

# SATISFACTION WORK IN AN EMERGENCY SITUATION: THE CASE OF THE PHILADELPHIA 911 CALLS

Richard Parker, Rowan College of New Jersey  
Anita Pomerantz, Temple University  
B. J. Fehr, Temple University

## ABSTRACT

Examination of a series of telephone calls made to 911 operators during a neighborhood disturbance allows a naturalistic view of some aspects of what Swan (1992) has called "satisfaction work." It also yields some insights that may be applicable to discussions about consumer satisfaction in service encounters generally.

## INTRODUCTION

Studies of consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction and complaining behavior in the services area have noted that service processes may have more to do with ultimate satisfaction than service outcomes (Lai & Widdows 1993), and that "the service encounter frequently is the service from the customer's point of view" (Bitner et al 1990). Swan's (1992) discussion of "satisfaction work" demonstrates that the service encounter consists of a process of social interaction in which both the service provider and consumer negotiate expectations and performance standards with an eye toward achieving satisfactory outcomes. Unfortunately, the dynamics of this interactional process are difficult to capture with traditional survey research methods, and even Swan's qualitative approach (based on study of focus groups) achieves a limited perspective on the process because it relies on respondents' retrospective reconstructions of their performance in such encounters.

The present paper attempts to provide a different perspective on this matter, complementing more traditional approaches, by examining the actual verbal interaction in a series of telephone calls to 911 operators during a neighborhood incident in 1994. The approach taken is based on a naturalistic, interpretive paradigm that has been increasingly applied in consumer research in recent years (Hudson & Ozanne 1988). Like Swan's qualitative approach, it draws implicitly upon the social scientific

perspective known as ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967), which studies the ways in which persons make sense of the social situations they encounter. More specifically, it draws upon the approach known as conversation analysis (Parker 1988; Psathas 1995), which applies the ethnomethodological perspective via close micro-analysis of carefully-transcribed representations of the moment-by-moment details of verbal interaction, in order to shed light on dynamic patterns of social interaction.

## THE INCIDENT

On the evening of November 11, 1994, groups of youths (some armed with baseball bats) clashed in a residential neighborhood of Philadelphia. Although a number of calls were made to 911 emergency operators, there was no police response to the scene for approximately 45 minutes and, by the time police arrived on the scene, one young man had been fatally beaten. The general perception of the media and citizenry appeared to be that the death was an outrage and an entirely avoidable tragedy; that it was caused by an unreasonably long delay in police response; and that this delay was at least partly a function of poor performance by the initial service providers in this case, i.e. those who answered the 911 calls. An immediate investigation by the mayor and relevant authorities led to reprimands or dismissals of several operators, and an ongoing review of 911 procedures. How these issues will ultimately be resolved remains a matter of official and public discussion (Jennings et al 1994).

As part of the official reaction to this incident, a tape recorded set of the 911 calls in question was made available to the press. (Although no details were offered regarding the process by which this edited "sample" of calls was drawn from the universe of hundreds of calls made to 911 in a major metropolitan area on any given evening, the implication was that these were the only calls relevant to this particular incident. Although the judgmental process resulting in this sample could

---

be a matter of research interest, in the absence of any information to the contrary, the remainder of this paper will treat the sample as comprising all relevant calls.)

The first 20 calls from this set were carefully transcribed and are reproduced in the Appendix. Most of these calls involve brief conversations between a citizen caller (indicated as CA) and an operator/answerer (indicated as OP). A few of the calls involve brief conversations between other parties, including dispatchers (DIS), police cars (e.g. 203), and a rescue squad operator (Res). (The tape provided also included 20 later calls, many involving discussions between dispatchers and law enforcement personnel on the scene who were looking for those responsible for the incident. Those calls are omitted here due to space constraints, and also because they do not bear directly on the issues discussed in this paper.) References to these calls below will include the call number, which is indicated in parentheses at the beginning of each call (together with the time of the call).

These calls were of interest because of the view that something had "gone wrong" in the interactions between citizens and 911 operators. Although guidelines as to the conduct of such interactions are likely to be available to professionals in this field, the caller making such a call for the first time -- and the researcher trying to approach these materials with an open mind -- must rely upon common-sense expectations in order to evaluate appropriate process in this case. Consequently, research attention was focused on an inductive description of what was actually happening in these calls.

The transcripts were produced consistent with transcribing conventions commonly used in conversation-analytic studies. These conventions were developed primarily by Gail Jefferson, and are reproduced in Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974). Briefly, the objective of this system is to produce a transcript faithful to the actual utterances and expressions, but intelligible to the average non-technically-trained reader. Words and sounds are reproduced as they were actually said (and sound to the transcriber), rather than being corrected for spelling, grammar, etc.

## (DIS)CONFIRMATION OF EXPECTATIONS

As Swan (1992) has pointed out, the general perspective that governs CS/D&CB research is the disconfirmation paradigm, which views satisfaction as a function of positive confirmation of the consumer's expectations regarding the product or service. However, during a service encounter, such expectations are not necessarily fixed in advance, but can become matters subject to negotiation between the parties. Nevertheless, we may consider that both the consumer and service provider go into each encounter with certain expectations and assumptions as to likely process and outcomes. Such expectations and assumptions will be based on prior experience and/or sources of information about the service. For example, Swan discusses the case of consumer expectations about health care services as largely a function of the patient or family member's previous experience and medical history. However, it is important to note that consumers have various sources of information about service situations prior to experiencing them. Even someone who has never been in direct contact with a doctor or nurse is likely to have a rich conception of health care procedures simply by virtue of their participation in the culture, and especially from their exposure to mass media. Thus a consumer is likely to approach a service encounter in the health care area with some interactional script or schema (Abelson 1981) already invoked.

