WHO'S THE FRIEND IN THE BACKGROUND?

INTERACTIONAL STRATEGIES IN DETERMINING AUTHENTICITY IN CALLS TO A NATIONAL CHILDREN'S HELPLINE

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A significant number of calls made to Kids Help Line are seen by the organisation as not requiring counselling support, but are rather young people testing or 'checking out' the service. Although the status of many of these 'testing calls' is self-evident, determining the authenticity of others presents the helpline counsellors with a dilemma: confronting the caller if they have doubts about the caller's reason for calling while, at the same time, avoiding a premature challenge when the call is genuine. We examine the various interactional strategies that the counsellors artfully deploy in their determination of the status of a call. Outright challenges are rare, and counsellors typically will employ devices that announce their suspicions indirectly and which, at the same time, seamlessly accomplish the mundane business of responding to a call in ways which treat the callers with respect.

INTRODUCTION

The incidence of prank calls made to emergency service providers is a well documented but rarely researched phenomenon. Australian statistics from Telstra, the national telephone carrier, indicate that 61 per cent of calls – or a staggering 5.8 million calls – to their triple zero (000) emergency number are not genuine. In acknowledging that a significant number of calls come from children, Telstra and the Victorian Government joined forces last year to run an educational campaign in Victorian schools to remind children that prank calls to emergency services are 'illegal and dangerous' (Minister for Police and Emergency Services Victoria 2006). Not surprisingly, helplines and counselling

services catering specifically for children and young people also report a high incidence of prank calls. For example, Kids Help Line, a national Australian counselling service for children and young people, which answers 313,000 calls per year, reports that just over 60 per cent of calls require no counselling or support. However, Kids Help Line does not refer to these as pranks or hoaxes, but rather as testing calls where callers 'check out' the service.

The calls we examine in this paper are part of a larger corpus of 200 calls collected at intervals over the period 2000–2003. They were recorded by Kids Help Line as part of their ongoing program of professional development and are used for quality control and training purposes, and copies of the audio tapes were made available to the authors. Ethical clearance for the project was obtained through Kids Help Line and The University of Queensland's Behavioural and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee.[1] The calls were transcribed employing the standard Jeffersonian notation system (see appendix for notations used).

This paper examines the ways in which Kids Help Line counsellors deal with the authenticity of the calls they receive. We do not have the space to enter in depth into the important conceptual issues which accompany the differentiation of talk (or action) which is 'genuine' or 'authentic' from that which is not. The question of speakers' intentions has been at the centre of much speech act theory, which has outlined the maxims that are seen to guide everyday conversational encounters (e.g. Grice 1969; Searle 1969). Outside of philosophy, the matter has also received attention in media studies research, where authentic talk is often characterised as 'spontaneous' or unscripted and contrasted with talk which is subject to pre-scripting.[2] The calls we examine in this paper are deemed inauthentic in that they are not designed to solicit help or advice. However, the extent to which they are 'first time through' interactional events – rather than having been subject to some planning or rehearsal – is a moot point.

Our primary aim in this paper is to document the strategies and devices employed by the counsellors to determine, and to demonstrate that they have determined, whether the call is a genuine request for help or support. We show that the strategies are artfully deployed by the counsellors as part of the mundane conversational business of responding to the call. Importantly, the strategies appear designed to deal with a dilemma that confronts the counsellors: the need to display that they have doubts about a call's authenticity at the earliest opportunity, but to avoid prematurely making these concerns known to the caller when the call is genuine. In essence the counsellors resolve this dilemma by

employing devices which amount to indirect rather than more face-threatening, outright, challenges.

The occurrence of prank calls, although widespread, is far from random. The incidence of prank calls spikes over weekends, particularly during the evenings, and the summer school holidays. Nevertheless, the helpline maintains a philosophical principle of treating all callers who make contact with respect. A child or young person's first contact with the service is seen as pivotal, and the treatment the caller receives is consequential for any subsequent contact they might make. As Kids Help Line points out, 'making a prank call may well be the young person's first approach to help-seeking and talking about important issues (Barton 1999: no page).

