'broken window' policing can be profiling, which typically results in increases in arrests for persons of color (e.g., Kohler-Haussmann, 2018).

Correia and Wall (2018) argue that while racial differences in crime rates are in part a reflection of policing practices such as profiling, at the same time ending racial profiling will not solve the problems with how policing is done in the United States. Theorists debating race and its relationship to inequality and societal institutions (e.g., Chakravartty et al., 2018), in particular policing, suggest that more comprehensive changes in how race and power are conceived are necessary before policing as a societal institution can be transformed (Saucier & Woods, 2016).

The assumption is often that bias is the source of racial profiling (e.g., Kovera, 2019; Ross et al., 2017; see Huang (2019) for an example of racial bias in police profiling in China). The assumption of individual bias as a causal factor should be contrasted with institutional, procedure, or interactional sources of unequal treatment. While some research has looked at the relationship between race and frequency of 911 calls (e.g., Hagan et al., 2018; relatively few papers have explored the role of race within the interaction between caller and call taker in the 911 call (e.g., Gillooly, 2020).

Lum et al. (2020) examined the role of emergency service call takers as gatekeepers for the provision of emergency services. They note that call takers are part of a system in which multiple players (e.g., citizen callers, dispatchers, the police) and organizational factors

(including rules and expectations) together result in the reported crime rates. Gillooly (2020) analyzed the Henry Louis Gates Jr. case, in which police challenged an African American man who was trying to pry open the front door of his own house because he had locked himself out. The police officer who arrived on the scene was widely perceived to be practicing racial profiling in this instance, but Gillooly (2020) argues that his response may have been guided by how the dispatcher formulated the dispatch information. While the caller had made a largely neutral report about what was happening, the call taker characterized the event as 'breaking and entering.'

While previous research on emergency telephone calls has investigated many aspects of these types of interactions, how racial and ethnic categories are formulated and used in the context of these calls has not yet been sufficiently examined. In this paper I use an ethnomethodological theoretical perspective and the conversation analytic method to investigate how emergency call takers and callers formulate and place references to racial/ethnic categories within the calls. I explore how what is commonly perceived as racial profiling differs from participants' routine use of racial/ethnic categories to assist in achieving the goals of the call. I then problematize these 'routine' uses, and raise the question of how even these routine uses of racial/ethnic categories can either constitute or facilitate a form of racial profiling.

Theoretical lens and methodological approach

This paper uses an ethnomethodological theoretical perspective and the conversation analytic method to explore the procedures through which race/ethnic categories are used in emergency telephone calls (Garfinkel, 1967; Sacks, 1992). Conversation analytic studies explore the interactional procedures used to conduct work in a wide range of institutional and informal

settings. By studying talk in its sequential context (the prior turns, the interaction itself, and the institutional roles of the participants) we can discover how participants use routine procedures to accomplish social action, social organization and intersubjective understanding (e.g., Garcia, 2013; Goodwin & Duranti, 1992; Heritage & Clayman, 2010; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008; Schegloff, 2007; Sidnell, 2010; ten Have, 2007).

In ethnomethodological terms a 'deviant case' is one which is accountably atypical. The unusual aspects of the deviant case contrast with and make visible the work done by routine ways of accomplishing the task, thus revealing the procedures and social norms participants use in given types of interactions (Garfinkel, 1967). Communicative acts that are atypical and that do not follow routine procedures for doing work in a given institutional setting can be better understood by examining how they differ from routine procedures and interactional norms.

Data and methods

The data analyzed in this paper are part of a larger collection of 96 calls collected for a study of interactional procedures in emergency service calls (see Sidnell (2010) on collections of conversation analytic data). The calls were publically released by a range of 911 call centers throughout the United States. These calls were pre-existing public records which were released to the media and hence were exempt from review by the IRB. In 80 of the 96 calls in the data set there were no explicit mentions of race/ethnicity. In 16 of the calls an explicit reference to racial/ethnic categories were used to refer to people discussed during the call.

The audio recording of the calls were transcribed using the conventions of conversation analysis (Jefferson, 2004; the transcribing conventions are listed in the Appendix). Simplified versions of the transcripts are used in this paper for ease of reading, and pseudonyms are used for

names and addresses. Previous conversation analytic research has laid a foundation for

understanding the interactional organization of emergency telephone calls and interactional uses

of racial/ethnic categories. After brief summaries of these bodies of research, I present the

analysis of the collection of 16 emergency telephone calls in which explicit references to

racial/ethnic categories were made.