By contrast, someone making a call to 911 is likely to be embarking on behavior that is only roughly scripted, if at all. Although there are now television programs that expose viewers to the 911 system, they are a relatively recent phenomenon, and the average Philadelphian's experience with actually calling 911 themselves is likely to be minimal. It might therefore be useful to offer some preliminary speculations about the expectations such a caller might have about what will happen when they call 911. At a minimum, it might be presumed that someone will answer promptly, that the answerer is there to help them by taking the information they are providing quickly and courteously, and that this person will see to it that appropriate emergency personnel are promptly dispatched. Meanwhile, the service provider will also enter the encounter with some

such preliminary expectations. It might be hypothesized that the 911 operator would be expecting the caller to concisely and courteously provide information on precisely what emergency exists and precisely where it is occurring, so that appropriate emergency responses can be determined.

In fact, however, in this case there is a considerable asymmetry in the expectations of caller and operator. Unlike many other services, where the consumer has enough cultural knowledge about the setting to make high-probability inferences about the provider's likely actions, here the consumer is unlikely to be aware of the precise institutional constraints that govern the operator's actions. For example, the caller probably is not fully aware of the implications of the fact that, for any action to be taken, the operator must pass the information along to a dispatcher. Then, due to the large volume of calls coming in, they will be prioritized in such a way that any given call may result in something less than an immediate response. Meanwhile, the operator who has adequate experience and training will know that callers rarely provide information clearly, due to a lack of awareness of the degree of specificity required, and also due to the fact that they are typically acting under some level of stress. Operators know they may have to prod and interrogate callers to get accurate and specific information. Consequently, this interaction typically begins with a level of asymmetry of expectations that might be expected -- even in the absence of unusual problems -- to result in some interactional difficulty.

#### **CALLER DEFERENCE AND TRUST**

The 911 caller is in a situation of considerable trust, different from that in many other service encounters. (Consumers often approach other kinds of service encounters with a degree of trepidation regarding process, outcomes and even provider motivation.) The 911 caller is often in a stressful and possibly "life-or-death" situation, but is likely to assume that the operator is a public servant and a competent, trained professional, someone without personal interest or reason to seek any outcome other than prompt solution of the caller's problem.

Consequently, callers often adopt a deferential and appreciative tone in a 911 situation. This is evident beginning in Call 1 where, after the operator responds, the caller says "Hi I'm sorry to call you:: but could you please send a car ...". Apologizing in advance for requesting a service might sometimes suggest either a situation not warranting such a service, or an unnecessarily deferential consumer. But in the case of 911 calls, the answerer is expected to solve a problem that is of serious concern to the caller. These calls therefore include many signs of deference and appreciation, with most ending with the caller thanking the operator. In fact, the caller's participation in Call 7 actually begins with a thank you ("Thank you I'm calling from the Fox Chase section ..."), suggesting that the caller is in an appreciative frame of mind regarding the service even before the request for it has been made.

Callers have such a degree of trust in their presumption of shared understandings with the operator -- and confidence that their outcomes expectations will be confirmed -- that they often offer their thanks even when no promise of action is explicitly offered!. Call 1 begins with caller's explicit request for police response, but operator never confirms that a car will be sent. Since there is no evidence of any police car being dispatched to the scene until Call 11, 40 minutes later, Call 1 does not appear to have provoked the requested action. This may actually have been a consequence of the deferential tone of the caller being interpreted by the operator as indicating that, in fact, this was an insufficiently serious situation to warrant immediate police action. It may have also been influenced by the manner in which caller described what was happening: "They're a pack of kids and they're really noisy and they're ( )- " could not be expected to project the degree of disturbance that ultimately ensued. On the other hand, answerers of subsequent calls invariably questioned callers to determine precisely what problems these "kids" were causing, so this operator may have prematurely categorized this incident as of low priority.

Even these few calls vary considerably in the degree to which responsive actions are explicitly projected. At one extreme is the subset of calls in which the operator explicitly promises a response, such as (in Call 3) "Awright we'll send somebody

out there" (even though how soon someone will be sent, or who precisely will be sent, is not usually addressed). In other calls, the caller asks for a specific action response, but the operator responds to the request and/or closes the call with an utterance such as "Awrighty" or "Mh mhm" (Call 4), which acknowledges receipt of the request without explicitly promising action. In Call 2, the operator implies that police will be sent, by responding to information about a woman having her car window broken during the disturbance with the question "Is she gonna wait for the police?" However, when asked "How long is it gonna be?," she responds "I have no idea" (and even so, caller ends with a "thank you").

The call that best illustrates caller's trust in an expected outcome is Call 5. Here the caller reports "a gang of at least fifty ki- young kids with bats outside beatin each other," upon which the operator asks for some details regarding the precise location of the incident and the "kids." Finally, the operator says "Okay," the caller says "Okay thank you," and the operator finally says "You're welcome." In other service encounters, such a "thank you" could be thanks for someone simply taking information one is providing, but it seems probable that a caller in this situation is basing those thanks on the expectation of a specific action response, which is never explicitly stated, and is entirely taken-for-granted within the context of the call. That is, it does not appear to occur to this caller that information is being taken -- and verified for precision -- except insofar as it will provoke police action directed to this location. The operator's "Okay" is undoubtedly heard as if it were followed by "something will be done about this."

### BREAKDOWNS OF TRUST

The trust callers have in operators' provoking appropriate responses to their problems may be lessened for callers with prior (especially unsatisfactory) 911 experience. In addition, in this case, the lack of prompt police response to the disturbance -- combined with the fact that several of the later callers are aware of prior calls -- results in several strained encounters. Call 4 includes an initial request, "Could you send ah some police over here," followed by a later,

abortive request, "Could you get a (.) car-." Although this call occurs some 19 minutes after the first call, it is not clear that the caller knows of any prior calls. Nevertheless, the fact that caller isn't satisfied with the response to his initial request suggests the absence of any assumption that appropriate action will result. (Even after this second request the operator makes no promise of action.)