Calls involving the yelling of abuse are transparently obvious instances of non-counselling calls, and are not considered here. However, in the more sustained prank calls, the issue of the call's authenticity is not immediately obvious and may – in extreme cases – remain doubtful throughout the call. Many – but not all – calls deemed suspect by the counsellors share the feature that they are made by a group of callers or by a caller in the immediate co-presence ('the friend in the background') of another party.[3] Hearable evidence that the caller is not alone is a key resource used by the counsellors to determine which way to go in the assessment of a suspect call. In such cases, counsellors typically inform callers that they are aware that the caller is not alone, and then assess how the caller subsequently responds to *this* information. For example, a caller who denies that another party is present in the face of clear evidence to the contrary is likely to bring the authenticity of their call under increased suspicion.

PRANK CALLS: TYPICAL THEMES AND A TRANSPARENT CASE

Prank calls vary considerably in their duration and complexity, but a recurring theme is talk around sex and sexuality. In our corpus of calls, a young male caller reports that his penis is too long; another announces that he has impregnated a forty-year-old woman; and a third tells the counsellor he has lost a testicle in a car accident. A common ingredient in these calls appears to be an attempt by the caller to engineer a situation in which the adult counsellor is required to use – and possibly describe the meaning of – sexual terms. Put colloquially, they work as invitations (or devices) to the counsellor to 'talk dirty'. To provide a flavour of the issues that counsellors confront, consider the following call, whose status as prank is transparent.

Extract 1 is the transcript of the entire call. In the extracts, the counsellor is designated as CT (call-taker) and the caller(s) as C (and Cs where more than one appears to be involved):

Extract 1: call 6_2_86

```
1.    CT:    Kids Help Line=hello,
2.           (2.5)
3.    C:     erm hello? i- ih- is this Kids Help Line=
4.    CT:    =it sure is,
5.    C:     my bruvver,
6.    CT:    mmm,
7.    C:     does things with gi::rls? um he brings them home into his room.
8.    CT:    does he,
9.    C:     erm I've got a rec- a recording of one
10.   CT:    [mmm
11.   Cs:    [((giggles))
12.   C:     I'll just play [you eh
13.   Cs:                   [(( giggles))
14.   Cs     Oooh OOOHHH OOOHHH OO::OHHHH
15.   CT:    hey I feel really weird hearing this (.) d'you think-
16.   C:     that was (.) that was- thm- do you have any advice
17.   ?:     ((loud stifled chortle))
18.   ?:     [(   )
19.   C:     [to give me
20.   CT:    do I have any WHA:T
21.          (1.5)
22.          advice?
23.   Cs:    [((giggles))
24.   C:     [yuuh
25.   CT:    what do you want adv(hh)ice on
26.          ((Click))
27.   CT:    heh heh heh .hhh oh insa↑ne children
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This is a short and transparently innocent prank call to which the CT responds with good humour – note her reflective remark delivered after the call has ended (line 27). The caller is a girl aged around 10 years and the 'recording' of her brother's exploits is actually a live performance by at least three other girls. In its structure, the call is remarkably consistent with the typical format followed by a genuine request for counselling support. Elsewhere (Danby and Emmison in press; Emmison and Danby 2007), we show that callers typically commence with a narrative account of their trouble or problem and then deliver a more specific reason for why they are now contacting the helpline. Such

narratives are a consequence of the sequential environment in which the CT produces only a greeting and an institutional identification. One regular utterance used for formulating their reason for calling is a statement that they 'do not know what to do'. These constructions, as well as cases where the reason for the call is made via explicit requests, such as 'can you tell me what to do?' or 'do you have any advice to give me?', can be seen as devices that bring the open-ended troubles announcement sequence to a close.

This structure is evident in Extract 1. The caller commences by outlining the problem – her brother's sexual exploits. The prank proceeds by providing undisputed evidence of the problem, purportedly an audio-recording of the alleged activities, but in fact a live performance by her co-pranksters. The caller then moves to the reason for the call (lines 16–19), the CT's request for advice as to what she should do. The anomaly of seeking advice in this encounter is signified by both the stifled chortle – at the precise moment the word "advice" is delivered – by another pranker and the incredulous clarification request on the part of the CT in lines 20–22: 'do I have any WHA:T (1.5) ad<u>vice</u>?'. That the call exhibits the structure of a genuine call suggests that this is not a first-time caller. Indeed, we argue that many calls are made by children who already have had contact with the organisation, and they are aware that making a call is an accountable matter. In other words, callers should have a problem to report, one on which they should expect to obtain advice.

STRATEGIES IN ACTION: JUMPING TO A CONCLUSION TOO SOON?

Not all prank calls are, however, so easily identified. We turn now to consider a call that presents the counsellor with a dilemma. Here, the counsellor appears to move prematurely to challenge the caller. Such an incident is not common. The default setting for orienting to a call, one consistent with the helpline's philosophy of treating all callers with respect, is to assume – at least initially – that each call is genuine.

Although the call contains features that are commonly sought by counsellors as evidence of a prank (such as the presence of a friend in the background), the call concludes without any indication by the caller that it had been a prank. Extract 2 shows the opening:

Extract 2: call 5_1_58