Conversation analytic studies of emergency telephone calls

Emergency telephone calls are an essential component of the provision of emergency services and

have been extensively studied from a conversation analytic perspective (e.g., Kevoe-Feldman, 2019;

Larsen, 2013; Monzoni, 2009; Paoletti, 2009, 2012; Tracy & Tracy, 1998; Whalen & Zimmerman,

1990; Zimmerman, 1984). Emergency service calls differ from ordinary telephone calls in the

construction of the opening sequence, the organization of the body of the call, and the performance

of the roles of the participants (Cromdal et al., 2012a, 2012b; Larsen, 2013; Whalen & Zimmerman,

1987; Zimmerman, 1984, 1992a, 1992b). Participants produce 'truncated' opening sequences

which display an orientation to the time sensitivity of the work done through emergency service

calls (Zimmerman, 1984). This is typically followed by the caller's first turn in which they request

help and/or provide a description of the problem (Whalen & Zimmerman, 1990). The body of the

call consists of an 'interrogative series' in which the call taker questions the caller to obtain the

information necessary to provide service (Whalen & Zimmerman, 1987; Whalen & Zimmerman,

1990; Zimmerman, 1984).

One critical task performed by callers to emergency services is conveying that the matter

they are calling about is a 'policeable problem' (Whalen & Zimmerman, 1990; see also Cromdal et

al., 2008; Sharrock & Turner, 1978; Tracy & Anderson, 1999). This means that the caller must

present a justification, either implicitly or explicitly, for the police, ambulance, or fire services that may be sent by the call taker (e.g., Garcia, 2015, 2017; Garcia & Parmer, 1999; Whalen et al., 1988; Paoletti, 2009; Zimmerman, 1992b). If the justifiability of a response is in question, call takers work to resolve those ambiguities (Larsen, 2013; Whalen & Zimmerman, 1990).

Previous conversation-analytic research on race and ethnic categories

Participants in interaction construct and display their orientation to race and ethnicity through their use and formulation of membership categories and the category-bound actions and characteristics associated with them (see Sacks, 1992; Whitehead, 2009; 2018). This work can be done explicitly or implicitly (Whitehead, 2009; see also Shrikant, 2019). West and Fenstermaker (2002) analyze how participants in a board meeting explicitly construct racial categories through talk. Participants' choices about how or whether to identify themselves as members of specific racial or ethnic categories were used to convey the relevance of their positions for the topic being debated (affirmative action policies). Whitehead (2020) studied how callers to a radio talk show can invoke racial categories implicitly through indirect references and ambiguous formulations. He argues that the identity 'white' is often treated as the default category, thus making its explicit mention unnecessary in many contexts (see also Whitehead & Lerner, 2009). Instead of explicit self-identification as white, callers' racial categories could be inferred from aspects of the interaction such as accents, geographical locations, occupations, and positions on social issues. As Whitehead and Lerner (2009) note, implicit references to racial categories are most often used when the category referred to is 'white,' with other categories explicitly mentioned.

Analysis of the data

In this section I analyze the collection of 16 emergency telephone calls in which participants refer to persons of interest using racial/ethnic categories. The analysis problematizes the use of racial/ethnic categories in these calls by comparing the deviant case of a caller's racial profiling with routine procedures for soliciting or volunteering these categories. The first call analyzed is atypical--a deviant case in which a caller volunteered a racial category not to assist in identifying or locating the labeled individual, but in an attempt to justify the call as police relevant. This call is an instance of what is commonly viewed as racial profiling. I then analyze the remaining 15 calls, and describe the procedures participants use to request and volunteer information about racial/ethnic categories. In these data racial/ethnic categories were routinely introduced by call taker's requests or by callers volunteering such information. I describe how both deviant and routine uses of these categories could lead to racial profiling and/or displace information that might be more effective in creating useful descriptions of persons of interest.

Doing 'racial profiling': Using race to justify a call to 911

Of the 16 calls in which explicit references to racial/ethnic categories occurred, there was only one instance of a caller volunteering such references in their first turn in the call. This call is therefore atypical in the sense that it was a rare event. It also differed from the remaining 15 calls because of how racial/ethnic categories are used in the call. The caller volunteered information about the racial/ethnic category of the person of interest not to aid the police in identifying, recognizing or locating that person, but as evidence supporting the suspicion that a crime may be in progress.