Call 6 begins with an expression of caller's dissatisfaction preceding provision of information: "I don't believe this It just rang about ten times There's a big commotion ..." This caller either has previous experience of such calls being answered prior to the tenth ring, or has just been disabused of an expectation that her call would be answered promptly. The same caller also refuses to assume that operator is translating information into appropriate action. After receiving an "Awright" to her initial report, she pursues the matter by asking "Did you get that?" When operator restates caller's report, pauses, and then asks "Was that it?," caller becomes upset and says "Ye- YEAH THAT'S IT! Send a police car ...," indicating that operator's leaving the response implicit is not acceptable to her. This particular interaction ends badly, because operator responds to caller's raised voice and demand for action by deflecting the demand ("Wait a minute Wait a minute") and terminating the conversation with "I have the information You can hang up now." This is hardly the response caller appears to be seeking. In this case, caller's action of beginning the encounter with a complaint causes a breakdown of trust by the operator in caller's commitment to focus on providing information about the incident, and suggests that the assumption of operator's competency is being challenged.

Two of the interactional "problems" evident in Call 6 relate to asymmetries in the ways callers and operators orient toward certain fundamental conversational issues. Several of the utterances in this call are followed by lengthy pauses. Operator may see these as opportunities for careful data entry, but caller appears to suspect that operator is not fully attending her report (hence "Did you get that?"). Also, operator has the job of accurately and dispassionately recording and forwarding the relevant information. Consequently, when caller questions whether operator is getting what she is

saying, operator restates it in a matter-of-fact way which caller appears to hear as insufficiently appreciative of the seriousness of the matter. Although taking time to carefully record information and responding dispassionately would appear to be appropriate behaviors for a 911 operator, and would probably not be challenged by callers whose trust in the system is high, they lend themselves to negative interpretations, especially among callers whose formerly taken-for-granted assumptions have become interactional issues. This suggests that 911 operators should probably be given specific training to assure that they do not simply do their jobs in an objective sense, but also display levels of interactional responsiveness and apparent concern for what is being described. As Hunt (1993) has pointed out, the literature tends to treat consumer dissatisfaction due to disconfirmed expectations as if it were a purely cognitive matter, not recognizing the degree of affect involved. In this case particularly (but probably true generally), functionally adequate but interactionally inadequate responses to an affectively charged situation will seriously compromise the quality of the service encounter.

Several other calls suggest caller impatience with the lack of police response as the situation unfolds. In Call 8, operator promises that "we'll send somebody out," but caller replies "Yeah hurry up because I don't know what's hapnen." In Call 13, caller begins with a complaint that "we got a near riot an there's no DAMN police around here." When asked "Where?," caller becomes upset, and his answer points out that "WE'VE BEEN CALLIN! EVERYBODY IN THE DAMN NEIGHBORHOOD'S BEEN CALLIN THERE!" He does not appear to hear or respond to operator's "Well I don't know that." Here caller appears to have become upset based on another assumption that turns out to be unwarranted, namely that any current operator answering a 911 call will have some awareness of situations reported in previous 911 calls. (He also assumes that operators previously called have had the power to assure responsive action.) In Call 15 (possibly by the same caller), caller complains "THEY'RE BEATIN THE HELL OUT A PEOPLE WITH BASE BALL BATS UP HERE! WHEN ARE YOU GONNA SEND SOMEBODY?" When asked "Who's got a bat

sir?," he becomes more upset, again apparently because he assumes that operator already has (or should have) information about the situation. Finally, the caller in Call 19, apparently unaware that police are already on the scene (the police response in Call 18 precedes Call 19 by only a few seconds), follows an initial request, which is answered with an "Okay," with "It's really bad if you could hurry," which is then followed by an "Okay" on the part of operator and caller. Here an apparently innocent exchange actually betrays absence of trust in implicit assumptions, because caller actually receives an explicit confirmation of his request for police response (which confirmation, as indicated above, is actually not given in many other cases) and yet adds the additional request that such presumably "emergency" response be accomplished in a "hurry." As the disturbance continues, an even more impatient caller in Call 20 is told "We will send the police," but replies with a demand to "Send them now not in ten minutes but now." But this caller has already lost faith in the system: "WE GOT KIDS BEIN BEAT UP ... AND NO ONE WANTS TO HELP US." This is the first case in which a caller directly challenges the assumption that the motivation of the 911 operators is to help callers.

### NEGOTIATING THE DETAILS

Much of the conversation in these calls focuses on the operator trying to determine, as precisely as possible, the who, what, when, where and why of the situation. In many cases this results in callers courteously providing details to the best of their ability, given the situation. However, there are times when the need for such information is called into question. (Indeed, there are times when operators ask questions that do not seem to be necessary even from the researcher's perspective!). Questions pertaining to who is doing what have much to do with how the problem will be prioritized, and the categories into which people and events are assigned have a direct bearing on what response will be forthcoming, and how quickly. As indicated earlier, when the caller in Call 1 defines those in the disturbance as "kids," and their actions as being "really noisy" in a McDonald's, the call is undoubtedly assigned a

low priority. Moreover, when operator asks "Inside the McDonald's?" and is told "In the parking lot," the incident may sound like youthful carousing rather than the serious situation it turns out to be. In Call 2, a caller from McDonald's reports the breaking of a customer's car window, but the fact that in the ensuing discussion the caller speaks of the victim waiting "to fill out a report" leaves the impression of an accident and relatively minor property damage, rather than a situation in which people are in imminent danger. In Call 3, information about the incident is forwarded from another jurisdiction. In this case, when operator asks for details and is told that "A juvenile is throwing rocks at the McDonald's," the situation is escalated to the level of more serious -- and now clearly deliberate -- property damage, but is still treated as the actions of "a juvenile." By Call 4 this evolves into "'bout 50 kids are bustin up cars ...," but it is not until Call 5, 32 minutes after the initial report of the disturbance, that physical violence against persons is first explicitly claimed by a caller ("kids with bats outside beatin each other").

