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Sequential Standoffs in Police Encounters With the Public

Geoffrey Raymond¹ , Jie Chen¹, and Kevin A. Whitehead^{1,2}

Abstract

Research on interactions involving police officers foregrounds the importance of their communicative practices for fostering civilians' perceptions of police legitimacy. Building on this research, we describe a pattern of conduct that is a recurrent source of trouble in such encounters, which we call *sequential standoffs*. These standoffs emerge when two parties persistently pursue alternative courses of action, producing a stalemate in which neither progress in, nor exit from, either course of action appears viable. They are routinely resolved by officers (re)casting civilians' pursuit of one course of action as constituting resistance to the officers' proposed course of action, and thus as warranting officers' use of coercive violence to resolve the stalemate. In some cases, however, officers resolve standoffs cooperatively using sequentially accommodative methods. We consider how these findings advance approaches to communicative dilemmas in policing, and their broader significance for scholars of social interaction, and of the interactional organization of conflicts.

Keywords

Action sequencing, coercive force, counters, policing, standoffs

Over the past two decades, research on the communicative practices used to conduct police encounters has considered their importance for fostering members of the public's perceptions of the legitimacy of police organizations, and particularly their willingness to cooperate with police officers in regulatory encounters (see Duck, 2017).

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For example, drawing on data from interviews (Tyler & Huo, 2002; Heritage & Clayman, 2010) and social psychological experiments designed to approximate courtroom and other legal settings (see Tyler, 2003), Tyler and colleagues have developed interventions designed to “influence ... people’s judgments about the procedural justice of the manner in which the police exercise their authority” (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003, p. 513). This procedural justice approach advises officers to treat members of the public with respect and provide them with an opportunity to present their views or perspectives. A related approach emerging from communication accommodation theory (or CAT, Giles et al., 2012, p. 408), offers a more fine-grained specification of the communicative practices likely to “promote feelings of trust which, in turn, increased civilians’ reported willingness to comply and cooperate with law enforcement” using quantitative content analyses of video recordings of actual police interactions (see also, Dixon et al., 2008). The CAT approach advises officers to vary their “communicative behavior to accommodate where they believe others to be ...” with the aim of fostering a “climate” in which persons “listen to one another, take the other’s views into account, and explain things in ways that ‘sit right’ with their partner” and encourages “pleasantness, politeness, and respect” (Giles et al., 2012, p. 408; see also Giles, 2023 for a review of research using CAT across settings and domains).

Across a wide range of studies, these approaches have provided evidence that the adoption of such orientations or perspectives enhances police legitimacy, and thus promotes civilian cooperation. While these advances are laudable, we also note two limitations. First in using quantitative techniques that rely on coding methodologies that lose aspects of the context and meaning of individual contributions in unfolding encounters, these approaches may unavoidably overlook some recurrent sources of interactional trouble—and practices addressed to such troubles—that meaningfully contribute to outcomes in police encounters. Second, the granularity of advice to officers proffered by these approaches (e.g., to be accommodative, respectful, listen, etc.) may be difficult for officers to follow in those circumstances where they most need guidance, such as in occasions of heightened conflict.

The present study contributes to these lines of research using Conversation Analysis (Heritage & Clayman, 2010; Schegloff, 2007) as a complementary approach that addresses precisely these limitations. Specifically, we describe a form of trouble that routinely emerges in police encounters—a previously unidentified pattern of conduct we call *sequential standoffs*—and explicate how participants orient to, understand, and seek to manage this trouble. Sequential standoffs are of interest to scholars of policing in part because they are one recurrent context in which police officers use coercive authority (including violence or force) to resolve what they may encounter as a form of conflict that places peaceable solutions beyond the reach of officers. Conversely, because of their distinctive features, civilians routinely treat the use of coercive techniques in this context as unwarranted, and thus as a basis for complaints in the moment as well as to police oversight agencies and courts in the aftermath of an encounter.

We initially contextualize our analysis of these standoffs by explicating how police officers and civilians rely on basic interactional structures and practices for organizing sequences of actions, and how standoffs emerge from the features of this basic form of social organization, before considering some alternative methods of police officers use to manage and resolve them. We conclude by situating these findings in relation to the claims about policing advanced by CAT, and suggesting trajectories for future research on sequential standoffs and related phenomena for studies of policing and conversation analytic research on sequence organization.

Sequences of Action in Police Encounters as a Context for Cooperation and Resistance

For police officers—as for others seeking to conduct courses of action with others in ordinary and institutional occasions of interaction—“adjacency pair sequences” (Schegloff, 2007; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973) are the primary locus of social organization for managing what will happen in an encounter. These two-part action sequences consist of a “first pair part” or initiating action by one party that provides a place for—and a normative expectation of—another party’s production of a related responsive “second pair part” (Schegloff, 2007; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). As Schegloff (2007, p. 264) observes, “because of its prospective operation, the adjacency pair is the prime resource in conversation for getting something to happen, because it provides a determinate *place* for it to happen—next” (emphasis in original; see also Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Police officers use this basic and pervasive interactional resource throughout their encounters with the public: They use initiating actions to establish contact with the subject(s) of interest and open an encounter with them (e.g., hailing a person, or using lights and sirens on a patrol car to initiate a stop); physically position the subject (e.g., using directives “step over here”, “sit on the ground”—see Buscariolli, 2023; Kidwell, 2018); establish, manage, or conclude the reason for the encounter (e.g., via announcements—“I believe you might be my warrant suspect,” “sir I issued you a ticket”—and requests—“please sign the ticket”); establish the subject’s identity (e.g., by posing queries “what’s your name?” “do you have ID on you?”) and pursue other “investigative inquiries” (Meehan, 2018); direct civilians to act in specific ways (e.g., “relax!” “put that down,” “keep your hands out of your pockets”); and so on. For these types of sequences, the initiating actions police officers pose to their civilian counterparts constitute the primary context within which issues of civilian cooperation and resistance emerge and are evaluated in the encounter.

Moreover, by virtue of the turn-by-turn (and thus action-by-action) organization of police encounters, the basic adjacency pair structure also provides participants a basis for establishing and managing their intersubjective grasp of the in-progress course of action and the larger encounter of which it is a part (Sacks et al., 1974). That is, officers can inspect the moments following their production of an initiating action to see what sense a recipient has made of it and draw inferences about whether or not a civilian is producing the expected responsive action, and thus whether they have partially or fully

cooperated with the officer, or produced some alternative form of conduct. Similarly, civilians can produce next actions that take up the officer's initiating action, indicate trouble in understanding it (see Schegloff et al., 1977), or use other methods to manage their participation in the course of action, and track how the officer makes sense of what they do.