The caller's claim to be reporting a policeable problem rests on her assumption that when she sees an African American man in public with two white children that he is engaging in

criminal behavior. She apparently suspects him of kidnapping the children--actually he had been hired by the children's parents to take care of them (Gomez, 2018). This is an instance of racial profiling on the part of the caller. Note that gender undoubtedly also plays a role here. If the person of interest had been an African American woman rather than a man, societal stereotypes about women as caretakers of children may have come into play (Sacks, 1992). It is likely that race and gender working together led to the caller's suspicions.

Excerpt 1: Caller suspects man of kidnapping children

((CT: male, C: female))

1	CT:	nine one one what's (the address) of your emergency
2		(0.6)
3	C:	hi there um I'm in the Wa:lmart parking lot at (Conner) parkway?
4		(0.2) and (0.2) I just got my nails done and I see this (0.2) black
5		gentleman with these two little white kids and I (0.2) a:nd (0.3) so
6		I just had a funny feeling (0.2) a:nd so I rode around and I sh- I
7		came back and I said- I saw the gi:rl get in (0.2) and the- the
8		little boy and I said I wal- I drove around these kids are these kids
9		okay? do you know these kids and he said why wouldn't I I said I
10		don't know ( ) I rode around again let me see the little
11		girl and he said NO and I said let me see the little girl! and jus-
12		see if she knows you and and uh you know so (0.4) he's in the::
13		(0.2) the:: (0.2) u:h gas station right now (0.2) and the number
14		on the plate is uh ((license number deleted)) it's u:h (0.2) u:m

15   like an electric <u>blue</u> honda

The caller provides her location in her first turn and begins to tell a story which accounts for her decision to call 911. She uses racial/ethnic categories to refer to the persons of interest ('black gentleman with these two little <u>white</u> kids'; lines 4-5). She then describes having a 'funny feeling' (line 6). She reports that she asked the man if she could talk to the children and was refused (lines 7-12). The caller identifies nothing about the man's behavior to support her suspicions that something is wrong other than his refusal to comply with her unusual request. The racial category of the person of interest is presented as the caller's justification for making the call, rather than anything problematic about him or his behavior. It was simply that he was apparently of a different racial category than the children who were with him.

The conversation analytic concept of membership categorization analysis (Fitzgerald & Housley, 2015; Sacks, 1992) is relevant here, in that this caller is overlaying membership in racial categories with membership in the category family, and perceiving what to her is an inconsistency. While objectively, there is often overlap in the categories of race and family, her observation leads her to suspect that something is wrong. Further, she may be assuming an implicit overlap in the categories of 'Black' and 'criminal.' Previous research addresses these stereotypes and analyzes how racial disparities in arrests and convictions are produced (Desai, 2019; Kohler-Hausmann, 2018; Murakawa, 2019; Pittman, 2020; Schlesinger, 2013; see also Lane et al. (2020) on racial stereotypes in media reports of Black Lives Matter protests).

Through her use of these categories (Shrikant, 2019), sounding white (based on her accent), and referring to the person of interest as 'black,' the caller may be implicitly identifying herself as white (Whitehead, 2020). The caller's use of 'gentleman' in line 5 may be a way of using hyper-politeness to counter the implications of this racial profiling. The use of this term

may enable her to claim a positive face for herself as one who is not motivated by racial bias (see Chiang (2010) on techniques speakers use to present themselves to others as not racist). In the following sections of this paper I analyze how racial/ethnic categories were routinely formulated and placed within the body of the call.

Routine uses of racial/ethnic categories in 911 calls

In this section I analyze the remaining 15 calls to show how the routine work of describing individuals is done by participants in emergency telephone calls. Call takers made explicit requests for racial/ethnic categories as well as general requests for descriptions which led some callers to provide such categories. In addition, some callers volunteered racial/ethnic categories in the absence of call taker requests.

Explicit requests are those which are directly articulated in the form of a request rather than indirectly formulated (e.g., Risberg & Lymer, 2020). In these data call taker's use of explicit requests for racial/ethnic categories of persons of interest occurred within the interrogative series. Call takers in these data use either the 'menu method' or the 'candidate-confirmation method' to request the racial/ethnic category of a person of interest.