Although some of the operators' questions appear redundant or unnecessary, operators apparently consider callers' reports somewhat unreliable, and perhaps with good reason. For example, in Call 5, caller's initial report is that "... we have a gang of at least fifty ki- young kids with bats outside ..." Operator responds "How many have bats?," which might seem an unnecessary question given that this information had already been provided. However, caller then answers "Ah about ten." The fact that callers' reports are sometimes called into question in this manner thus makes good objective sense, but again creates conditions for caller dissatisfaction, to the extent that it can be heard to betray operator's lack of trust in the person with whom they are interacting.

To be sure, some callers are quite specific about where the need for assistance exists. For example, in Call 4, caller begins with "Could you send ah some police over here to 7979 Rockwell Avenue." Many others are less specific, such as the caller in Call 5, who begins with "Uhm hi This is at Oxford Avenue Pizza Hut," which requires operator to later ask for more specificity: "Okay what s- what hundred Oxford is this?"

One of the additional asymmetries complicating these interactions is differential orientation to the very idea of location. Callers inhabit a world of local landmarks whose locations are known implicitly, but whose actual addresses may not be known with precision. Callers appear to expect operators to recognize these landmarks and such other information as local street names, but operators are often unfamiliar with these places. For example, in Call 8, caller reports the location of the incident by saying "Hi ehm I live across the street from the Fox Chase school and the playground." Operator then repeatedly interrupts caller's attempts to move on to a description of what is happening with requests for more specific locational information, beginning with "Okay Fox Chase playground What's the address." Caller reports that "right now they're at like Ridgeway and Rhawn ...," and attempts to return to reporting of the action, but is interrupted with "Okay Ridgeway and what was that other street you mentioned ma'am." Here caller's agenda of focusing on what is happening is at odds with operator's agenda of focusing on where it is happening.

The ultimately fatal attack occurs in the immediate vicinity of St. Cecilia's Church, and when callers mention that location, they tend to be extensively prompted for more precise locational information, which they are sometimes unable to provide even after considerable interrogation. For example, in Call 16, caller begins with a reference to "St. Cecilia's on Rhawn Street," and upon being asked "Where?," repeats "St. Cecilia's on Rhawn Street?," apparently thinking that the problem has to do with operator simply not having heard this information the first time. Even when subsequently asked "This is at Rhawn and what?," caller repeats again "At Rhawn Street St. Cecilia's." The persistent operator tries again: "Okay but that's Rhawn and what What's the cross street or what hundred block a Rhawn," and gets only "It's St. Cecilia's school yard ..." Yet another request for "what hundred block" then results in "It's Five Points It's at Oxford and Rhawn," which is apparently not heard by the operator, and the interrogation continues for some time. Here again, the caller uses a landmark ("Five Points"), which would probably satisfy any local resident as a precise location, but which fails

to satisfy operator as such.

The most heart-wrenching call, Call 17, involves a friend of the victim, in an extremely agitated state, reporting his urgent need for medical attention. She begins "My friend- my friends's bleeding He's at St. Cecilia's Hospital." Asked "He's what," she repeats "He's St. Cecilia's a hospital." Apparently recognizing some inaccuracy in this emotional report, operator says "Awright slow down Ye He needs what at the hospital?" Caller finally corrects her report: "I mean he's near the school he needs a hospital ...," and later "He's at St. Cecilia's at the church." Later, when prodded for more precision, caller appeals to operator's knowledge of local landmarks: "You know where Fox Chase School is," to which the response is "No I don't." Unfortunately, even when operator feels that she has sufficient locational information, she transfers caller to a Rescue operator, and yet another locational interrogation ensues.

It is important to note that operators will sometimes either know the location of a landmark or have prior information about an incident. For example, in Call 12, the caller gives the location only as "Fox Chase ah playground" and is immediately told "Somebody'll be there sir."

Some public criticism of these interrogations suggested that operators should have had better knowledge of the areas involved. Other criticism focused on the fact that operators can actually see on their monitors the address from which every call is being made! This is evident in Call 14, where caller's "Yes uhm this is one a the Sisters at St. Cecilia's convent ah on Rhawn Street?" is followed by operator's volunteering "500 Rhawn ma'am?" and caller's correction "525 Rhawn." In Call 17, when the victim's emotional friend is transferred to Rescue, and again begins with imprecise references, the Rescue operator asks the 911 operator "Police can you tell where she's calling from," and is told (by the operator who has already asked so many locational questions) "She's- she's calling from ah 501 Rhawn Street by the Free Library." Some hearers of these tapes later questioned why an emotional caller whose precise location was known had to be asked so many questions before action was taken, but a partial answer is provided in caller's immediate qualification of this information: "I'm- Yeah I'm

at the Free Library But my friend is at St. Cecilia's Church." Defenders of the 911 operators' actions can thus argue that knowing the precise location of the caller does not necessarily tell them the precise location of an incident. Detractors, however, might argue that precious time could be saved by having police or other personnel dispatched to the neighborhood immediately and given more precise information as it becomes available.

## DISCUSSION

911 callers clearly come to this encounter with a variety of expectations regarding interactional processes and likely outcomes. Most of these expectations, such as expecting that their call will result in police or other emergency personnel being dispatched to the scene, are strongly held, but so implicitly that they don't even require verbalization during an encounter. Nevertheless, callers would be likely to be conscious of such an expectation, possibly able to report it if asked, and they do explicitly complain about it when such an expectation appears to be disconfirmed. Many expectations operate at the level of taken-for-granted assumptions, such as expecting operators to know the locations of neighborhood landmarks. Such expectations might not be consciously available for report to researchers. They are subject to negotiation during any given encounter, especially when they become problematic and no longer taken-for-granted. Satisfaction in this situation appears to depend upon tangible confirmation of certain expectations (e.g. dispatch of emergency personnel to the scene) and successful negotiation of others (e.g. willingness of operator to learn the location of a landmark).