When directed to the person(s) who are the main focus of an encounter (e.g., in contrast to bystanders) most actions initiated by officers entail systematic modifications to the basic set of practices participants use in related sequences in ordinary conversation. For virtually every way that a speaker in an ordinary conversation can compose an initiating action to define a situation or seek to constrain a recipient's response, a responding speaker can draw on resources to resist, alter, or depart from those formulations and constraints in shaping how the sequence unfolds (Schegloff, 2007). Indeed, the possible ways recipients of an initiating action may resist its terms in formulating a response can shape how first pair parts are specifically designed for their recipient in light of the occasion and state of their relations (Raymond, 2003; Sacks, 1987; Schegloff, 2007). In police encounters, however, officers' capacity to use coercive authority to compel particular responsive actions introduces asymmetries in such action sequences that shapes how civilians participate in them (see Drew & Heritage, 1992; Heritage & Clayman, 2010; Raymond, 2003).¹

As Bittner (1970, p. 40) famously observed, police intervention means "above all else" the capacity to use their coercive authority (including force or violence) to "overpower resistance to their solutions in the native habitat of the problem." Although Bittner does not specify when and by reference to what sorts or practices officers may use such authority, he supports this claim using a series of vignettes (drawn from field notes) in which officers invoke their coercive authority to compel compliance with a solution they have proposed as a sequence initiating action. For example: "In the apartment of a quarreling couple, patrolmen were told by the wife, whose nose was bleeding, that the husband stole her purse containing money she earned. *The patrolmen told the man they would 'take him in,' whereupon he returned the purse and they left*" (Bittner, 1970, p. 40; emphasis added). In this vignette, the officer's threat succeeds in compelling a reluctant subject to relinquish his wife's purse. Thus, when Bittner observes (1970, p. 40) that, for parties calling or contacted by the police, "every conceivable police intervention projects the message that force may be, and may have to be, used to achieve a desired objective," we can add: to the extent that they are articulated at all, the desired objectives of police officers will be pursued via sequences of action, with force and coercion being potentially deployed to overcome resistance to the form of action they make relevant next.

The capacity of officers to use coercive force or violence raises crucial questions about when, how, and with what frequency officers come to use it in compelling compliance with their directives (see, e.g., Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002; Terrill & Reisig, 2003). For example, a substantial body of research (e.g., Epp et al., 2014; Fryer, 2019) has documented stark racial disparities in the use of these coercive practices. While we seek to contribute to this important body of research, we focus on explicating

the interactional antecedents of officers' escalation to the use of coercive force or violence and its in-progress management and resolution, rather than on the aggregate-level outcomes these processes may produce (see also Whitehead et al., 2018). Such a focus enables us to examine how orientations to resistance and its alternatives emerge in the unfolding of interactional sequences, how officers justify their uses of force and how civilians challenge such claims, and what alternative methods officers may deploy in handling the forms of trouble they encounter. In considering these matters, we also examine how orientations to the relevance of race and other categorical identities emerge in situ, and how these reflect and shape the participants' understandings of events and actions (see also Whitehead, 2020; Whitehead et al., 2018).

In taking up this fine-grained analysis of how police officers exercise authority in sequences of actions, we also introduce two sources of complexity to the view of social authority social psychology inherited from the situations modeled in Milgram's (1974) classic experiments (see also Hollander & Maynard, 2016). For Milgram, and most subsequent studies, the exercise of authority is conceived of as emerging in single courses of action that pose a binary choice between compliance and resistance for subjects. In the following, we take up two ways in which this view overlooks important aspects of the encounters in our data, and in doing so we specify the contributions of the empirical analysis that follows.

First, rather than conceiving of encounters as entailing a relatively uniform exercise of authority across the varied sequences that comprise them, we show how participants orient to, respond to, or constitute specific sequence initiating actions as "turning points"—that is, as sequential contexts in which a transformation in a projectable outcome or state of affairs becomes relevant (or is treated as such). For both officers and civilians, orientations to such turning points can be reflected in the practices they use to manage what happens next. Specifically, they may be occasions especially ripe for management via the use of "counters" (Schegloff, 2007, p. 16)—that is, when a speaker responds to an initiating action by producing another initiating action that "reverses the direction of constraint" (Schegloff, 2007, p. 19), thereby redirecting the relevance of a responding action back to the speaker of the prior initiating action. As our analysis demonstrates, the use of counters can give rise to standoffs in which both officers and civilians persist in pursuing alternative courses of action, and thus *no progress can be made in either one, and yet no exit from the sequence is viable*, thereby bringing their interaction into a state that is "both frozen and continuing" (Wagner-Pacifici, 2000, p. i; also see Whitehead et al., *forthcoming*).

Second, the conventional view of social authority overlooks how police encounters are almost invariably conducted in encounters characterized by "multiactivity" (Haddington et al., 2014), with ratified participants' engaged in "multiple involvements" (Raymond & Lerner, 2014, p. 230). That is, on many occasions, police officers making contact with civilians will find them *already* engaged in some ongoing activity (e.g., driving, walking, sleeping, fighting, talking, arguing, etc.). As we will see, civilians may remain variously committed to these alternative activities across their

encounters with the police. By virtue of this, rather than civilians choosing whether to comply with officers' directives in isolated sequences of action, civilians routinely orient to those directives as making relevant a choice between *participating in or pursuing alternative courses of action or engagements*. Moreover, within such encounters, participants recurrently pursue multiple activities or involvements (e.g., questioning and searching, talking to multiple parties, including via police radios, and so on) which may complicate how the parties make sense of each other's conduct since each of their multiple engagements may furnish different possible bases for understanding what they are doing (Raymond & Lerner, 2014). In our analysis, we explicate how participants orient to and manage the complexity of these occasions, and how misunderstandings that emerge by reference to such multiple involvements can be involved in officers' uses of coercive force. Taking these observations together, our analysis suggests that we have much to learn about police encounters by examining how matters of cooperation and resistance emerge in naturally occurring sequences of action.

Data and Method

The video recordings used in this study were collected as part of a larger project on police encounters with the public and are stored in the UCSB-UC Berkeley Corpus of Police Encounters. The collection includes over 700 dashcam and other videos (ranging from 10–50 min in length) and hundreds of interviews with police officers. These include more than 400 dashcam videos from a city on the West Coast of the United States, and recordings of more than 250 discrete encounters recorded by researchers in ride-alongs in all 10 substations in another major U.S. city's police department. These data were initially collected under the auspices of a grant from DARPA and subsequently expanded and improved with funding from the William T. Grant Foundation. In developing our analysis, we have approached these data as "third party video" (Jones & Raymond, 2012). These videos have been transcribed using the Jefferson (Jefferson, 2004) transcription system, and analyzed using the conversation analytic methods described by Schegloff (1996). This involved building a collection (see also Clift & Raymond, 2018) of more than 50 encounters that included instances of the specific phenomena of interest for the project—namely, counters, and counters to counters—for subsequent detailed analysis. The cases that we examine in detail below were selected from the broader collection so as to illustrate both recurrent features of their systematic organization and variations in the details of their realization in particular cases (see also Maynard & Clayman, 2018).

Counters as an Alternative to Practices of Responding

Schegloff and Sacks's (1973, p. 297) account of adjacency pair sequences as a basic form of organization used to manage the "close ordering problem," notes that producing a sequence initiating action is, "the basic generalized means for assuring that some desired event will ever happen. If it cannot be made to happen next, it's happening is

not merely delayed, but may never come about.” This formulation provides a compelling analysis of the very matters that police officers and civilians may struggle over in pursuing courses of action, with both parties oriented to the possibility that, if an event or action cannot be made to happen next, it may never happen. Most of what is currently known about such action sequences, however, has been developed through analyses of the ways that participants manage the relationship between sequentially initial and sequentially responsive actions (although see Joyce, 2022). As Schegloff (2007) also observes, however, the recipient of an initiating action can produce a “counter” as an alternative to the response the initiating action makes relevant. In what follows, we briefly explicate what is currently known about the use of counters in ordinary conversation and then turn to a more extended analysis of the use of this practice in the context of police encounters, including how these can lead to the emergence of sequential standoffs.