```
1.    CT:    Kids Help Line=hello::
2.           (1.0)
3.    C:     hello,
4.    CT:    hello=how are you,
5.           (0.4)
6.    C:     erm not too good I'm (.) I'm a bit curious.
7.    CT:    you're a bit curious.
8.           (0.5)
9.    C:     yeaah
```

The CT is a female in her mid-20s and the C appears to be a young girl aged around 12 years. Following the greetings sequence, C moves immediately to a pre-announcement of the problem that she wishes to talk about. This construction in which C announces that she is a 'bit curious' is similar to other callers who announce that they are a 'bit concerned' or a 'bit worried' about something. This construction, however, is relatively unusual in calls to the help line, and it is far more common to find Cs moving immediately to a narrative announcement of the problem without any prefacing comment.

The use of the prefatory comment by the caller has parallels with a phenomenon identified by Potter and Hepburn (2003). Adult callers to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), the principal United Kingdom child protection helpline, typically commence by stating that they are 'a bit concerned' or have 'some concerns'. As Potter and Hepburn (2003) note, the callers generally are reporting as third party observers of troubles involving others, and this construction appears to have a number of uses. For example, 'concern constructions' serve to attend to epistemological asymmetries between the caller and the call taker as well as provide a way for the Child Protection Officers to take the claims of abuse or neglect seriously while not presupposing their truth. In the present call, where the caller is reporting directly about her own troubles and not those of another person, the use of this prefatory remark appears to have additional functions. The delay of the announcement of the concern works to indicate that the caller is not overwhelmed by the trouble, that it is something that has been noticed or perhaps monitored over time: in other words, a more reflexive, adult way of handling a trouble. The call continues:

Extract 3: call 5_1_58 (continued)