Certain of the "problems" in the service encounters examined here are functions of disconfirmed expectations regarding outcomes (e.g. no police response after repeated calls). To be sure, in some cases these outcomes had much to do with ways in which callers themselves characterized persons (e.g. "kids" vs., say, "men"), actions (e.g. being "noisy" vs. "beaten each other with baseball bats"), and likely consequences (e.g. property damage vs. imminent danger to human life) of what they reported.

Dissatisfaction with process was mediated largely by the degree of trust callers had in operators. Where callers felt no threat to their taken-for-granted assumptions, they could be quite appreciative of operators' actions, even in the absence of explicit promises. On the other hand, when these assumptions became problematic, a loss of trust ensued, and callers could take offense at such otherwise unnoticed interactional details as long pauses or matter-of-fact responses. (Operators likewise took offense at caller actions that countered their expectations.)

Only additional research will show whether the 911 call has elements generalizable to other service encounters, or is such a unique situation as to have little in common with other services. One special feature of this situation is that most of the callers are acting as representatives of the entire neighborhood, which is the ultimate consumer in this case. Thus satisfaction with process is largely an individual matter, but satisfaction with outcome is more salient as a community issue. It may also be difficult to reconcile the types of events discussed here with findings generated by other research methodologies. For example, Lai and Widdows (1993) have proposed that dissatisfaction based on process (as opposed to outcomes) is more pronounced for individuals displaying low involvement. In this case, the caller with the most direct involvement (the victim's emotional friend) displayed more courtesy and restraint during her interrogation than did some of those viewing the scene from their windows. Nevertheless, naturalistic descriptions of service encounters as they happen should provide useful micro-level perspectives on findings generated by other approaches.

Although this exploratory study cannot presume to provide "solutions" to the interactional problems examined here, a few suggestions might be offered. First, the 911 operators could be better trained and motivated to demonstrate sensitivity and tolerance to each caller, even when a caller is rude. Callers under stress should arguably not be held to normal standards of interactional civility. Operators should verbally display a level of concern commensurate with the seriousness of the situation, and avoid matter-of-fact responses. Second, operators could be specifically trained to better display that they are

paying attention to callers. For example, if long pauses are required while an operator keys information into a system, the operator could apprise callers of what is going on, so that they don't think the operator is being inattentive. Finally, if callers typically report problems in reference to local landmarks, operators could become familiar with those landmarks, so that valuable time would not be wasted asking for more specific information. This could be accomplished with training, or by decentralizing 911 operations to neighborhoods and staffing them with local residents.

## REFERENCES

- Abelson, Robert P. (1981), "Psychological Status of the Script Concept," *American Psychologist*, 36 (7), 715-729.
- Bitner, Mary Jo, Bernard H. Booms and Mary Stanfield Tetreault (1990), "The Service Encounter: Diagnosing Favorable and Unfavorable Incidents," *Journal of Marketing*, 54 (January), 71-84.
- Garfinkel, Harold (1967), *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Hudson, Laurel Anderson, and Julie L. Ozanne (1988), "Alternative Ways of Seeking Knowledge in Consumer Research," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14, 508-521.
- Hunt, H. Keith (1993), "CS/D&CB Research Suggestions and Observations for the 1990's," *Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behavior*, 6, 40-42.
- Jennings, John Way, Bill Ordine, Jeff Gammage, and Larry Lewis (1994), "Area's Other 911 Call-takers Better Trained Than in Phila.," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 11, B1.
- Lai, Mengkuan, and Richard Widdows (1993), "Determinants of Consumers' Satisfaction with Services: A Preliminary Study," *Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behavior*, 6, 166-174.
- Parker, Richard (1988), "Conversational Interaction: Directions for Qualitative Marketing and Consumer Research," in E. Hirschman & J. Sheth, eds., *Research in Consumer Behavior*, 3, 211-245. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Psathas, George (1995), *Conversation Analysis: The Study of Talk-in-Interaction*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Sacks, Harvey, Emmanuel A. Schegloff and Gail Jefferson (1974), "A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-taking for Conversation," *Language*, 50 (4), 696-735.
- Swan, John E. (1992), "Satisfaction Work: The Joint



Production of Patient Satisfaction by Health Care Providers and Patients," *Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behavior*, 5, 69-80.

## APPENDIX

NE PHILADELPHIA 911 CALLS & RADIO TRANSMISSIONS: NOV 11, 1994

MB: This is Mr. (Blecast) number 278 assigned to police radio. The following is a reproduction of telephone and radio transmissions received in Police Radio on the Northeast division on November 11th 1994 in reference to an incident at 535 Rjawn Street. Each reproduction will be preceded by its starting time.

\*\*\*\*\* (1) 10.01.25 pm \*\*\*\*\*

OP: Police 225

CA: Hi I'm sorry to call you; but could you please send a car to the McDonald's at the corner of Hasbrook and Oxford

{  
(keyboard.....)

OP: It's (.) on the corner of Hasbrook and where?  
{  
.....

CA: Oxford. It's in Fox Chase. (1.0) .hhh They're a pack a

{  
.....  
kids and they're really noisy and they're (.)

OP: ..... Inside the McDonald's?

CA: In the parking lot at least

{  
.....

OP: Ah Mc(.)Donald's parkin lot okay

CA: Thanks so much

OP: You're welcome.

{  
.....

CA: Bye

{  
.....

OP: Bye

{  
.....

