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## Confessions of lockdown breaches. Problematising morality during the Covid-19 pandemic

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## **Confessions of lockdown breaches. Problematizing morality during the Covid-19 pandemic.**

**Key words:** morality, transgressions, public space, pandemic, confessions, radio phone-ins

### **1. Introduction**

This short essay contributes to understanding the discursive construction of morality at a time when behaviour in public spaces has become open to public scrutiny more than ever and to continue the scholarly dialogue on morality that Michael Haugh and I have engaged in (Márquez Reiter & Haugh, 2019; Haugh & Márquez Reiter, 2019).

The paper examines confessions of Covid-19 breaches in two radio phone-in programmes. The topic of the programmes revolved around experiences of lockdown and acted as priming for (Goodwin & Loyd, 2020) callers' self- and/or other confessions. The programmes' promos were designed to build the audience and encourage listeners to tune in by asking them to share their views on a sensitive question affecting the UK population.

The programmes hosted invited experts who were recruited at certain moments in the show to comment on (in)direct experiences of lockdown compliance or breaches reported by the callers and respond to text messages from the listenership which were read aloud. In these calls, callers acted as informers and confessors while the radio host played the role of facilitator. Callers disclosed first-hand knowledge or experience of lockdown breaches and acknowledged and/or avowed the circumstances that led to them. In line with the ritualised nature of confessions (cf. Kádár, 2017), they were performed in front of at least one other; in this case, the participants of the call and the programme's listenership. In addition, the actions described transcended the individuality of the offender as they represented moral dilemmas likely to affect many members of the general public. Moral dilemmas are understood here as the conflict that emerges from the callers' requirement to choose between two actions: complying with lockdown guidance v. attending to their livelihood or wellbeing needs. Callers can do each but not both of the actions as the latter would mean that they have failed to do something that they ought to do (e.g. McConnell, 1986). They would thus inevitably violate an important moral concern: attending to their own needs v. attending to those of the collective during a pandemic.

As morally invested members of the public, as evidenced by their spending time telephoning a radio programme to discuss appropriate behaviour in public during the pandemic, they recognise that their actions, those they witnessed, know of or were involved in are vulnerable to being deemed problematic. Callers phoned in to seek information, advice or validation of their actions on the basis of unclear and contestable government guidance regarding behaviour in public spaces during the Coronavirus outbreak. Those whose actions were constructed as nonnormative during the calls attempted to transform them into morally permissible by pursuing validation in a public forum (i.e. the radio). They thus presented their own breaching of the rules as necessary or warranted by *force majeure*.

The analysis focuses on the social actions that participants (callers, the host and invited experts) are seen to be carrying out and orienting to through talk such as self-professions and disclosures of minor unlawful behaviour in public. It pays attention to their design and the moral dilemmas they allude to.

## **2. Data and analytic framework**

The data are a collection of 80 minutes of calls from the UK BBC5 Live phone-in programmes, broadcast on April 6<sup>th</sup> and May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020, under the titles “Is the UK lockdown working?” and “Are people following lockdown rules?”.

As is the case with these kinds of radio programmes (Hutchby, 1991, 2005) callers initially get in touch with the producers and provide details as to what their contribution will be about (of which the hosts reveal some awareness as they introduce the callers), and presumably get selected on the basis of this, so in spite of the fact that the callers are morally invested, those who appear on air may respond to radio or programme-specific debates or agendas.

The calls have been transcribed using Jeffersonian conventions (Jefferson, 2004), and the data analysed following an interactional pragmatics perspective informed by insights from conversation analysis (Schegloff, 2007). The analysis concentrates on the social actions that participants are seen to be carrying out and orienting to through talk. It seeks to adumbrate the situated character of morality and potential shifts in the collective consciousness resulting from the need to recalibrate individual self-interests in light of the need for collective safety during a pandemic.

## **3. Analysis**

In the two programmes analysed, the callers discuss their (in)direct experiences of lockdown breaches and compliance in the presence of the radio host and an expert guest in the area of psychology, as well as a police constable in one of the shows. The analysis will focus on disclosure of breaches by three different callers who frame their “confession” in different ways with reference to their particular circumstances.