```
10.   CT:    uh huh (1.5) what are you feeling curious about,
11.   C:     erm we:ll I'm growing hairs (.) in different places of my body
12.          including my vasaja.
13.          (1.5)
14.   CT:    your what=can you say that again,
15.          (0.5)
16.   C:     my vasaja=°my vagina°.
17.   CT:    uh hm
18.          (0.5)
19.          what about your vagina,
20.          (0.6)
21.   C:     it's growing hairs there and they're really scary,
22.   CT:    u::m is it,
23.          (0.4)
24.          uh hm,
25.   C:     what is it
26.          (0.4)
27.   CT:    what is it?
28.   C:     yeah.
29.          (0.6)
30.   CT:    what do you think might be happening,
```

The problem and the reason for the call are made apparent: the onset of pubic hair is something the caller finds 'really scary' (line 21). She mispronounces the word 'vagina' (lines 12 and 16), but also supplies the correct version when CT requests this. In the extract we see CT using devices such as repair initiation, repeating the caller's turns and, finally, reversing the direction of the questioning (cf. Drew 1997; Schegloff Jefferson and Sacks 1977; Schegloff 1997). Although these features, particularly reversing question direction, are established practices of counselling that place the onus on the caller to work towards their own solutions of problems, they are also key ways in which the legitimacy of the call can be subtly determined.

Interactionally, the devices appear innocuous, yet they work to challenge the status of the caller's prior utterance. We see this clearly in line 30 where there is an explicit reversal of the direction of the questioning. CT responds to C's question 'what is it', initially delivered on line 25, with a question of her own, 'what do you think might be happening'. This reversal move has important consequences. First, it provides the CT with an opportunity to hear what C knows about the matter. As a generic device, this tackles the problem of recipient design[4] to the extent that the CT deals with callers of unknown

experience, education or knowledge. In effect, finding out what C knows about any given matter will permit a more precise form of 'calibration' (cf. Baker Emmison and Firth 2005) of the information and advice that is subsequently relayed. Second, the reversal move provides a form of cooperation test; if the call is serious, then such a question should be answered in a straightforward manner. If C resists this move, then this might be an indication for the CT of a possible prank. As it turns out, C does not accept CT's invitation to reveal what she knows:

Extract 4: call 5_1_58 (continued)