Counters and Sequential Standoffs in Ordinary Conversation

We can note some initial features and consequences of counters in ordinary conversation by analyzing extract 1 (analyzed by Schegloff, 2007, pp. 18–19). In this interaction, Tony and Marsha, a divorced couple, discuss the travel arrangements of their son, Joey, who has visited Marsha but is on his way back to Tony’s house where he lives.

(1) MDE:MTRAC:60-1:2

- 1 MAR: Hello_i?
 2 TON: Hi: Marsha?
 3 MAR: Ye:ah.
 4 TON: How are you.
 5 MAR: Fi::ne.
 6 (0.2)
 7 MAR: Did Joey get home yet?
 8 TON: Well I wz wondering when 'e left.
 9 (0.2)
 10 MAR: .hhh Uh:(d) did Oh::h Yer not in on what ha:ppen'.
 11 TON: No(h) o=
 12 MAR: =He's flying.

Instead of producing the response Marsha’s query (line 7) makes relevant, Tony poses an alternative query (line 8)—a counter, that “reverse[s] the direction of the sequence and its flow” (Schegloff, 2007, p. 17). In using a counter to respond to Marsha’s query, Tony makes relevant a response by Marsha. Following some delay and subsequent elaboration (lines 10–12), Marsha begins responds to Tony’s counter (line 12), and thereby ratifies the redirection it initiates.

Counters almost invariably suggest some problem or issue with the prior initiating action. In this case, Tony’s counter raises trouble with Marsha’s preceding query: She has presumed that Tony knows more about Joey’s travel plans and possible arrival than she does. In just the ways Marsha takes up and responds to Tony’s counter, she treats the counter as having been produced “for cause”—as done for a reason or purpose—and thus as an accountable move in the interaction. Put differently, the production of a

counter invites a recipient to find and resolve (or at least address) the trouble that warranted the reversal of the sequence. Here, an incipient conflict over “adjacency” or “nextness” that might have emerged via Tony’s use of a counter is averted when Marsha begins taking up what Tony’s counter has prompted her to realize (line 10) and begins to respond to it (in line 12).²

The consequences of using a counter to manage (ostensible) problems with the design of an initiating action can be appreciated by considering the challenges it potentially introduces. If a first pair part makes relevant a range of choices regarding whether and how a responding action will take up the relevancies the first sets in motion (see Heritage & Raymond, 2012; Raymond, 2003), a counter makes relevant a *choice* between *two alternative courses of action* and the contrasting agendas or projects they initiate. If the prospective operation of adjacency pair sequences *solves* a problem in organizing courses of action by providing a determinate place for the production of the event or action a first action makes relevant (i.e., next), the use of counters potentially *introduces* one. While a first party can simply accept the redirection posed by a counter (as in extract 1), they can also counter a counter and thereby insist on a response to their own initiating action. As a result, in sequential contexts where one party responds to an initiating action with a counter, a contest over “nextness” can emerge.

We can observe the beginnings of such a contest in extract 2 (also analyzed by Schegloff, 2007, p. 18). In this extract, Carrie arrives at a shop and summons her boyfriend, Vic, who is visiting with a friend.

(2) Upholstery Shop

1 VIC: =I Left my garbage pail in iz [hallway.=
 2 CAR: [VIC:
 3 CAR: Vic(tuh),
 4 VIC: =Yeh
 5 CAR: C'mmere fer a minnit.
 6 (0.7)
 7 VIC: Y'come [he:re. [please?
 8 CAR: [You c'co[me ba:ck,
 9 VIC: I haftuh go t'the bathroom.=
 10 CAR: =Oh.

Following a pursuit (line 3) of her initial summons (line 2) and Vic’s response (line 4), Carrie directs him to come to her (line 5). In lieu of a response, Vic uses a counter to propose an alternative action—that she should instead go to him (line 7). As he is doing so, however, Carrie counters Vic’s counter (line 8), beginning her turn in overlap at the point where the upshot of his turn becomes recognizable. The countered-counter here exposes what can be at stake when each party insists that the other respond to their initiating action: The parties are faced with a choice over which action will prevail and which one will be abandoned. In this case, the incipient conflict is apparently resolved when Vic provides a basis for remaining where he is (line 9), which Carrie registers as news (line 10; see also Heritage, 1984a), and thus appears to accept.

Across extract 2, the parties use counters, and counters to counters, to struggle over *how* a project will be accomplished (i.e., who will come to whom). Although Vic ultimately remains in the same place, he never rejects the relevance or feasibility of going to Carrie (e.g., as might have been conveyed if Victor had rejected Carrie's directive, or produced some other non-aligning response). This struggle only comes to be resolved when Carrie accepts Victor's account. Conversely, in cases where neither party acquiesces to the course of action pursued through successive counters produced by each, a standoff may emerge. In such cases, neither party can advance their own course of action so long as their selected recipient is pursuing an alternative to it, nor can they abandon their own action without opening the way for the other party to pursue their alternative course of action.

Counters and Sequential Standoffs in Police Encounters

Having considered the use of counters as an alternative to responding, and the troubles that may emerge when participants begin to use counters to counters in mundane conversation, we turn to analyze the use of counters in police encounters. In taking these up, we initially identify the features of sequential standoffs in police encounters and explicate some of the sequential and contextual features common to the circumstances in which they emerge. We then examine how participants pursue, manage, and seek to resolve them in this context.

In extract 3 we examine one way that counters come to be used in police encounters, and how they may develop into sequential standoffs. In this case, two officers (MP1 and MP2) have contacted a Black homeless man who is sitting on the street (CM1) on the grounds that he "fits the visual description" of a person named in a warrant (data not shown). Throughout the first several minutes of the encounter, the officers pursue an effort to identify the subject. Each time the officers produce an initiating action that invites, requests or demands that the subject provide his name to them, the subject produces alternatives to responding that avoid these constraints.³ After several minutes of such exchanges, CM1 and the officers exchange complaints and challenges related to the officers' focus on him, including accusations that the encounter is racially motivated. The dispute comes to a head when the officers escalate their effort to identify the subject using a threat that invokes their capacity for coercive authority: "You can sit down and be reasonable, or unfortunately we- w- or what we'll have to do is take you down and have you fingerprinted an' photographed" (data not shown). The civilian treats the use of this threat as a turning point in the encounter and begins to adopt different methods for managing his involvement in the officer's project.

Extract 3 begins in the aftermath of this threat. MP1 resumes pursuing CM1's name using a two-part query (line 2) that retains his skepticism regarding the name (Terry Thompson) CM1 proffered in a prior exchange. In doing so, MP1 shows himself to be resuming the project of identifying CM1 at the last point before trouble prompted its abandonment (see Raymond & Zimmerman, 2016). CM1 initially works to evade

this query (line 3), before adopting a different practice for managing the sequence, producing a counter (lines 6–7).