It will be claimed that participants engage in a similar set of practices for producing their confessions but organise their contributions differently depending on whether the recipients align or not with the warrantability of the breaches. Participants who disclose their breaches straightaway in the call present their breaches as inevitable and warranted by a long-term physical health condition requiring ongoing management, which is disclosed as an account right after admitting to the breach. Disclosing their having broken lockdown first thing (and providing what looks like a reasonable account for it) provides them with a kind of “moral immunity” pre-empting any accusations later in the call. Strictly keeping to lockdown guidelines for these participants is presented as a potential hazard to their wellbeing, pointing at a tension between their individual needs and those for the collective good. Even though these participants confess to having breached the guidelines, they list a number of measures in line with the guidance that they have taken to minimise the risk to themselves and others; hence displaying an ability to reflect on the effect of their actions on others, including the concrete measures they claim to have taken to mitigate those effects.

Callers whose breaches may not be warranted by a diagnosed health condition still present them as “inevitable” and driven by some urgency (framed as an “addiction”, or as a thing “they had to do”), but the actual confessions and descriptions of the breaches appear later in the narration and are prefaced by a number of accounts. In line with the callers who presented the confessions straightaway, they also list the “rightful” and “considerate” measures taken to

counter the effects of their actions; thus revealing their awareness of what should be done despite choosing to act unlawfully (Kádár & Márquez Reiter, 2015).

### 3.1 The indirect benefits to others derived from helping oneself

The first call to be discussed is that of Derek in Nottingham, a gentleman with a prosthetic leg and limited mobility who drives daily to a relatively distant outdoor location. He describes his daily breach as opening the car door and having his coffee while enjoying the scenery for “mental exercise”.

#### BBC5APRIL6Call16 “Derek2 in Nottingham”

1 RACHEL DEREK'S in Newark in Nottingham.  
2 =Hi Derek what's it like where you are.  
3 =Are people generally being observant of the rooles?  
4 (0.7)  
5 DEREK II: Well ↑yes they ↓are:=hi Rachel >by the way.<  
6 RACHEL: ↑Mor↓ning.  
7 DEREK II: They are I think erm **but** I live near quite a big  
8 lake (0.2) erm:: and there was: over the weekend  
9 there was lots of- of noise from quad bikes and  
10 scooters and stuff followed by .h police sirens  
11 (0.5) all over the place\_  
12 =Now I don't know whether they were .hh you know  
13 trying to- to stop that.  
14 .h Erm:: but >**what I actually phoned up about was**<  
15 was .hh I actually **I think technically I break the**  
16 **law.**  
17 .h Erm: I'm in an unfortunate position I've got a  
18 prosthetic leg.  
19 (0.5)  
20 So (0.2) any walking .h er any distance i-it's  
21 completely out of the question.  
22 So exercise for me is very limited.  
23 RACHEL: Mmm.  
24 DEREK II: I live on my own .hh which is fine erm:: but what  
25 I do in the mornings .hh erm and **I've >already<**  
26 **done it this morning** is I- I make a coffee .hh I  
27 get in my vehicle and I drive about three or four  
28 miles down to the river .h and I sit down by the  
29 river .hh drink my coffee watch the world go by.  
30 .h There's no (0.2) physical exercise (0.2) but  
31 there's mental exercise.  
32 RACHEL: Mmm\_  
33 (0.5)  
34 DEREK II: >If you see what I mean< because i-it gets me away  
35 from-from the property .h I don't see anybody I  
36 don't talk to anybody .h **but I mean technically I**  
37 **suppose I am breaking the law.**  
38 (0.5)  
39 RACHEL: Wow I mean there's not a law to be broken but I-I  
40 [suppose like you] said the guidelines technically  
41 [( ) ]  
42 RACHEL: tha' .hh **that may not be allowed** but Susan **who would**  
43 **want to deny Derek ↑tha'.**  
44 SUSAN: .mtk **absolutely** I think the: erm the whole concept  
45 of mental exerci::se .h erm: and mental wellbeing

46 >is °a°< REALLY important one .h a::nd we really  
 47 need to be (0.2) paying attention to it .h ↑not  
 48 ↓**just in terms of (0.2) getting out the house**  
 49 **which I agree is is er is really important for**  
 50 **that.**  
 51