The 'menu method' of requesting racial/ethnic categories

Call takers construct a 'menu' request by providing a list of racial/ethnic categories and asking the caller to choose from that list. The categories provided are typically broad 'generic' categories (e.g., 'Hispanic' rather than 'Guatemalan'). Excerpt 2 shows a call taker using the menu method to request information about a person of interest--a small child who has been found alone on a boat. In this call the male child is misidentified as a female (Lapin, 2020).

Excerpt 2: Child found in boat, mother missing

((CT: female; C: female))

1	CT:	nine one one which (town) are you reporting?
2		(0.4)
3	C:	um lake picard? um the emergency is we have a missing person?
4		we found a little girl (0.2) i:n one of the <u>bo</u>ats by herself and
5		the mom is <u>no</u>where to be found.
6		(.)
7	CT:	okay lake pica:rd? (1.5) mm (0.3) fou:nd h .h hh (0.6) okay <u>one</u>
8		chi:ld. (0.2) .hh <u>a</u>:nd she's u:h is she white black asian hispanic?
9		(0.3)
10	C:	I have <u>no</u> i<u>de</u>a I'm heading down there right now to check my
11		husband he was one of the people that was? first? there? a:nd <u>I</u>'m
12		going to go find out more information. he just told me to call it in

In the caller's first turn she identifies the gender and approximate age of the person who was found ('a little girl'; line 4). The call taker first verifies the location information and then uses a menu request to elicit information using a standardized list of race/ethnic categories ('<u>a</u>:nd she's u:h is she white black asian hispanic?'; line 8). There are no explicit clues in the call as to the race/ethnicity of the caller, but both the caller and the call taker sound like native speakers of English (see Whitehead (2020) on implicit cues). Note that even though this sounds like a standardized and purportedly comprehensive list, there are other possible categories or terms that

could have been used (to be discussed below). Variations on the menu method occur in these

data, for example in terms of the number and order of racial/ethnic categories provided. It may

be that the specific categories used, and/or the order in which they are used, are related to the

demographics of the geographical region the call occurred within. While obtaining a description

of the found child may be useful to police who arrive on the scene, the use of the menu method

requires putting people into generic racial categories based on very little information. These

categories then create a potential for differential treatment of persons of interest.

The 'candidate confirmation' method of requesting racial/ethnic categories

Call takers create 'candidate confirmation' requests by suggesting a specific racial/ethnic

category and requesting confirmation from the caller. For example, the caller in Excerpt 3 is

reporting a missing child. He first specifies that a child is missing (line 13), and then provides

the child's gender (line 14). The call taker then asks a series of questions requesting information

about the child (starting in line 16).

    <u>Excerpt 3:   Missing five year old boy</u>

    ((CT: male, C: male))

    11   CT: okay tell me (exactly) what happened?

    12   (0.3)

    13   C: um we: uh (0.2) we have a missing child. (0.3) um (0.2) woke

    14   up this morning a:nd uh (0.3) he wasn't (0.2) he wasn't-

    15   (0.1)

    16   CT: how [old is] he

17   C: [(   )]

18   (0.2)

19   C: (we have a) missing child

20   (0.2)

21   CT: yeah how <u>old</u> is he

22   (0.3)

23   C: he's five.

24   (0.6)

25   CT: and what was he last seen wearing

26   (0.2)

27   C: uhm uh <u>ma</u>rio like blue (long sleeve) sweatshirt and uh <u>black</u>

28   sweatpants

29   (3.0)

30   CT: and is he u::h (0.2) male white?

31   (0.4)

32   C: yes.

The call taker first asks for the age of the child (lines 16 and 21), and then asks about his clothing ('and what was he last seen wearing'; line 25). The call taker then provides a candidate racial/ethnic category ('and is he u::h (0.2) male white?'; line 30) and asks for confirmation via a question produced with questioning intonation. This candidate confirmation request is formulated as a 'yes/no interrogative' (Atkinson & Drew, 1979; Raymond, 2003) with a preference for agreement (Pomerantz, 1984; Sacks, 1987). There may be implicit clues which

lead the call taker to assume that the missing child was white. These could include accent, name, demographics of the neighborhood the call comes from, or other factors (Whitehead, 2020).