(3) Seattle Police dispute, 1:07–13:04
 1 (1.0)
 2 MP1: What is your first name, it's Terry?
 3 CM1: Whatever you wanna call me<
 4 MP1: Well, I'd like your name so I can make
 5 sure that you['re not him.
 6 CM1: [What's the name a' the person
 7 you're lookin' fer?
 8 MP1: I will tell you as soon we're done,
 9 (0.3)
 10 MP1: If I c'n pro:ve [that you're not him
 11 CM1: [You're playing-
 12 You're playing with me
 13 MP1: I'm not playing with you.
 14 CM1: Okay
 15 MP1: I'm telling you: straight up,
 16 right now, (.) if I can determine
 17 that you're not him, (0.2) this is over.
 18 (.)
 19 Okay?
 20 CM1: So what's his name. I'll tell ya.
 21 MP1: So what is your first name?
 22 CM1: >No(w) what's his name?<
 23 MP1: What is (.) your first name?

CM1's use of a counter serves as a method for managing the explicitly coercive sequential environment posed by MP1's queries. Instead of seeking to delay, and possibly avoid, responding to the sequential constraints posed by the officer's query, CM1 counters them with an *alternative* sequence initiating action—"What's the name a' the person you're lookin' fer?"—that reverses the direction of the sequential constraints, making a response by MP1 relevant (Schegloff, 2007). Notably, through this counter, CM1 positions himself as working toward MP1's project by offering an alternative method that also satisfies his concerns. That is, he can confirm whether he is the person on the warrant while also avoiding having to identify himself to the officers, thereby avoiding other possible troubles that may arise from doing so. In contrast, MP1's queries seek to identify CM1 *before* revealing the person named in the warrant (see line 8).

Once a subject has used a counter to initiate an alternative action in this way, the grounds for an incipient sequential standoff have been established: 1) in a context where one party has initiated a course of action, a second party uses a counter to initiate an alternative course of action; and 2) these two courses of action are opposed to one another insofar as each pursues a trajectory that the other specifically seeks to avoid. Such sequential contexts constitute an incipient conflict (see also Whitehead et al., 2018) since any further pursuit of either course of action takes place in a context where the other party has publicly displayed a *commitment to pursuing a different course of action*, and one that their own course of action seeks to avoid.

Such incipient sequential standoffs (where two parties are pursuing alternative projects) pose distinct challenges since each course of action forms a reciprocal context for the other. As a consequence, even where the parties seek to avoid a full-blown standoff by alternating between responding to the other's initiating action and pursuing a response to their own, they may nevertheless encounter trouble. For example, MP1's offer (lines 8 and 10) appears to propose a possible sequential solution to the incipient conflict: He will respond to CM1's query once MP1's project has been completed. In this way, MP1 appears to acknowledge CM1's alternative query while sustaining his own as the priority. CM1's response, however, characterizes the offer as disingenuous (lines 11–12), and thus as aggravating rather than resolving the incipient conflict. Apparently, in responding to CM1's prior turn as if it were merely a query (or expression of interest) MP1's offer is vulnerable to the complaint that he is minimizing or avoiding matters that prompted CM1 to produce the query *as a counter*. While MP1 emphatically rejects CM1's accusation (line 13), we can note that his turn is vulnerable to this charge because the proposed offer to address CM1's query can be understood as promoting his own action. Once parties find themselves enmeshed in two courses of action, any contribution to one can be viewed for the implications it may have for the other.

In the aftermath of this exchange, a full-blown sequential standoff emerges: Following MP1's defense (line 13), and CM1's apparent acceptance of it (line 14), MP1 reasserts his proposal (lines 15–17) and, following a brief delay (line 18), invites CM1's acquiescence to it (line 19). In the next turn, however, CM1 re-asserts his own prior query (line 20), using a "so" preface that treats MP1's response to CM1's prior action as still pending (Bolden, 2009; Raymond, 2004). MP1 in turn produces a similarly "so"-prefaced response to *his* prior action (line 21). With each party pursuing a response to one course of action whenever the other party seeks to pursue a response to the other, the parties find themselves in an interactional stalemate (cf. Pollner, 1975). In Wagner's-Pacifici (2000, p. i) terms, the interaction is "frozen" insofar as neither party can achieve progress in their proposed course of action, and yet also "continuing" since they also cannot abandon their continued pursuits without providing an opening for the other party's course of action and the trajectory it entails.

Having established the conditions for the emergence of full-blown sequential standoffs, we now turn to an examination of how participants may seek methods to resolve them, and of the range of features that complicate the possible methods for doing so.

Sequential Standoffs as a Form of Trouble, and Some Methods for Resolving Them

We begin this section by considering an encounter, shown in extract 4, that introduces three sources of variation in contrast to extract 3: (a) The *civilian* initiates the first course of action, preempting the officer's first action; (b) once the officer produces a counter, the standoff takes shape over just a few turns in the opening moments of the encounter; and (c) the standoff is resolved by the officer's use of physical force. This encounter, which takes place in a convenience store, has been prompted by a party calling 911 upon leaving the store to report that a white couple (composed of

a man and a woman) is engaged in a loud verbal conflict with another party. When the arriving officers (MP1 and MP2) find the 911-caller in the parking lot, he complains that a woman in the store was using racial epithets to insult a Black person (who has left the scene). On entering the store, the officers find three civilians, a white woman (CF1), a white man (CM1), and a Black man (CM2). The officers' "for cause" arrival (i.e., they have been called to address a public disturbance) projects their initiation of the encounter's opening. Before they can do so, however, CM2 intervenes to preempt his possible treatment as a suspect (line 1). In this way, CM2 treats the beginning of the encounter, and his possible categorization as an antagonist in the conflict, as a projectable turning point that he seeks to avoid (see also the analysis of this case in Whitehead et al., frthb). MP1 then initiates an alternative course of action (line 2), establishing an incipient standoff within the first two turns of the encounter's opening.

(4) SPD7455@20090331021633

1 CM2: >Hey.=Honestly sir.< (.) I have no issues=
 2 MP1: =Let's go out[side.
 3 (?): [These guys are cool.
 4 CM2: This guy- I- [honestly- honestly-
 5 CF1: [He's cool. He's,
 6 CM2: I'm the- I'm [the one that's keeping th[uh peace sir.
 7 MP2: [those dudes out there, [
 8 CF1: [He's- he's
 9 [the one ().
 10 CM1: [I'm fine.
 11 MP2: First of all you're coming outside too okay?
 12 CM2: Okay. [No (that's) fine sir.
 13 CF1: [Hey he's cool though. Please
 14 [believe me man. he's,
 15 CM2: [But listen- listen sir I'm not ((MP2 approaches CM2))
 16 Okay- [okay >I'm comin' outside< ((MP2 grabs CM2's arm and))
 17 MP2: [OUTside right now. Right now. ((uses it to compel exit))
 18 CM2: I'm coming outside sir.
 19 MP2: RIGH[T now.
 20 CM2: [>Honestly< I didn't even (submit.)
 21 Would=you tell him?
 22 [I didn't do any fucking thing man.
 23 CF1: [No he [didn't- he didn't do anything.
 24 MP2: [Okay all right. All right.
 25 Just let me find out. Let me find out a'right?