The presenter, Rachel, welcomes the caller, elicits his experience of where he lives (line 2) and reformulates the question providing a more specific version to check whether in his experience people are observant of the rules (line 3). After a gap (line 4) Derek confirms that people generally are compliant with a rising intonation ‘well’ in turn initial position (Heritage, 2015) and introduces a greeting back to Rachel in latch (line 4), which is reciprocated (line 6). The dispreference (Pomerantz 1984) observed in Derek’s reaction orients to the question’s ‘positive’ polarity (line 3) where a ‘yes’ answer would represent a ‘best-case scenario’ (Raymond & Heritage 2021) v. the qualified ‘Yes...but’-type answer he provides (Raymond 2003). It also relates to the contrast between the type of ‘best case scenario’ embodied in the design of the question (line 3) and what Derek is about to reveal as his reason for calling. In this sense, Derek’s initial answer to the question could be said to foreshadow his breaches.<sup>1</sup> Derek provides a reference to what he heard and interpreted as possible other-breaches in the lake area where he lives (lines 7-13). This is tentatively presented based on auditory stimuli (i.e. noise) and mitigated with markers of lower certainty (“Now I don’t know whether they were...trying to stop that”, line 13).

Derek proceeds to clarify that the reason for the call is not to discuss other people’s compliance but his own breaching (line 14). The breach is presented as a mitigated confession (lines 15-16), of an action that did not happen once but happens regularly as seen in the use of the present tense.

There is no uptake by the presenter after this and Derek produces a marker of incipient speakership (inbreath, line 17) and a “erm” before presenting an account for the breach. This is prefaced with an assessment of his personal circumstances (line 17) and the disclosure of having a prosthetic leg. There is no uptake by the presenter in response to this empathy-seeking disclosure, and Derek incrementally (Schegloff, 2016) adds to the account by explaining that regular forms of exercise (as permitted by the guidelines) would in his case be limited.

Derek presents his long-term physical health condition as unavoidable: he has no control over his prosthetic leg. He formulates his breach as a choice is warranted by his health condition despite being “illegal” if read technically. The modulated forms with which this confession is presented (the use of ‘think’ as a hedge [Aijmer, 1997]) followed by the insertion of ‘technically’ by which the opposite may be inferred) also shows that this breach is not presented as defiant or brazen but as something of *force majeure*. His actions are morally just

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing this out.

in the sense that his obligations and rights to his wellbeing emerge as taking precedence over his legal obligations. In other words, lockdown may increase the risk of adverse health conditions and negatively impinge on the capacity of the National Health Service (NHS) to deal with Covid-19 cases. In helping himself, Derek is helping the NHS, thus making relevant the official discourse then circulating in society.<sup>2</sup> Rachel responds with a minimal token displaying listenership but also understanding with low volume and narrow low range (line 23), though no further elicitation or form of response is offered.

Derek continues to describe further mitigating personal circumstances (line 24) and what the breach consists of (lines 27-29). In this account, the reference to this having been done that morning (lines 25-26) may also be a way of orienting to the caution exercised, being in a place at a time where people may not be around given that the show aired at 9am, and suggests consideration for the collective good. The actions described as part of the breach are ordinary and unobstructive actions (for others). They are listed and prosodically produced with markers of routineness (e.g. the use of the present tense to describe habitual actions) in spite of the fact that they are carried out in extraordinary circumstances.

Another display of awareness of the guidelines lies in his referring to the accepted physical exercise and clarifying that, in his case, it represents wellbeing (“mental exercise”, lines 30-31). This receives a similar kind of minimal response (line 32) and silence (line 33) displaying understanding. Derek orients to these as markers of incipient dispreference. Before he professes again to be “breaking the law” while displaying regard for the rules and safety of himself and others, he strengthens (lines 34-35) and extends his account (lines 35-36) in pursuit of an aligning response and finishes it with a prosodically highlighted “technically” (line 36), including another mitigation “I suppose”.

Rachel’s offers a relatively more involved response via a response cry (Goffman, 1978) wrapping up the moral dilemma that Derek’s situation entails. In upkeeping her role as a broadcaster, she ensures accurate terms are used, and her response token is followed by an other-correction to Derek’s categorisation of the rules, rejecting the use of the term “law” in favour of “guidelines” and taking up “technically” again to confirm that this may not be allowed (lines 42). She immediately recruits the expert, Susan, by presenting this issue as something that in Derek’s case should be seen as morally permissible (42-43).