```
31.   C:    I dunno
32.   CT:   uh hm
33.         (9.0)
34.   CT:   is there someone who you could talk to about this stuff with
35.         (0.4)
36.   C:    you:
37.   CT:   me?
38.   C:    yea[:h
39.   CT:       [what about someone in your li:fe? someone face to face?
40.   C:    no
41.   CT:   okay↓
42.         (3.5)
43.         .hh hh o(h)kay well can you tell me how– what I can do to help you
44.         through this
45.   C2:   ((whispers)) ºtell me what it isº
46.   C:    you tell me what it is
47.   CT:   I can hear your friend in the background,
48.         (0.6)
49.   CT:   what it's [like–
50.   C:              [it's my sister
51.   CT:   it's your sister (0.5) okay
```

The C answers the CT's question about whether she knows what is happening to her body in the negative (line 31). This is acknowledged with a minimal response by CT. There follows a pause of 9 seconds before CT begins a different line of questioning inquiring into C's personal circumstances and the availability of 'someone who you could talk to' (line 34). C's response to the counsellor's question – 'you:' (line 36) – appears unexpected by CT and she initiates a repair initiation (line 37) before reformulating the question (line 39). Again, C answers negatively. In her next turn, CT prefaces her question with a distinct laughter particle in her repeated 'o(h)kay' (line 43).

At this point, clear evidence that C is not alone is provided: there is a soft background whisper from another party that C then repeats – 'you tell me what it is' (line 46). CT does not respond to this question but immediately confronts C with evidence that there is someone with her – the friend in the background (line 47). Importantly, C does not deny this, as is typically the case in the more 'self-evident' multiparty prank calls: there is a (0.6) second pause and then she announces in overlap with CT's next turn that the other party is her sister (line 50). The CT does not comment further about the 'friend in the background'. There is a further significant pause before she continues, specifying that she is not sure that she can help. She then goes on to suggest that C is undergoing bodily changes associated with puberty (lines 53–55):

Extract 5: call 5_1_58 (continued)

52.		(9.5)
53.	CT:	well I'm not really sure that I can help you with this=it sounds
54.		that like you're going through <u>pub</u>erty (.) and that there are
55.		these changes happening to your <u>bod</u>y (.) it's probably going
56.		[to be
57.	C:	[what's puberty
58.		(1.5)
59.	CT:	puberty (.) yea::h this is something that you really need to be
60.		talking with someone (.) y'know like (.) someone in your life?
61.		(1.5)
62.		I'm quite hesitant to engage– to talk t– about this stuff with
63.		you
64.	C:	why::
65.	CT:	I jus–[
66.	C:	[I have no one to–
67.	CT:	uh uh
68.	C:	to talk to
69.	CT:	I kindov get the feeling that
70.		(1.0)
71.		you just want me:: to or you just want a counsellor hear someone
72.		to talk about this stuff?
73.		(2.0)
74.		it just doesn't seem very <u>gen</u>uine to me
75.		(1.5)
76.	C:	I have <u>no</u> one else to talk to I live with my da:d.

As the CT formulates C's description of her bodily changes as 'going through puberty', she is interrupted in the delivery of this information by C's request for clarification of this term (line 57). CT responds to this by once again announcing that this is a matter

for discussion with someone close to C, and that she (CT) feels reluctant to talk about 'this stuff' (line 62). The call then enters a crucial phase: C questions CT's reluctance and repeats – in overlap with CT – that she has no one to talk to (line 66). By this point, however, CT has already embarked on her challenge to the legitimacy of the call. She announces that she feels that the caller just wants to hear someone 'talk about this stuff' (line 72), and, after a two second delay, makes her suspicion explicit: 'it just doesn't seem very genuine to me' (line 74). There is a 1.5 second pause before C replies firmly and without hesitation with information about her family circumstances. Apart from her father, C has no one else to talk to about this matter (line 76). The CT does not comment further about the caller's motives for making the call. The CT further inquires about C's knowledge of puberty and repeats her earlier remark about C needing to find someone 'in her life' with whom to talk. The call concludes shortly thereafter.

As we have suggested, it is impossible to authoritatively determine the call's authenticity, even on the basis of the audio recording. What is incontrovertible, however, is the counsellor's suspicions that the caller's motive was not genuine, although this charge is not pursued or resolved. We know that the helpline receives calls from adolescents who want to hear the counsellors talk about 'this stuff', but there are a number of clues that suggest that the counsellor's suspicions may have been misplaced. First, it is the caller who introduces explicit sexual terminology. If this was – as the counsellor suggests – an elaborate prank to have these terms become the object of discourse, why does the caller demonstrate her cognisance of them so early in the call? Second, the caller reveals her family circumstances. We can, without much difficulty, imagine similar scenarios where young callers do not have access to adult female friends or relatives. For example, the young girl may be living in an isolated part of Australia, on a rural property, raised by her father, and receiving distance education, where contact with a female teacher may be intermittent or even non-existent. Had the counsellor pursued these lines of inquiry in response to the caller's insistence that she only had her father to turn to, the call could quite possibly have taken a radically different trajectory and the status of the call may not even have been topicalised.

STRATEGIES IN ACTION: A SUCCESSFUL RESOLUTION OF THE DILEMMA

We turn now to a call where there is evidence that the CT achieves a successful resolution of the dilemma. Unlike the previous call examined in Extracts 2–5, the status of this call as a prank becomes apparent towards the end of the call and is openly admitted by the

C in his concluding turn. The caller is a boy who says he is 12 years old. The caller reports that he is scared because his dog is staring at him. CT probes:

Extract 6: call 5_1_51

15.	CT:	u::m what type of dog is it,
16.	C:	it's a big black one.
17.		(0.4)
18.	CT:	ri:ght and it keeps staring at you,
19.	C:	yes.
20.	CT:	so whereabouts are yo:u.
21.		(0.8)
22.	C:	i:n my house
23.	CT:	yeah?
24.	C:	yeh my mummy's asleep
25.	CT:	I see=how old are you
26.		(0.6)
27.	C:	twelve
28.	CT:	I see↓

The implied category of domestic pet ('my dog') can be heard inferentially as locating the source of the concern within the home. This turns out to be the case. The reported activity of the dog as 'staring' serves to introduce an element of surprise, uncertainty – even danger – into the unfolding and presumably real time scenario. Moreover, the hearable security of the family household is partially countered by the unsolicited information by the caller, 'my mummy's asleep' (line 24). The counsellor's next turn (line 25) could be a straightforward search for additional material to assess the severity of the caller's situation, but it also contains an interesting ambiguity. It could be heard as a charge directed to – although unheard by – the mother for failure to ensure the security of her child in the presence of a large and possibly aggressive animal. As well, it could be heard as a challenge to the caller: 'Aren't you really old enough not to worry about this?'. We omit the next exchanges, where the precise location of the dog (outside the house and no longer visible) and the caller (inside the house) are established. The call continues:

Extract 7: call 5_1_51 (continued)

45.	CT:	what do you think you're scared about?
46.	C:	I dunno:
47.	?:	(°woof woof°)
48.	C:	it has a <big long thing> underneath its bottom

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49.             (0.5)
50.   CT:       it has a big wha:t,
51.   C:        long thing↑ under its bottom↑
52.   CT:       ri::ght↓
53.   ?:        (woof woof)
54.   CT:       so what's important about tha:t
55.   C:        it keeps wobbling (0.5) around
56.   CT        yeah,
57.             (0.5)
58.   C:        would you know what that was
```