As in extract 3, each party initiates a course of action that opens a possible trajectory that the other party's course of action seeks to avoid. CM2's preemptive announcement (line 1) makes establishing his status as an uninvolved bystander the priority. This reflects his orientation to his "provisional status" as Black person in white space (see Anderson, 2015, pp. 13–14), and thus his need to counter racial biases that he treats as bound to the category "police officer" (Whitehead et al., frthb). By contrast, MP1's counter—a collectively-addressed directive to "go outside" (line 2)—initiates a move to separate the civilians in the store before establishing their relative involvement. This directive pursues a preliminary project that officers routinely use in responding to public disturbances since any discussion of civilians' respective roles in their current, co-present arrangement may open trajectories that separating them would avoid—especially reopening the conflict.

Following these opposed actions, a full-blown standoff emerges as each party then pursues their own proposed course of action in a next turn, thereby demonstrating their commitment to these two alternative projects: CM2 continues advancing claims regarding his status by commenting on others' actions (line 4) and characterizing his role in the conflict (line 6) as aligned with the officers' overarching project; MP2 counters these efforts by addressing the prior, general directive (in line 2) to CM2 specifically (line 11). We can note that the parties' actions reflect an orientation to the emerging standoff to which they contribute. For example, CM1 uses a range of resources to solicit the officer's reciprocity, including a preface (Hey honestly sir) and multiple restarts (lines 4 and 6) thereby registering his involvement in a different activity (Goodwin, 1980). Similarly, MP2's counter (line 11) adds elements that tacitly acknowledge CM2's pursuit of a different course of action, using a preface (First of all) to assert it as the priority action, and repackaging it as an already-in-progress-action for CM1 to join by completing it with "too." Through these features, MP2 underscores that CM2 had been included as a recipient of the initial directive and thus positions his current action *as a pursuit* of MP1's initial directive. He then invites CM2's acquiescence to it by appending an upwardly intoned "okay?"

In the context of a standoff, parties can manage the conflicting demands posed by the two courses of action with both sequentially initial and sequentially responsive actions. Parties can use *sequentially initial actions* to pursue a response to their own prior action, composed, for example, as an *n*th pursuit of a response in a stand-alone sequence (see Heritage, 1984b), or using features that acknowledge the competing relevance of an alternative course of action (as in extract 3, line 8, or in this extract, line 11). Speakers can also compose *responding actions* to manage sequential standoffs, however. In extract 4 (line 12), CM2 composes a responsive turn addressed to relevancies advanced in MP2's initiating action: CM1's turn-initial "Okay" projects the compliance invited by MP2's preceding "okay?", while his elaboration "No, (that's) fine sir" acquiesces to MP2's preceding privileging of his course of action.⁴ While CM2 apparently cooperates with MP2, his response to MP2's initiating action can nevertheless be viewed as "strategic" (cf. Schegloff, 2000) since he treats the possible resolution of the officers' sequence as enabling the resumption of his own course of action: CM2's appended "But"-prefaced continuation (line 15) pursues his prior action, now apparently produced as the remaining in-progress action. This suggests one way that sequential standoffs can be resolved: The parties can complete one course of action, thereby freeing them up to pursue the alternative competing line of action—if the resolution of the other sequence satisfies the party who initiated it.

Although CM2 attempts such a resolution here, he immediately finds that MP2 has a different understanding of their joint situation. Rather than treating his course of action as possibly complete following CM2's talk in line 12, MP2 escalates to using physical force to compel CM2's compliance with his directive (lines 16–17, and 19) and thus unilaterally resolves the standoff in favor of the officers' course of action. In grabbing CM2's arm and lifting it behind his back, while using successive directives to narrate and justify his use of a pain compliance technique to compel CM2's exit, MP2 not only treats his own course of action as still in progress, but positions CM2's talk in line 15 as having been a form of resistance to it. CM2 registers this escalation, first by abandoning his in-progress utterance

(lines 15–16), repeating “okay” to disclaim the need for further any further pursuit or escalation of force by MP2, and then offering repeated formulations of his own conduct (I’m coming outside), as a means of claiming that the officers have failed to recognize that he is *already* complying (see Royce & Raymond, *forth*).

The dueling treatment of and claims about CM2’s compliance with MP2’s directives in lines 17–21 suggest divergent understandings of CM2’s conduct, and thus a breakdown in intersubjectivity (cf. Schegloff, 1992), the bases for which bear some exploration. Most simply, the different frameworks of accountability that police and civilians treat as relevant for conducting their encounters can be a routine source of trouble in police encounters (cf. Drew & Heritage, 1992). For example, in mundane conversational encounters, participants routinely treat *projected* compliance with a directive or request as sufficient for resolving an in-progress sequence (Lindström, 2017), trusting that the promised action will be produced when it is relevant to do so. In police encounters, officers may sometimes do the same. For example, they may accept a civilian’s *agreement* to move from their current location as sufficient grounds for treating the civilian as complying with the officer’s directive to move *even when the civilian currently remains in place* (see Raymond et al., 2022). In other cases, however, officers treat anything other than *visible* compliance, including claims by the civilian that they are complying or will comply, as a form of resistance. The heightened scrutiny of visible conduct in these cases reflects a lack of “trust” (Garfinkel, 1967), here reflected in officers declining to take civilians’ claims at face value. In extract 4, we can see evidence of a shift from one orientation to the other in the timing of MP2’s pursuits and escalation. While MP2 initially takes the CM2’s claimed agreement to move at face value (in lines 11–12), as soon as CM2 resumes his earlier course of action (line 15), MP2 escalates to using force (line 16) to compel CM2’s compliance. Thus, the different frameworks of accountability the parties treat as relevant for the encounter may be one source of the divergent understandings that emerge in this case.

The sequential standoff itself is another source of trouble, however, as the two courses of action concurrently relevant in standoffs provide competing sequential contexts for making sense of conduct, and thus a systematic basis for misunderstanding talk or visible conduct. Thus, MP2 treats the course of action launched by his directive as still in progress and CM2’s resumption of his own course of action (line 15) as a form of resistance to it. In contrast, CM2 treats his projected or promised compliance (in line 12) as having resolved MP2’s project, and thus the resumption of his earlier course of action as something he has taken up in the aftermath of that sequence. It is apparently on these grounds that CM2 protests the officer’s escalation to the use of force as an unnecessary and thus complainable move (lines 18, 20–22; see also Schegloff, 2005). As this conflict reveals, where participants find themselves engaged in two competing courses of action, the very architecture for intersubjectivity otherwise enabled by the turn-taking system (Heritage, 1984b; Sacks et al., 1974) may be undermined by the contrasting relevancies associated with two in-progress courses of action. In such circumstances, each party may use their own course of action as a basis for composing their own talk and visible conduct and for understanding just what the other party is doing with theirs.

Extract 4 also reveals how standoffs and the troubles they routinely give rise to can be further illuminated by analyses of co-present third parties' interventions (see also Lerner, 2019; Whitehead et al., *frtha*). Where co-present third parties observe sequential standoffs beginning to emerge, they may produce interventions designed to prevent or resolve them, thereby treating such occasions as problematic. For example, directly following MP1's counter to CM2 (line 2), and thus at the first place the incipient conflict between the parties' actions becomes evident, CF1 aligns with CM2's project by attempting to preempt the officer's treatment of him as a suspect (lines 5 and 8–9). In contrast to CM2's prefaced, elaborated pleas, however, the design and substance of CF1's initial claims presume that the officers will listen to and believe her, thereby possibly tacitly indexing privileges associated with her status as a white person (see also Whitehead, 2020). When the officers fail to respond to her pleas, however, CF1 reconfigures her interventions to index her pessimism regarding the officer's reciprocity and willingness to accept her claims by prefacing her turn with "hey" and completing it with "please" (lines 13–14). CM2 also orients to CF1's relative privilege: After MP2 has taken physical control of CM2 and declined to respond to his repeated claims and complaints (in lines 16, 18, 20), CM2 directs his remarks to CF1 (lines 21–22), who begins to relay them to MP2 (line 23). As soon as CF1 begins to address MP2, he responds to both parties in a way that indicates, for the first time, his openness to entertaining CM2's claims of his non-involvement in the conflict that occasioned the officers' arrival at the scene (line 24).