Susan offers a strong endorsement (line 44) and takes up Derek’s formulation of “mental exercise” and leaving the house but moves on to expand on mental wellbeing inside the house. She thus focuses on mental wellbeing in a way in which she is seen to deal with the sensitivity of Derek’s condition but may not be heard as endorsing all possible such other cases. Her assessment is based on the grounds of the information as presented by Derek. Nonetheless, Susan’s contribution abstracts from Derek’s personal case to focus on things that all callers may need to consider.

Some of the features of Derek’s formulation and framing of his own breach are common to other confessions in the programmes that include disclosure of health conditions. These callers begin by presenting themselves as technically unlawful early on in the call while displaying awareness of what the guidance states. They then move on to introduce the mitigating

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<sup>2</sup> “Take care of yourself and your NHS will take care of you”  
<https://www.nottinghamwestccg.nhs.uk/media/2088/self-care-leaflet.pdf>, accessed on 10/09/2020.

circumstances that make the breach unavoidable and present their own safeguarding of their health as part of their moral responsibility to help the NHS and, by extension, help others who might need the service. They also display consideration for others and regard for the guidelines by listing the cautious measures they take.

This next call is by John in Canterbury, an essential worker who discloses his own mental health condition that led him to not only leave the house in ways that are treated as not lawful (although not really described in the call), but also to move in back with their parents.

BBC5MAY6 Call 14\_John in Canterbury

64 NICKY: ↑HEY ↓JOHN HOW YOU DOING?=John in Canterbury.  
65 (0.7)  
66 JOHN: ↑Yeah I'm I'm alright at the moment thank you hh.  
67 NICKY: Yeah is [every]thing going okay for you?  
68 JOHN: [Erm- ]  
69 (0.7)  
70 JOHN: Erm ↑we:ll it was: it was very hard at the start  
71 and erm: and I broke the lockdown erm by going  
72 outside regularly as I .hhhh have general ↑anxiety  
73 dis↑order und and I get very caught up in my own  
74 anxieties and fear:s if I'm on my own in↑si::↓de  
75 erm and I was given CBT which ↓helps you know which  
76 (0.2) consists of distraction like going outside  
77 and noticing what you can see smell etcetra.  
78 .h But I can do that so >at the ↑start of the  
79 lockdown< I tried to avoid going outside er I used  
80 the CBT technique of (.) being thankful for what I  
81 ha::ve like I (0.2) .h have a big flat and can go  
82 outside once a da::y you know while political  
83 prisoners ((noise distortion)) one room and can't  
84 go outside at ↑orl or even look out the window in  
85 ↑many ↓cases which is more frustrating and  
86 depressing >you know< not even taking into account  
87 physical suffering they experience.  
88 .hhh But I ↑still ↓struggled erm: you know even  
89 with that because I- I've been staying in my  
90 grandma's flat erm: and she died recently and  
91 ~being in that flat~ you know makes me think about  
92 er her suffering er and her ↑dea↓th .h and I kind  
93 of worry that this will happen to: >you know< other  
94 members of my family [from Covid nineteen-]  
95 NICKY: [When when you go out] b-  
96 absolutely understand everything you're saying it's  
97 a (.) terrible situation I understand anxiety  
98 disorder as well.  
99 JOHN: =Mmm.  
100 NICKY: So when (0.5) you're going out  
101 are you being (.) terribly careful °too°.  
102 JOHN: .hhh Yea:h so erm when I was in my grandma's fla:'  
103 erm (0.2) cos I've actually had to (0.2) to go- to  
104 move back in with my parents >cos I< was struggling  
105 so much but when I was in my er- grandma's flat I  
106 could .h quite easily go straight into the  
107 countryside and easily stay two metres apa:r .h  
108 **so for ME y- .h yeah I don't like (0.2) kind of**  
109 **breaking ↑rools but you know I wanted to actually**

110 avoid going to move back in with my parents cos I  
 111 I work in a supermarket and they're quite elderly.  
 112 .hhh Erm so I was kind of doing that to to further  
 113 to avoid erm (0.5) .mkt you know making that wor::se  
 114 but I I think the people that (0.2) you know are  
 115 far worse than me you know elderly people .hhh erm  
 116 maybe who have mental health issues or or can't  
 117 actually have any social contact cos they- er I  
 118 mean I know old people that .h rely on going outside  
 119 that ↑is their social contact they might not have  
 120 friends or family-  
 121 NICKY: Er er er absolutely and this (0.5) applies to the  
 122 the whole ↑hair↓dresser situation as well what  
 123 what a situation John thank you very much indeed  
 124 for .hhh explaining that one.