Like the menu request method, the candidate confirmation method elicits information that could lead to profiling on the basis of racial category. In addition, the use of this method in Excerpt 3 seems to be based on the assumption that the call taker is also white. The method used to elicit racial categories in these calls may be related to perceived in-group or outgroup membership between the call taker and the caller. The use of the candidate confirmation method may constitute an instance of 'racial recognition' on the part of the call taker. The call taker may imply that he is white by making this 'guess' as to the racial group of the caller.

Call taker's 'general' requests for descriptions

In this section I analyze those call taker requests for descriptions which did not make explicit references to racial/ethnic categories but nevertheless resulted in their production by the caller. In some cases, the callers used standard categories (e.g., White, Black, Asian, Hispanic). In other cases, callers used non-standard categories.

Standard formulations of racial/ethnic categories. In Excerpt 4 the call taker asks for a description via a general question (line 19) and the caller responds with standard racial categories (lines 21-25). The caller is an employee at a drug store who suspects two customers of shoplifting. It should be noted that when the police apprehended the male suspect, no stolen goods were found; his identification as a shoplifter was mistaken (Ballantyne, 2020).

Excerpt 4: Man suspected of shoplifting

((CT: male; C: male))

19   CT: can you describe the person to me?

20   (0.2)

21   C: (short um) one black guy big one um with a hoodie with brown

22   with a grey hoodie? and black lady (0.2) U::M like um black um

23   black coat? (0.2) but um I <u>want</u> you guys to uh (stay in the) <u>back</u>

24   of the store (the walnut ave) uh door? in the car (0.2) so that

25   you can so when they go out? from this door (0.2) you can catch

26   them

27   (0.2)

28   CT: okay u:hm <u>whi</u>ch door are they at

The call taker uses a general question to ask the caller for a description of the suspected shoplifter ('can you describe the person to me?'; line 19). The caller's response reveals that there are two suspects rather than one. His description begins with a racial/ethnic category, followed by the suspect's gender, followed by the size of the person ('big one'), and finally by a description of the suspects' clothes (lines 21-23). It should be noted that the caller was apparently not a native speaker of English; this may explain some of the grammatical choices in his responses (see Garcia, 2021). Even though the request for a description was a general question, in his response the caller volunteered a racial/ethnic category as the first descriptor (he had already revealed the gender of one suspect earlier in the call). In order to help the police recognize the suspects when they left the store, the caller may have assumed that race was a category that would facilitate recognition. In the city in which this incident occurred, African

Americans were only a very small percentage of the population. Of course in this instance, the

suspect was incorrectly identified as a shoplifter (Ballantyne, 2020). The use of a racial category

in the description may make him vulnerable to profiling by police when they arrest him as he

leaves the store.

Non-standard formulations of racial/ethnic categories. There were several ways non-

standard references to racial/ethnic categories were formulated in these data. In Excerpt 5 below

a call taker makes a general request for information about the person of interest ('okay give me a

description of him'; line 47). Prior to this general request for a description, the caller had already

conveyed some information about the suspect (his gender and the type, color, and license plate

number of his car).

Excerpt 5: Girl kidnapped from yard

((CT: male; C: female))

47   CT: okay give me a description of <u>him</u>

48   C: hh .hh oh my god he was a mexican? .hh hh=

49   CT: =how <u>old</u> do you

50   think was he and what was he wearing

51   (0.2)

52   C: with a mustache? and he was like how old [about in] his?

53   ?:   [(   )]

54   C: twenties? (maybe)

55   CT: okay

56   C: and he=

57   CT: =what was he wearing

58   (0.2)

59   C: I don't know it was in the car [(   )]

60   CT: [it's okay] it's okay it's okay

61   we got everybody on the way already okay? [um]

62   C: [like] a brown shirt

63   may be? (0.3) I think like a tank top maybe? or something? .hh

64   (0.2)

65   CT: oka:y um

In response to the call taker's general request for a description, the caller provides a non-standard racial/ethnic category of the person she observed kidnapping the girl ('hh .hh oh my god he was a mexican?'; line 48). Note the questioning intonation on 'mexican?' which marks the category used by the caller as tentative. Given the placement of this question after she has already provided the suspect's gender and his car's type, color and license plate number, there may be fewer choices as to what identifying characteristics are left to describe. Note that the category 'Mexican' is much more specific than 'Hispanic,' and is not one of the standard categories used in the menu method in these data. Given that this call occurred in a city where almost 50% of the population is Hispanic, it could be that in this local context 'Mexican' serves as a stand in for the more commonly used category 'Hispanic.' However, the questioning intonation reveals the caller's uncertainty about this categorization, so it is possible that a miscategorization could be passed on to officers in the field. The call taker does not question the

racial/ethnic category provided, and instead asks about the suspect's age and clothing (lines 49, 50, and 57). He thus implicitly treats 'Mexican' as a sufficient racial/ethnic categorization of the suspect.