We can also note that utterances by CM2 and CF1 over the course of this extract reflect their in-progress analysis of the conflict's shape and direction: They track the initial, projectable emergence of a turning point in seeking to preempt it, intervene as a standoff emerges, and comment on the manner of its apparent resolution. For example, as the officers escalate to begin using force, CM2's and CF1's initial, prospectively oriented attempts at preemption (lines 1, 5, 8–9) give way to CM2's present-progressive formulations claiming misunderstanding (line 18, "I'm coming ...") that aim to stop, rather than prevent, what is happening. Moreover, both CM2 and CF1 shift to the past tense in formulating and relaying a complaint about his treatment (lines 21–22, "I didn't even ...", and 23 "no he didn't ..."). In this way, their talk registers the resolution of the standoff, even as the actions they initiate by reference to it seek to sustain the conflict it has given rise to—a conflict that preoccupies the parties for the remainder of the encounter (more than 20 min following this extract). Cases such as this thereby demonstrate that the troubles that can emerge in resolving a standoff may persist and shape the encounter long after the standoff itself has been resolved (see also Dersley & Wootton, 2001).

Having canvassed some of the conflicts and issues that can arise in and as sequential standoffs, we turn to two extracts that further document a recurrent source of trouble in them, and the alternative methods that officers may use to resolve them. Extract 5 is taken from a traffic stop in which MP1 pulled over CM1 for speeding. While this case has a number of interesting elements, we focus in particular on three features of the encounter and its sequelae: (a) the emergence of a sequential standoff (lines 1–15); (b) how the standoff gives rise to the divergent ways that CMI and MP1

understand the import of the MP1's directive in line 18; and (c) MP1's use of coercive force to resolve the standoff (lines 21–35).

(5) Speeding ticket standoff

1 MP1: (Sir I issued you a ticket. Please sign here)
 2 (so,)
 3 CM1: No:. W[hat you're gonna do:. If you're givin' me
 4 MP1: [(No-)
 5 CM1 a ticket fi[rst of all you're gonna tell me why:.
 6 MP1: [Uh huh.
 7 (1.0)
 8 CM1: An'=
 9 MP1: =Fer spe[eeding.
 10 CM1: [second of- Second of all we're gonna go
 11 look where the forty mile an hour ↑sign is:.=
 12 MP1: =↑Well: you're gonna sign this first.=
 13 CM1: =No, I'm no:t.
 14 (0.4)
 15 CM1: [I'm not signing anything officer.
 16 CF1: [()
 17 CF1: ([)
 18 MP1: [Sir:., hop out of the car.
 19 (5.0) ((seem image sequence 1))
 20 CM1: (this []) ((pointing down highway))
 21 MP1: [Turn around put your hands behind
 22 your [ba:ck. ((reaching for taser))
 23 CM1: [(No:, no I'm not a [)
 24 MP1: [TURN AROU:ND, (.)
 25 PUT YOUR HANDS BEHIND YOUR BA:CK, NOW!
 26 CM1: What the hell's wrong with yo:u?
 27 (0.2)
 28 MP1: TURN AROUND,
 29 (0.2)
 30 MP1: TURN AROUND!
 31 (0.3)
 32 CM1: What the heck's wrong with you?=
 33 =(click as MP1 discharges taser))
 34 CM1: NO:!
 35 MP1: [DOWN ON THE GROUND!

In line 1, MP1 begins the final phase of the traffic stop by announcing that he has issued the driver a ticket and requesting his signature. CM1 seeks to preempt this possible trajectory by rejecting the request (line 3) and then producing a two-part counter. The counter, which is formulated *as* a preemption (“first of all ...”, line 5; see also extract 6, line 11), shifts the primary agent relevant for the project it initiates (line 3, “what you’re gonna do ...”) and establishes a contrasting set of relevancies: CM1 directs the officer to explain his actions⁵ and directs the officer to join in an investigation of the ticket’s basis (lines 5 and 10–11). As in other incipient standoffs, each party’s course of action opens a trajectory that the other seeks to avoid: MP1 seeks to resolve the ticket by collecting the driver’s signature (in preparation for concluding the encounter), while CM1 seeks to re-open the matter, presumably to establish a basis for prompting the officer to withdraw the ticket.

The basis for the troubles that come to shape this encounter emerges in MPI's pursuit (line 12) of a response to his directive, which is evidently designed to reject CM1's proposed reordering by insisting that signing the ticket remains the "first" relevant next action. Nevertheless, in using "first" to establish that his action retains priority, he also tacitly allows for other actions—possibly including the search CM1 proposed in lines 10–11—to be taken up after this matter has been resolved. CM1 appears to hear it this way: His response dispensing with MPI's pursuit is designed to sustain his proposed investigation as the relevant next action. CM1's emphatic rejection of MPI's directive (line 13), along with his upgraded and elaborated repetition thereof (line 15), appear designed to resolve once-and-for-all that he will not sign ticket, thus making relevant the next item on the agenda – the search he has proposed.⁶ In this sequential context, MPI's next action, directing CM1 to exit the car (line 18), can be understood in two different ways, with the parties' respective next actions displaying that each of them has understood it in one of these possible ways: CM1 treats it as an invitation to begin (or resume) addressing his concerns, exiting the car and beginning to point down the highway (line 20), presumably toward a speed limit sign (see Figure 1); MP2, in contrast, treats it as a first step in effecting the arrest of the driver following his rejection of a lawful order, preparing to take control of him by placing the clipboard and ticket on the front of his car during the silence at line 19.