\*\*\*\*\* (2) 10.10.19 pm \*\*\*\*\*

OP: Police ( ) Radio operator 57

CA: Hi yes I'm callin from McDonald's Fox Chase center on Oxford Avenue?

OP: Mm mhm

CA: Okny uhm there- I have a bunch a kids out in my parkin lot they just broke one a my customer's wins- windows

OP: Where's the customer?

CA: Uhm she's out in the parkin lot (1.0) An she was going through my drive through and they broke one a her windows

OP: Is she gonna wait for the police?

CA: I'm sorry?

OP: Is she gonna wait for the police?

CA: Ah how long is it gonna be?

OP: I have no idea

CA: U::hm I'll find out but I'd- I would imagine she would (2.0) to fill out a report

OP: (keyboard 6.0)

CA: Okny?

{

OP: Mm mhm

{

CA: Awright thank you

{

OP: Mm mhm

\*\*\*\*\* (3) 10.13.58 pm \*\*\*\*\*

OP: Police radio ( ) Can I help you

MC: Hi it's Montgomery County

OP: Yes

MC: We've a report of a disturbance at Borbeck and Oxford

OP: Okay on the highway

MC: Pardon

OP: On the highway

MC: (What ya mean at) Borbeck?

OP: Yeah on- out on the street or inside somewhere

MC: A juvenile is throwing rocks at the McDonald's

OP: At the McDonald's

MC: Yeah there's about twenny of em

OP: Awright we'll send somebody out there

MC: Okny

OP: Okny bye bye

MC: bye bye

\*\*\*\*\* (4) 10.20.49 pm \*\*\*\*\*

OP: Police radio operator 57

CA: Could you send ah some police over here to 7979 Rockwell Avenue (0.4) 'bout 50 kids are bustin up cars over near Rockwell auto body

OP: What are they doin?

CA: Busting up the cars windows and everything (1.2) 7979 Rockwell Avenue

OP: Uhh hhh

CA: Could you get a (.) car-

OP: Wait a minute Okay and they are inside the ah (0.2) lot

CA: Yeah

OP: .hhh hhh. Teenagers

CA: Yep

OP: How many is there

CA: 'bout fifty

OP: Awrightly

CA: Okay

OP: Mm mhm

\*\*\*\*\* (5) 10.33.58 pm \*\*\*\*\*

OP: Police 232

CA: Uhm hi This is at Oxford Avenue Pizza Hut Uhm we have a gang of at least fifty ki- young kids with bats outside beatin each other while they're chasin each other tryin to hit someone and they just ran behind the store

OP: How many have bats?

CA: Ah about ten  
 OP: Okay what s- what hundred Oxford is this  
 CA: What hundred Oxford Avenue is this? ( ) What hundred Oxford 78  
 OP: O-  
 CA: And they are in between our store and the McDonald's  
 OP: In the- in the parkin lot  
 CA: Yep They're in between- Yes in between both parking lots  
 OP: Okny  
 CA: Okay thank you  
 OP: You're welcome  
 \*\*\*\*\* (6) 10.37.15 pm \*\*\*\*\*  
 OP: Police 225  
 CA: I don't believe this It just rang about ten times There's a big commotion going outside in front of our home like a gang fight  
 OP: Well where is that ma'am  
 CA: Ah uhm Ridgeway Street 7900 Ridgeway Street  
 OP: Okay  
 (1.6)  
 CA: Ah they got clubs out there  
 CA2: It's gang fight  
 CA: And there's a kid hurt out there  
 (2.8)  
 OP: Awright  
 (2.0)  
 CA: Did you get that?  
 OP: Yeah a kid is hurt outside and there's a fight. (1.0) Awright?  
 (1.0)  
 OP: Was that it?  
 (0.6)  
 CA: Ye- YEAAA HIIAT'S IT! Send a police car to 7979 Ridgeway St  
 OP: Wait a minute Wait a minute Wait a minute  
 You asked me an I'm asking you  
 CA: What  
 OP: I have the information You can hang up now  
 \*\*\*\*\* (7) 10.37.34 pm \*\*\*\*\*  
 OP: Police 244  
 CA: Thank you I'm calling from the Fox Chase section of the city There seems to be a lot of gang fighting out in front of my house the 7900 block of Ridgeway Street It's just above the recreation center A lot of screaming yelling kids are carrying it looks like clubs of some kind  
 OP: Yeah I'll send someone out  
 CA: And they're in the middle of the street  
 OP: I'll send someone out  
 CA: Thank you  
 (in background: (6) 10.37.15 "I have the information you can hang up now")  
 \*\*\*\*\* (8) 10.37.50 pm \*\*\*\*\*

OP: Police 45 how can I help you  
 CA: Hii elim I live across the street from the Fox Chase School and the playground  
 OP: Min mhun  
 CA: And there is a tremendous amount a kids out there like fighting an (1.0) uhm (1.0) I'm just afraid somethin's gonna happen  
 OP: Okny Fox Chase playground What's the address  
 CA: Ah it's well I- right now they're at like Ridgeway and Rhawn in front of the school but they just keep seem- they're- they just keep growin They're talkin about a fight down-  
 OP: Okay Ridgeway and what was the other street you mentioned ma'am  
 CA: Rhawn  
 OP: Oh okny (1.0) Okny we'll send somebody out  
 CA: Yeah hurry up because I don't know what's hapnen  
 OP: Okny  
 CA: There's a lot of screaming an yellin  
 OP: Okay ma'am  
 CA: Thank you  
 OP: Min mhun Bye bye  
 CA: Bye  
 \*\*\*\*\* (9) 10.38.25 pm \*\*\*\*\*  
 OP: Police 170  
 CA: Ah hi I'd like to report a disturbance on a  
 OP: Where  
 CA: Ridgeway Street  
 OP: What and Ridgeway  
 CA: 7940 Ridgeway Street There's about 20 kids outside fightin  
 OP: We'll send somebody around  
 CA: Awright thanks a lot  
 \*\*\*\*\* (10) 10.41.01 pm \*\*\*\*\*  
 OP: Police radio  
 CA: Yeah could you get a couple cars over here to 7979 Rockwell Avenue  
 OP: Okay  
 CA: Like about 50 teenagers baseball bats a gang fight down in the complex here between the ah Fox Chase playground and the ah auto body area  
 OP: Min 7979 Rockwell  
 CA: Yeah  
 OP: Awright we'll get somebody right over there  
 CA: Thank you  
 OP: Awright  
 \*\*\*\*\* (11) 10.41.21 pm \*\*\*\*\*  
 DIS: 203 7845 Oxford at the Pizza Hut's an McDonald's parkin lot .hh Check for several maless armed with baseball bats 7845 Oxford Avenue parking lot McDonald's and the Pizza Hut (there's no (flash-ooze car))  
 203: Okay  
 DIS: Thank you  
 28: 28  
 DIS: 28