Excerpt 6 also has a general request for a description followed by a non-standard report of ethnicity:

Excerpt 6: Man kidnapped and car stolen

((CT: male; C: male))

92   CT: o<u>k</u>ay. sir! now do you know- re<u>me</u>mber what these guys <u>lo</u>oked

93   like?

94   (0.3)

95   C: they look (yeah) like yeah they're from like .hh from .hh uhm east?

96   east ahsia (   ) from middle middle ahsia middle asia

97   (0.1)

98   CT: .h they're [from   ] middle asia?

99   C: [(   )]

100   C: middle asia (they're) come from araba- araba- araba arabia! .hh hh

101   CT: alright we:ll (look)

102   C: (they are muslims) (0.2) they look(s) like from iran or iraq

103   somewhere .hh hhhh

104   CT: okay pick <u>one</u> <u>gu</u>y and give (him) uh description to me

105   (0.2)

106   C: <u>one</u> guy (is) they're they're pretty skinny? (0.2) .h and they hav:e

107   they come from .hh hh I think they come from ira:n? or ee .h

108   maybe .hh iraq somewhere .hh=

109 CT: =middle (eastern man?)

110   (0.2)

111 C: middle east yeah

112   (0.4)

113 CT: oka:y.

The call taker asks for a description of the suspects ('sir! now do you know- remember what these guys looked like?'; lines 92-93), and the caller volunteers an ethnic identity as a descriptor (starting in line 95). As in Excerpt 5 above, the persons of interest are referred to in a way that does not fit into one of the standard categories (White, Black, Hispanic or Asian). This caller is a speaker of English as a second language. His level of familiarity with English may lead him to use different categories than a native speaker of English might use. In addition, the standard American racial categories may not appear relevant to him. The caller struggles to define the ethnicity of the caller, volunteering east Asia, middle Asia, Arabia, Iran or Iraq as possibilities. The call taker then suggests 'middle (eastern man?)' (line 109) as a gloss for the possibilities the caller has presented, and the caller agrees (line 111). Note that this suggested gloss is not one of the generic standard categories used in the United States, but is an attempt to provide a category to cover people from the parts of the world the caller listed. This excerpt illustrates that there may be advantages to having a caller volunteer non-standard categories, in that more specific categorizations can be obtained. These specific categories may better facilitate identification of the person of interest while at the same time avoid some of the

stereotypes associated with the standard generic categories that can contribute to profiling. On

the other hand, as seen in this excerpt, the caller's production of nonstandard categories can take

considerable time and effort. Anything that lengthens the call may delay a response to the

emergency that is being reported.

Callers volunteer racial/ethnic categories

In this section I discuss how callers volunteer racial/ethnic categories of a person of interest

when not solicited by call takers. Excerpt 7 shows a caller volunteering a description of a person

of interest which includes a racial/ethnic category. The caller suspects this person of kidnapping

his daughter (Yancey-Bragg, 2020).

Excerpt 7: Woman kidnapped, father calls police

((CT: female; C: male))

75	C:	she had broken up with a (0.2) boy?
76		(0.2)
77	CT:	okay
78		(0.1)
79	C:	or a man? recently and um he's a pretty tall black gu:y? (0.2)
80		jeff smith is his name.
81		(0.6)
82	CT:	okay. (0.2) has he made any threats or anything like that?
83		(0.2)
84	C:	u::m her his his friends were kind of harassing her a little bit well

85   they were. the campus police were involved with that

86   (0.2)

87   CT: ye:s.

The caller volunteered that his daughter, who was a college student, had 'broken up with a (0.2) boy?' (line 75). He then performs a self repair in the third turn position (Schegloff et al., 1977), replacing 'boy' with 'man' ('or a man? recently and um he's a pretty tall black gu:y? (0.2) jeff smith is his name.'; lines 79-80). The caller's placement of the racial/ethnic category later in the description (after he has provide gender, age and height) may indicate that the use of this category is a 'dispreferred action.' Dispreferred actions are formulated and placed in interactions to display their dispreferred status, and may be delayed, mitigated, or formulated indirectly (Pomerantz, 1984). As in Excerpt 1 above, the caller may be working to display a non-racist perspective by placing the racial category at the end of the list of descriptors (Chiang, 2010).