The CT returns to the theme of C being scared and she seeks to clarify the grounds for this. C initially cannot offer any reason, but then introduces new material: the dog has a 'big long thing underneath its bottom' (line 48). Just prior to this, a faint and clearly humanly produced dog 'bark' is heard. CT does not comment but instead asks the caller to repeat his prior turn and follows the caller's answer with an elongated and downwardly intonated news receipt (line 52). Again, no challenge about the authenticity of the call is made: instead, CT asks the caller why this noticing is important (line 54). The call appears to follow a relatively well-worn path. As noted previously, a recurring feature in many prank calls is an attempt by the C to engineer a situation in which the CT discusses sexual matters and, in so doing, employs terminology that, to some extent, still carries a social taboo status. In the present call, there is little doubt that C is searching for the CT to name and discuss the dog's reproductive organs. The long thing under the dog's bottom 'keeps wobbling around' (line 55): Does CT know what it is? The call concludes:

Extract 8: call 5_1_51 (continued)
```
59.   CT:       yeah
60.   C:        what
61.   ?:        (woof woof)
62.   CT:       what do you think it is
63.   C:        I don't know (0.4) it looks like a stick
64.   CT:       ri::ght
65.             (0.5)
66.             it sounds like you're actually with a few people now=do any of
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```
67.          them know what it is
68.   ?:     (woof woof)
69.   C:     no no one's here my mummy's asleep and my daddy's at work
70.   CT:    who's the person that keeps saying 'woof woof'
71.   C:     that's my dog
72.          (3.5)
73.   CT:    are you sure it's not a person sa::ying it,
74.   ?:     (woof woof)
75.   C:     n(hh)o
76.   CT:    n– you sure?
77.   C:     yes
78.   CT:    I see↓
79.          (4.5)
80.   C:     >hey guess what=this is a prank=see ya<
             (phone is hung up)
```

Evident here is the CT's refusal to be drawn into either providing the sexual terminology that the boy is seeking or openly challenging the veracity of the request. Instead of rebuking C, the CT's strategy is a beautifully crafted way of simultaneously providing enough resources for the caller to continue with the prank should he wish, but now with an indication that she has grasped what is happening. She acknowledges that she does know what the long wobbling thing is but refrains from providing any details. Thwarted, C tries again this time with a direct request: 'what' (line 60). Again CT returns the sequence to him with no further information provided. C repeats his earlier claim that he is by himself and that his mummy is asleep. He now provides the additional information that his daddy is at work (line 69). CT rises to the occasion with a response – 'who's the person that keeps saying "woof woof"' (line 70) – that has all the locutionary force of an outright challenge, but which still works to ensure that the prank has not yet been formally challenged. Interactionally, this permits C to continue with the prank for a few more moments. He insists that the sound that the CT hears is his dog. However, when asked by CT – after a considerable pause – if he is sure that it is not a person (line 73), the prankster's façade begins to crack. His answer is constructed via a grammatically incorrect negative and, importantly, the denial contains a choked laughter particle (line 75). Although he recovers his composure momentarily in response to CT's 'n– you sure,' the ensuing silence becomes too much to endure. After a 4.5 second gap, the caller reveals the real purpose of the call.[5]