The depth of the parties' misunderstanding can be appreciated in the contrast between the officer's escalating demands (lines 21–22, 24–25, 28, and 30), and CM1's admonishing queries (lines 26 and 32). Each of these actions casts the other party's conduct as beyond comprehension, a form of trouble that arises from each

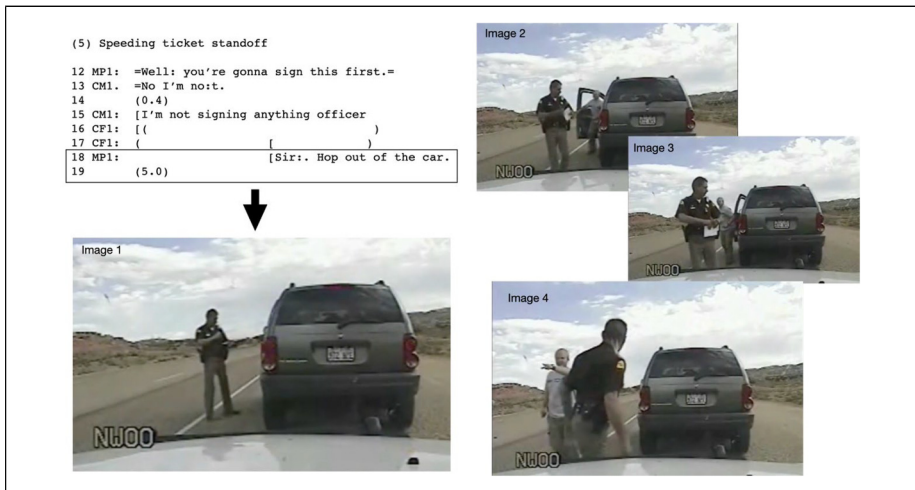


Figure 1. Across images 1–4: Following line 18, CM1 exits the car to begin the search projected by his earlier talk while MPI returns to his cruiser in preparation for taking CM1 into custody.

party using a different presumed course of action to make sense of the other's conduct. As we noted in relation to extract 4, once two parties come to be engaged in competing courses of action, each may use a different prior action as a basis for composing their own actions and for making sense of the other's conduct as well. In such an environment, each party's use of the turn-taking system's proof procedure to make sense of their own and each other's conduct, can generate *further misunderstanding*. As a consequence, while in the midst of a standoff, neither party may appreciate that they are proceeding on the basis of divergent understandings of their circumstances and actions (Heritage, 1984b; Sacks et al., 1974). Instead of availing themselves of the methods they might otherwise use to address such troubles in understanding (see, e.g., Schegloff, 1992; Schegloff et al., 1977), they resort to admonishing one another for failing to grasp what should be obvious (see also Raymond & Sidnell, 2019). In such circumstances, the apparent breakdown in intersubjectivity is both profound and completely unappreciated. It is therefore not surprising that the conflicts that emerge from these contexts take on the features of accusation and condemnation rather than repair since, for each party, the trouble is not that the other party doesn't understand, it is that *they will not understand* (see also Garfinkel, 1967; Raymond & Sidnell, 2019).

In this case, as Bittner's (1970, p. 40) formulation anticipates, the officer uses his coercive authority to "overpower resistance to [his] solutions in the native habitat of the problem." Specifically, beginning in line 33, MP1 unilaterally resolves the standoff in favor of the course of action he initiated by discharging his taser and then arresting CM1. As in extract 4, the use of coercive violence to attempt a unilateral resolution of the standoff (and the misunderstanding it occasions) only partially succeeds. While the officer effects the arrest of CM1, the troubles generated by this action included the lodging of a formal complaint by CM1 that (echoing extract 4) extended the conflict long after the standoff itself was resolved. On the basis of this complaint and a lawsuit filed on his behalf, CM1 received a \$40,000 settlement following a finding that MP1's conduct violated both state law and departmental policy.

While the financial settlement in this case distinguishes it from others in our data set, the forms of conflict and trouble that emerge in the encounter itself follow a consistent pattern. In the vast majority of cases in our data (and as we have seen in extracts 4 and 5), officers finding themselves in a sequential standoff recurrently issue escalating demands for the civilian to produce a compliant next action and then use their coercive authority to unilaterally compel the completion of their own course of action, and thus ostensibly "resolve" the matter. In this way, the participants orient to the conflicts posed by sequential standoffs as entailing a choice between two possible actions, with resolution accomplished by one party (the officer[s]) unilaterally completing their own course of action (often without the civilian[s]' cooperation), and the other party abandoning their course of action. Perhaps not surprisingly, the party forced to abandon their course of action rarely drops the matter entirely and instead treats the manner in which the conflict was resolved as a basis for complaints and further conflict. For officers, actually resorting to the use of coercive violence constitutes a failure of their authority⁷ (Bittner, 1970) and the conflicts, formal complaints and lawsuits that emerge in the aftermath of

doing so can be costly and, where publicity brings them to the attention of community members, undermine community trust.

In our final case, shown below in extract 6, we consider an alternative possible method for resolving sequential standoffs that was used in a subset of our cases. Given space constraints, we focus exclusively on the method the officer uses to resolve the conflict. The encounter in this case emerges from events that developed after the police were called to a fight between a brother and sister outside of a bar. As the officers arrive, the sister (apparently inadvertently) hits one of them and they begin to arrest her. On hearing her distress, a different brother, CM1 (who was not involved in the fight) attempts to intervene in the arrest. An officer arriving on the scene, FP1, sees and hears the officers focused on the arrest yelling at CM1 and she intervenes to move him to a different location. An incipient sequential standoff emerges when FP1 and CM1 each pursue a course of action that opens a trajectory the other seeks to avoid: FP1 directs CM1 to move to a different area (lines 1, 2, and 4), while CM1's produces counters include the beginning of accounts invoking family relations (lines 4, 13, and 15) that justify remaining engaged in those events, and a complaint that FP1's actions are unwarranted (line 10). In what follows, we track how FP1's efforts to resolve this conflict achieve a different, and more stable, outcome.

(6) SPD7570@20100612020355

1 FP1: Let's go. Over here. Let's go. Get over here.
 2 (2.0)
 3 FP1: Get over [here.<
 4 CM1: [(My- My (o[ther) sister)
 5 FP1: [I don't care. Sit down.
 6 >Sit=down.< until we get figure this out.
 7 We have no idea what's going on. You need to
 8 jus, (.) STOP. Sit dow:n,
 9 (.)
 10 CM1: I'm not doin' anyth[ing,
 11 FP1: [Sit DOW:N:!
 12 (0.4)
 13 CM1: M- my sist[er,
 14 FP1: [On the ground.
 15 CM1: My brother.
 16 FP1: <Okay. [We'll figure it out in a bit.
 17 CM1: [(Can I let them know)
 18 (.)
 19 FP1: SIT DOWN!
 20 CM1: I'm- I'm dow[:n.
 21 FP1: [No. On your ass agains- thuh g-
 22 wall.
 23 CM1: I'm sittin' on my ass.
 24 (0.3)
 25 CM1: I'm not being angry m[an. ((recording breaks up))
 26 FP1: [Okay. I get tha:t. But
 27 'til we get this figured ou:t. you can't be
 28 pestering everybody. Until someone talks to
 29 you, just chill out, okay?
 30 CM1: I understand.
 31 FP1: Thank you.

As in prior cases, FP1 initially treats each of CM1's efforts to pursue an alternative course of action as a form of resistance to her directives, timing her pursuits (in lines 5, 11, and 14) to intersect the turns he is composing (lines 4, 10, and 13). In doing so, FP1 succeeds in prompting him to abandon each of these turns, only to find him resuming his pursuit once a bit of silence begins to emerge (lines 9 and 12). As CM1 begins to sit, but before he has fully complied with FP1's directives (as he does in line 23), FP1 adopts a different approach, first acknowledging CM1's initiating action ("Okay", line 16) and then beginning to propose a possible *sequential solution* to the standoff: Instead of requiring him to abandon his project, she shifts to a collective reference form to announce, "We'll figure it out in a bit" (line 16). FP1 thereby shifts to proposing that CM1 *delay* his pursuit of an alternative course of action rather than demanding he abandon it altogether. This appears to be a turning point in the exchange: CM1 does not begin another initiating action referring to his family members following the one he brings to completion in overlap with FP1 in line 17. FP1 then uses two escalating pursuits to get CM1 to fully comply with her directive (lines 19 and 21),⁸ before producing a complex utterance (lines 26–29) that more fulsomely acknowledges CM1's claims (I get that), reformulates the possible sequential solution ("until we get this figured out ...), and provides a basis for privileging the course of action she has initiated as the priority. In response, CM1 accepts this proposal (line 30), thus (temporarily) dropping a course of action that he had continued to pursue through multiple efforts, and cooperating with FP1's course of action. FP1's appreciation ("thank you," line 31) registers this shift. Thus, in contrast to the unilateral and coercive outcomes observed in extracts 4 and 5, the parties in this case arrive at a mutually ratified and stable (if temporary) resolution of the standoff.