In Excerpt 8 a twelve year old girl called 911 while hiding from a burglar who was breaking into her house. She answers the call taker's question as to whether she knows the suspect by volunteering a racial/ethnic category to describe him.

Excerpt 8: Twelve year old girl hiding from burglar

((CT: female; C: female))

3   C: hi um (0.3) there's someone at my door? and he keeps on knocking

4   on the door .hh and=he- (0.2) tried opening it

5   (0.2)

6   CT: yeah? oka:y (give me time) okay (0.4) and you don't kno:w him?

7		(0.2)
8	C:	no: he's- he's mexican and .hhh I don't know him at all .hh hh he-
9		(0.3) chh and I'm home alone.

The caller volunteers that the burglar is Mexican (line 8). The continuation of her turn ('and .hhh I don't know him at all'; line 8) implies that she is from an ethnic group other than Mexican. This ethnic 'otherness' is presented as evidence for her not knowing him (Van Cleve & Mayes, 2015; see also Burroughs, 2015). The use of this racial/ethnic category is for the purpose of providing evidence that the call is justified. The ethnicity of the person knocking on her door is given as evidence that she does not know him in order to justify her calling the police. It is his identity as an 'other' that is used to prove that she does not know him. This use of a racial/ethnic category may be another instance of the display of implicit whiteness (Whitehead, 2020). This is further documented later in the call, when the call taker uses the menu method to request her brother's racial/ethnic categories (her brothers are expected to arrive home shortly), and the caller identifies her brothers as white (not shown).

The examples of volunteered racial/ethnic categories in Excerpts 7 and 8 show how this information both fills functions for doing the work of the 911 call and puts persons of interest into categories which may lead to profiling when this information is forwarded to police in the field. In Excerpt 7 the caller volunteered the information to help the police locate the suspected kidnapper of his daughter, and in Excerpt 8 the caller volunteered the information to help convince the call taker that the person trying to open her door was a burglar rather than a friend or family member.

Discussion and conclusions

In this paper I first analyzed a deviant case in which a caller used a racial/ethnic category to justify the call as reporting a police-relevant situation; this was identified as racial profiling. In the remainder of the calls in the collection, call takers and callers used routine procedures for eliciting and volunteering racial/ethnic categories. Call takers could explicitly request a racial/ethnic category for the person of interest by using the menu or candidate confirmation methods. Call takers could also produce general requests for descriptions, some of which would elicit racial/ethnic categories. Finally, callers could volunteer a racial/ethnic category for the person of interest if not asked for one by the call taker. The categories volunteered were most often standard categories (such as Black, Hispanic, White, or Asian), but were sometimes nonstandard categories (such as 'Mexican' or 'Middle Eastern').

In terms of the locations within the call these categories were requested or volunteered, only the deviant case occurred in the caller's first turn; the other instances all occurred during the interrogative series. Racial/ethnic categories, whether produced by requests or volunteered, were often not the first descriptor provided. Gender, clothing, or type of car were common ways of describing individuals in these data. These delayed locations suggest that soliciting or volunteering racial/ethnic categories may be a dispreferred action within the calls (Pomerantz, 1984), and/or may reflect caller's reluctance to foreground this information.

Recall also that this collection of 16 calls with references to racial/ethnic categories constituted a small minority of the 96 calls in the larger data set. This demonstrates that in most cases, the work of emergency service calls can be done without this information. Information about racial/ethnic categories is only solicited or volunteered if one or both parties finds it to be relevant to the work at hand. When asked to describe someone for the purpose of enabling the

police officer in the field to identify/locate/recognize that person, the caller may produce what they feel are the most salient descriptors or details based on their knowledge of what that person 'looks like.' This description may or may not contain racial/ethnic categories. Waiting for callers to volunteer racial/ethnic categories or to produce them in response to general requests for descriptions may be the most neutral/profiling-avoidant approach a call taker can take. This approach is also more likely to elicit other types of descriptors that the caller has noticed which may be useful. One problem with racial/ethnic categories is they have less to do with what someone looks like than with preconceived notions as to what a person is--their identity as a member of a group. Ascribing an identity during a 911 call is not the same thing as describing the person.