- 28: How 'bout I swing by that locations
- DIS: Thank you (hold you out)
- \*\*\*\*\* (12) 10.41.24 pm \*\*\*\*\*
- OP: Police 157 What's the problem
- CA: Ah yeah I jus wanna let you know I live across from the Fox Chase ah playground
- OP: Yeah
- CA: An there's about 25 youths right now that are running around yelling obscenities yelling about niggers an everything else they're runnin through people's yards an all I don't know if something's gone on tonight or not but
- OP: Somebody'll be there sir
- CA: Okay thank you
- OP: Awright
- \*\*\*\*\* (13) 10.42.32 pm \*\*\*\*\*
- OP: Police 170
- CA: Hh how ya doin This is a- I'm in Fox Chase here and we got a near riot an there's no DAMN police around here
- OP: Where?
- (1.0)
- OP: Where
- CA: On RIDGEWAY STREET near Rhawn
- OP: Well I don't know that
- CA: WE'VE BEEN CALLIN EVERYBODY IN THE DAMN NEIGHBORHOOD'S BEEN CALLIN THERE! I called the District They tell me to call 911 (1.0) What are we supposed to do here
- (1.0)
- CA: THERE'S CARS THERE'S A WHOLE DAMN hhh ah CONVOY OF CARS COMIN HERE! YOU GOT A DAMN RIOT GOIN ON UP HERE!
- OP: Police'll be there
- (0.8)
- CA: Hhh (.) yeah thanks a lot
- \*\*\*\*\* (14) 10.44.13 pm \*\*\*\*\*
- OP: Police 244
- CA: Yes umm this is one o the Sisters at St.Cecilia's convent ah on Rhawn Street? . hhh There's a bunch of kids out in the parking lot an it looks like they're beating up one kid
- (1.2)
- OP: 500 Rhawn ma'am?
- CA: 525 Rhawn
- OP: In the parking lot
- CA: Yes
- OP: We'll send someone out
- CA: Thank you
- \*\*\*\*\* (15) 10.44.23 pm \*\*\*\*\*
- OP: Police 94
- CA: 911 (0.4) we're in Fox Chase on Ridgeway Street ((noise)) THEY'RE BEATING THE HELL OUT A PEOPLE WITH BASE BALL BATS UP HERE! WHEN ARE YOU GONNA SEND SOMEBODY?
- OP: Who's got a bat sir
- CA: hhh Who's got a bat SOME GORILLA! WHAT THE HELL DO YOU MEAN!
- ( )
- OP: Wait a minute Wait a minute Don't TALK to me like that I asked you a question
- CA: WELL I'M TELLIN YOU
- OP: WHO HAS THE BAT
- CA: THERE'S A MAN GOT A BAT (
- OP: IS HE BLACK OR WHITE OR HISPANIC
- CA: THERE'S A RIOT GOIN ON UP HERE-
- \*\*\*\*\* (16) 10.44.37 pm \*\*\*\*\*
- OP: Police 232
- CA: Hello
- OP: Police
- (1.8)
- CA: Yeah up on the St. Cecilia's on Rhawn Street
- OP: Where?
- CA: St. Cecilia's on Rhawn Street? There's five car loads of kids chasin a ( ) kid down in the ( )
- OP: This is at Rhawn and what?
- CA: At Rhawn Street St. Cecilia's
- OP: Okay but that's Rhawn and what What's the cross street or what hundred block a Rhawn
- CA: It's St. Cecilia's school yard Five car loads of the kids just pulled in
- OP: Yeah what hundred block a Rhawn Street is it on sir
- CA: It's Five Points It's at Oxford and Rhawn
- (2.0)
- OP: I can't hear you cause something's wrong with the phone You sayin Rhawn an- an it's by what?
- (2.2)
- CA: I'm tryin to find a cross street (3.0) What street is this
- (1.2)
- OP: Look at one a the buildings and tell me the address on it
- (1.0)
- CA: Yeah it's- (1.8) it's on Rhawn and (Burholme)
- OP: Rhawn and what? (1.0) Look at the a- look at one a the buildings and tell me the address on it
- (2.8)
- CA: 500 Rhawn Street
- OP: 500?
- CA: Rhawn Street A paddy wagon just went by
- (In background: "Where's he at? (...) Give me an address" 10.45.37)
- (9.0)
- OP: Okay
- \*\*\*\*\* (17) 10.45.37 pm \*\*\*\*\*
- OP: Police 157
- CA: Hello
- OP: Yes Police