Conclusion

In the preceding analysis we have developed an initial account of the phenomena of sequential standoffs, including how they emerge, how participants orient to them as a form of trouble, and how they come to be resolved. While such standoffs can occur in mundane settings of conflict (Whitehead et al., 1998) and cooperation, our attention to them in the context of police encounters with the public arose because they are routinely resolved through officers' use of coercive force. In our data set and in recordings of police encounters that achieve broad circulation in the news media as instances of racialized police violence (e.g., the arrest of Sandra Bland), sequential standoffs routinely precede, and figure centrally in, the use of coercive violence by officers. In our data, officers typically treat the emergence of standoffs as posing a choice between asserting and ceding control of the encounter as a warrant for resorting to the use of coercive force.

As our analysis demonstrates, however, some officers find ways to manage or avert the interactional trajectories associated with these forms of trouble via sequential solutions that are alternatives to the use of coercive force. Of course, these methods may not work in every case. For example, while the method adopted by the officer in extract 6 succeeds in achieving a peaceful resolution of the emerging conflict, it appears that the

officer in extract 3 tried something similar (lines 8, 10, and 15–17), though the design of those attempted resolutions may not have (adequately) registered the basis for the civilian's use of a counter. Perhaps as a consequence, the civilian in the latter case treats the officers' offer as less than genuine and, tacitly reviving an earlier claim that their actions were motivated by his racial status, rejects it on the basis that the officer cannot be trusted. Nevertheless, in our data we notice a clear pattern: Cases where officers pursue unilateral resolutions to sequential standoffs—recurrently using coercive force to achieve these outcomes—almost invariably result in post-resolution complaints and sustained conflicts that extend beyond the resolution of the standoff and even the encounter itself. By contrast, in cases where officers propose sequential solutions, civilians recurrently accept them, and the emerging conflict comes to be resolved cooperatively and without the use of force. The contrast here is not between a uniformly effective practice and its violent alternative. Rather, it is between a set of sequentially sensitive accommodative methods that (in proposing sequential solutions to standoffs) opens an opportunity for participants to resolve matters cooperatively, and an alternative that (in unilaterally resolving such standoffs via officers' use of their coercive authority) precludes cooperative outcomes. A quantitative analysis of the relative efficacy and consequences of these alternative practices will appear in a forthcoming paper. For now, we simply wish to note that although arising from a very different observational and methodological foundation, these results offer additional support for the claims and basic of thrust of CAT for policing, particularly for settings and occasions involving racial mistrust (see Dixon et al., 2008; see also the discussion of nonaccommodation in Giles et al., 2023), while also advancing how researchers can address communicative dilemmas in this domain.

Finally, we note that, beyond their evident significance in relation to police encounters, sequential standoffs are a phenomenon of potential interest for scholars focusing on the basic or “generic orders of organization” (Schegloff, 2007, p. xiii) that underpin all occasions of talk-in-interaction across mundane conversational and institutional settings. Specifically, sequential standoffs emerge from and rely on practices and forms of organization that participants routinely use to conduct sequences of action-in-interaction (Schegloff, 2007)—and yet the methods used to produce and resolve them have emergent features that are beyond the scope of these basic forms of social organization. That is, sequential standoffs arise out of routine uses of the structures and practices of sequence organization, and yet participants treat them as a form of trouble to be resolved, but one that departs from the routine contingencies associated with organizing multiple simultaneously realized courses of action (e.g., as in Raymond & Lerner, 2014; see also Haddington et al., 2014). The generic organizations of practice associated with sequences of action may thus give rise to sequential standoffs while providing no “built-in” ways of resolving them. Moreover, as our analysis demonstrates, these very features of sequential standoffs complicate the search for cooperative methods for resolving them.

In this respect, our analysis documents interactional phenomena with parallels to occasions of sustained overlapping talk or “floor fights” that arise out of the routine use of the turn-taking system, and yet their organization and resolution are beyond

the scope of the turn-taking system (Schegloff, 2000; Sacks et al., 1974). A full accounting of the import of sequential standoffs for our understanding of conversational interaction is beyond the scope of this initial rendering of them. In the interim, we note that these occasions (perhaps unlike the floor fights analyzed by Schegloff, 2000) seem to emerge in, and constitute the limits of, occasions where parties enmeshed in heightened conflict use *talk-in-interaction* to manage their differences. Given their recurrent use as a primary organizational framework through which participants accountably manage whether one or more parties will resort to using physical violence in interaction, they constitute a phenomenon of interest for scholars of social interaction, and of the interactional organization of conflicts, more broadly.


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Notes

1. The adaptation of sequences in the context of police encounters shares some formal characteristics with other custodial relations characterized by similar asymmetries – for example, parent–child interaction (see Goodwin & Cekaite, 2014; Goodwin & Loyd, 2020).
2. Also see the more detailed analyses of this case by Schegloff (1997, 2007).
3. In this respect, CM1’s responses suggest that he is an experienced or “copwise” subject. (Stuart, 2016a, p. 279)—that is, a person, who, by virtue of statuses that make them subject to routine encounters with the police (in this case, being a Black, chronically homeless resident; Stuart, 2015, 2016b), develops knowledge that renders “seemingly-random police activity more legible, predictable, and manipulable” (2016a, p. 279; see also Stuart, 2015, 2016b).
4. In this respect, both parties orient to CM2 as having been the first to produce a sequence initiating action, and to the entitlements associated with having done so. For example, MP2’s “first of all,” and “okay,” register the relevance of CM2’s acceptance of the proposed re-ordering of the two actions and CM2’s response, “no (that’s) fine sir” passes on the opportunity to resist this outcome or register a complaint about it.
5. As in extract 6, the recipient of the counter (here MP1) attempts to resolve the competing action by producing a simple, cooperative response (line 9) fitted to the terms of CM1’s demand for an explanation. In this way, MP1 resists CM1’s treatment of the counter as warranting preemption of the prior course of action.

6. This move thus directly contrasts with the one attempted by the civilian in Extract 3, line 12. In extract 3, CM2 attempted to resolve MP2's course of action by providing a preferred response that promotes sequence closure; here, CM1 uses emphatic rejection to achieve a related outcome.
7. Insofar as an officer's exercise of social authority compels compliance by signifying the *potential* use of coercive force, the actual use of violence is only necessary where the officer's authority has failed in some way.
8. Note how this exchange closely parallels the events in extract 4, lines 16 and 18: CM1 responds to FP1's escalating pursuits by formulating his own conduct as a means of claiming that he is *already* complying with her (lines 20 and 23).

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