As discussed in the introduction, the theoretical contributions of the ethnomethodological perspective and conversation analysis have relevance for our understanding of both racial profiling and emergency service calls by focusing our attention on how racial/ethnic categories are routinely accomplished in face-to-face interaction. It also enables the analysis of the single instance of a caller's use of a racial/ethnic category to justify a call to the police by relying on the racial category to frame the complaint as a policeable problem (racial profiling). The contrast between these routine and atypical ways of using racial categories in 911 calls shows that racial profiling is not solely a matter of attitudes, it is also a matter of interactional procedures and decisions on whether, how and where to use the categories.

However, given the prevalence of racial profiling in American society and in policing in particular (e.g., Murakawa, 2019; Platt, 2018), this paper has also considered whether even these 'routine' uses of racial/ethnic categories, in particular the standard categories, contribute to the process of racial profiling. If racial/ethnic categories are communicated to the dispatcher/police

officers in the field, these categories may shape their perceptions of who they are looking for even before they have arrived on the scene. This process may allow biases and stereotypes about racial/ethnic categories to influence their expectations. Thus even routine use of racial/ethnic categories in police calls is potentially problematic.

Practical implications and suggestions for further research

These findings have practical implications for how emergency service call takers can maximize the usefulness and equity of the information gathered. For example, call takers who are aware of the routine ways and locations for soliciting and volunteering racial/ethnic categories may be better able to detect callers who are inappropriately racially profiling. Recognizing how and when the caller is providing racial/ethnic categorical information will help the call taker distinguish information to assist the police in identifying, recognizing, or locating a person of interest, as opposed to the use of racial/ethnic categories to inappropriately justify a 911 call. The ability to quickly recognize and distinguish between these two types of uses of racial/ethnic categories may help call takers detect racial profiling when it occurs and make more equitable decisions about how to handle these calls. This suggests that training for emergency call takers would do well to include instruction in potentially problematic uses of racial/ethnic categories so that they can both more easily recognize racial profiling by callers and in their own use of these categories during the call.

However, this analysis also problematizes the routine uses of racial/ethnic categories. Using these categories as descriptors to identify persons of interest may lead to profiling by officers in the field, even if their intended use during the call is for legitimate purposes of describing a person of interest. This could have implications for the nature of the police

response once the information from the call is transmitted by the call taker. Racial profiling may

be a distributed act--rather than resulting solely from the police officers in the field it may at

times originate from the person who calls emergency services (Gillooly, 2020; Lum et al., 2020)

or from how the call taker conveys the information obtained from the caller to the police

(Gillooly, 2020). Further research should investigate whether and how information about

racial/ethnic categories provided by callers is conveyed by call takers to the responding officers,

and should systematically investigate various types of outcomes for calls that were dispatched

with and without information on the racial categories of persons of interest.

As Whitehead (2020) has shown, the racial/ethnic categories of participants and persons

referred to may be accessible from details in the interaction even when race is not explicitly

mentioned. Future research should compare calls with explicit racial/ethnic categories to those

where such categories are left implicit. Further research should also compare race congruent

calls (when both caller and call taker are hearably of the same racial/ethnic category--this type of

analysis will rely on implicit markers of racial category such as accent), to discover whether and

how these calls differ from race incongruent calls. It may be that the candidate confirmation

method is a way of communicating same-group status with the caller. Depending on the results

of these further studies, decisions might be made to change whether or how these categories are

used in 911 calls and the related dispatch packages.

Given the relatively small size of the collection of data in this preliminary study, further

research on larger data sets should be done to confirm and extend these findings. Further

research should address whether racial/ethnic categories are actually useful descriptors when

police need to find someone, or whether other characteristics would be more useful. What types

of descriptors are most likely to be helpful will no doubt vary with the specific circumstances of

the case, but it is quite possible that in some emergency calls questions about the person of interest's age, clothing, or type of car are more likely to be of use than a racial/ethnic category.

Finally, the geographic location of the calls may be important for understanding which categories are used, given that population breakdowns by race/ethnicity differ by region, state, city, and even streets or neighborhoods within cities. The geographical local context may therefore be key for understanding how people refer to racial/ethnic categories in 911 calls, and further research should address how categories used vary by local context (see for example, Natrass et al., 2017; Paoletti, 2009).

Appendix

Simplified version of Gail Jefferson's (2004) transcription conventions:

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
(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.

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.

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