CA: My friend- my friend's bleeding He's at St. Cecilia's Hospital  
 OP: He's whint  
 CA: He's St. Cecilia's a hospital  
 OP: Awright slow down Ye He needs what at the hospital?  
 CA: I mean he's near the school he needs a hospital he's bleeding  
 OP: Where's he at  
 CA: He's at St. Cecilia's at the church  
 OP: He's where  
 CA: At St. Cecilia's  
 OP: I can't understand you Give me an address  
 CA: He's at St. Cecilia's  
 OP: An where's that at  
 CA: It's on Oxford Avenue  
 OP: Oxford and what  
 CA: (I'm) It's like- Okay Oh my God  
 OP: Listen. Listen if you don't calm down he gets no help Do you understand that much  
 CA: I'm trying  
 OP: Awright so you gotta tell me Oxford and where  
 CA: Oh God It's You know where Fox Chase School is  
 OP: No I don't  
 CA: Okay it's- it's Oxford Avenue and Veree  
 OP: Veree Awright what happened to him  
 CA: He got beat with a bat  
 OP: Awright Is the people that beat him are they still there  
 CA: No  
 OP: I hold on I'm gonna connect you to Rescue You tell them where he is  
 CA: Okay  
 ((Ring))  
 Res: Rescue  
 CA: My friend jus- my friend got beat with a bat He's at- he's at St Cecilia's Church  
 Res: What  
 CA: St. Cecilia's  
 Res: What's your address What's the address Where's it at  
 CA: It's at- it's by- it's right across the street from ( ) School which is right by Rhawn  
 Res: Police can you tell where she's calling from  
 OP: She's- she's calling from ah 501 Rhawn Street by the Free Library  
 CA: I'm- Yeah I'm at the Free Library But my friend is at St. Cecilia's Church  
 OP: She told me it was at Oxford and Veree first She can't seem to get it together  
 Res: Is that where the St. Cecilia's is Oxford and Veree  
 CA: It's- it's- ah it's ( ) wait where am I calling to where are you at  
 OP: Don't worry about where we're at tell him where you're at where you 'im to go  
 CA: St. Cecilia's like I don't know the (key) streets I'm at right now I'm at the Library but St. Cecilia's how can you  
 OP: How far are you away from it

CA: He's at- I think he's at Rhawn an (Arrat) Street  
 Res: Rhawn and where  
 CA: I think it's (Arrat) but I'm not sure It's at St Cecilia's Church He's right by the church  
 Res: An what's wrong What happened  
 CA: He got beat with a bat  
 Res: He got beat with a bat?  
 CA: He's bleedin  
 Res: Okay it's right near Rhawn and (Arrat)  
 OP: No tha- that's not a good add- a good cross street she's probly talkin about Rhawn an Veree  
 CA: He's at St Cecilia's Church He's right at the church  
 OP: Okay Rhawn and Veree is close to where she's callin from  
 Res: Okay. We're on the way  
 CA: Thank you  
 \*\*\*\*\* (18) 10.45.53 pm \*\*\*\*\*  
 203: 203  
 DIS: 203  
 203: As far as that Rescue over here on the 7th district side right at Rhawn and Ridgeway in front of a church we got a kid down looks like he was beat up (0.4) could possibly have something to do with that Oxford Avenue thing  
 DIS: Kny you said Rhawn and Ridgeway?  
 203: Correct on the 7th District side Start his rescue work please  
 DIS: Thank you  
 2B: 2B  
 DIS: (All car semi) 2B  
 2B: (I'll start)  
 DIS: Thank you sir  
 \*\*\*\*\* (19) 10.45.59 pm \*\*\*\*\*  
 OP: Police 170  
 CA: Hi ulm can you send a car to Fox Chase (rec)  
 (1.0)  
 OP: Where's that  
 CA: Ulm it's on ( ) Rockwell Ave (1.6) There is- there's ulm a bunch a people in cars an they're comin out an beatin people up  
 OP: Okay  
 CA: It's really bad if you could hurry  
 OP: Okay  
 CA: Okey  
 \*\*\*\*\* (20) 10.46.22 pm \*\*\*\*\*  
 OP: Police 344  
 (4.8)  
 OP: Police 344  
 CA: Hi yeah we're havin a problem outside our house here  
 OP: What's your address  
 CA: Okay we're ah- It's not a my street it's now at (5th) street on Rhawn Street

OP: It's-

CA: In the rectory In the ulim school yard

OP: Well what's the address there

CA: Okay 525 Rhawn Street

OP: 525 Rhawn

CA: Right

OP: Awright is that R

CA: R - H - A - W - N. WE GOT KIDS BEIN BEAT UP (0.6) AND NO ONE WANTS TO HELP US

OP: I'm tryin to help you ma'am I have to first understand you

CA: Rhawn R ns in rob, H as in help, A as in apple, W as in water, and N as in knee (2.0) Does that help

OP: Emmensely! (0.4) Now can you continue to what's the problem there

CA: We've been calling for twenty minutes now to get the cops up here an no one's come  
{

OP: Awright so what- what- what Ma'am MA'AMI

CA: You know the Fox Chase Rec

OP: Ma'am what's goin on out there

CA: I've been telling we {

OP: You haven't told me what's goin on

CA: We've had like I don't know a group of 50 kids out front about

OP: Uh huh

CA: Okay?

OP: Ah what are the kids doin ma'am

CA: Ah well a few of them have golf clubs an then this one little boy just cam down and said to us "Someone's beatin them up with a baseball bat"  
(2.8)

OP: Ah we'll send the police ma'am

CA: Pardon me

OP: We will send the police

CA: Send them now not in 10 minutes but now

OP: We will send the police ma'am

CA: Thank you Do you know where it is it's on {

OP: what you said didn't you You said 525 Rhawn ma'am (1.0) That's

CA: Yes that's what I said

OP: Okay that's where we're gonna send them

CA: Thank you

OP: You're welcome

CA: Bye

---

**Send correspondence regarding this article to:**

Richard Parker  
 School of Business Administration  
 Rowan College of New Jersey  
 201 Mullica Hill Road  
 Glassboro, NJ 08028-1701 USA

---