CONCLUSION

Kids Help Line statistics show that nearly two thirds of their calls require no counselling support. Despite this, there are no gate-keeping procedures that triage the calls prior to the counsellors answering them. This organisational response to all incoming calls actively demonstrates the principle on which Kids Help Line operates, that every call is important. All calls, including testing calls, are understood as callers exploring the service and what it offers.

In the calls examined here, there were instances where it was difficult, at least initially, to determine if the call required counselling or support, or whether it was a testing call. In the exchanges, the counsellor artfully deployed strategies to search for the call's authenticity. A core strategy is to ask about the 'friend in the background'. In each call presented, there was a 'friend in the background'. On two occasions the friends were active co-pranksters. In one call, however, we suggest that the counsellor may have jumped to a conclusion too soon when, in fact, the call may have been a genuine request for advice.

There has been little investigation of how counsellors manage the interactional trajectories of calls that may, or may not be, testing calls. This paper shows the collaborative and artful collaborations by both caller and counsellor in working towards the success of a call. For the counsellor, this is shown through respectful responses that, at some stage, acknowledge that the call is a prank that was skilfully set up. For the caller, the task is to get away with the call for as long as possible while also making sure that the counsellor knows that it is a prank. This requires adept interactions from both parties.

Kids Help Line counsellors must attend to the possibility of each call being a testing call. This is not a usual condition for counsellors who meet with their child clients in face to face sessions. Given that telephone counselling is a relatively new phenomenon, and that there seems to be very little guidance for counsellors on how to respond to the non-counselling calls, it is testimony to the professional skills of the helpline counsellors that they are able to adapt their everyday conversational skills to these unchartered terrains so effectively.

APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

( )	word(s) spoken but not audible
(was)	best guess for word(s) spoken
(( ))	transcriber's description
(.)	micropause of less than two-tenths of a second
(2.0)	pause timed in seconds
do::n't	sound extended
<u>but</u>	emphasis
<u>BUT</u>	greater emphasis
[no	the point at which an overlap begins
=	latching between utterances
<u>not</u>↑	rising inflection
<u>not</u>↓	falling inflection
.	terminating intonation
?	rising intonation
°up°	talk that has a noticeably lower volume than the surrounding talk
n(hh)oh	laughter particle within an utterance
> <	'more than' and 'less than' signs indicate talk which is delivered much faster than surrounding talk

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ENDNOTES

1. This project was funded by the ARC Small Grant scheme.

2. For an early discussion of this issue see Emmison (1993) and, more recently, the papers in the themed section of *Discourse Studies* 3 (4) 2001 dealing with 'Authenticity, talk and mediated experience', for example, Van Leeuwen (2001).

3. In treating such calls as possibly suspicious the counsellors appear to be invoking a specifically Western sense of the individual self and the corresponding norm that help seeking is – or should be – a matter one undertakes in private. In the case of help seeking by children, however, practical circumstances may mean that this norm cannot be upheld. For example we have examples of apparently genuine calls in our corpus where the caller appears to be in the company of a younger sibling whom they are temporarily caring for during a period

of parental absence – such absence being, of course, an ideal time for a call to a helpline to be placed. For an example of this see the discussion of call 5_1_58.

4   Recipient design refers to the multitude of ways in which one speaker designs his or her utterances so as to display his or her sensitivity to the particular other(s) who are co-participants in the talk.

5   The caller's final utterance in which he attests to the status of the call as a prank is interesting. It would appear that callers who are making prank calls face an interactional dilemma of their own to the extent that they need to ensure that, *at some point*, the real status of the call is revealed. In other words a prank call is not 'successful' unless the prankee *knows* they have been pranked.

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