Nicky, the presenter, introduces John with a question on his wellbeing which may or may not have been based on prior knowledge provided by the show producers. John's answer indicates a possible past state of trouble or a potential future one ("at the moment", line 66), prompting Nicky to ask again as John launches his telling (line 70) with a number of initial prefaces. John begins with an assessment of what the lockdown was like at first (line 70), confesses to having broken the lockdown (line 71) and how, and after a long inbreath presents his account for having done so, disclosing his suffering from an anxiety disorder, followed by a longer account with more details.

John lists the forms of treatment he has tried as a means of showing that it was not enough to deal with his condition, making his going out inevitable. He presents himself in a more privileged position than others (lines 81-87). The account of his struggle continues with increased levels of distress around the real fear of death of relatives (lines 88-94) leading to an intervention by Nicky in overlap (l. 95). The beginning of Nicky's turn oriented to the confessed breach (going out) and was leading towards a question that gets initially aborted (line 95). Nicky redirects his question action by moving aside the painful part of John's account, empathising and demonstrating understanding of the sensitivity of the situation (lines 96-98) with a display of access to anxiety disorder as John described it. After getting a minimal response (Fishman, 1978) from him, Nicky restarts the question (lines 100-101) from a position of care and concern, to request whether he was being cautious when outside, with the addition of "too", which orients to the measures of self-care presented earlier by the caller. With this, Nicky orients to the expectation that confessions of Covid-19 breaches should be accompanied by an account of the measures taken to mitigate the possible consequences of the breach to others and prompts for them. Such accompanying accounts appear to be treated by the participants as normative. In the previous call they were articulated without prompting and in the present one they are oriented to as missing (lines 100-101).

John is allowed another extended multi-unit turn where apart from mentioning his awareness of social distancing and his going out into the countryside as a means to avoid the extreme measure he had to take in the end, he discusses the other breach (moving back in with parents) and describes the reasoning process that involves concern with the guidance and the care of others. John once again positions himself as more fortunate than others with other conditions and thus orients to the value of taking care of others as oneself. Nicky empathises (line 123)

with John without any explicit assessment terms and thanks him for his full explanation without any further explicit endorsement or condemning of the described breach.

In these two examples, callers disclosed their breaches at the first available opportunity and accompanied them with contiguous accounts that point at the moral dilemmas of having to choose between two conflicting actions. They volunteered or were prompted to explain the reasonable and considerate measures they took to mitigate the consequences of their actions .

### 3.2 Individuals' right to autonomy: minimal sacrifice towards others

Breaches may be framed as unavoidable in less sensitive ways. This last call is by a gentleman who chooses a pseudonym and who is exposed by the host to not be using his real name. Mike describes a clear breach: a meeting with friends to play a tennis match.

#### BBC5MAY6 Call 10\_James Scott Mike in Teddington

128 NICKY: Mike in Teddington hello Mike **not your real name.**  
129 (1.0)  
130 MIKE: .hh Yeah hi good morning [erm I think that I- ]  
131 NICKY: [Um the reason we're ]  
132 putting these questions on to the Chief Constable  
133 is that **er** they are questions that will **be .hhh**  
134 understood **an-**and applied to so many people what  
135 would you like to ask.  
136 (0.7)  
137 MIKE: .hhh Well I I ↑hope it's a ↓common sense question  
138 too I I I'm a very keen tennis player (0.2) proble  
139 **probably even an addict** and er .h you know **I miss**  
140 **my tennis desperately** and .hh we have a little  
141 tennis WhatsApp ↑group and I'd asked a couple of  
142 people (0.5) if they'd be intrested in playing a  
143 a **discreet** ↑game ↓and .hh and actually people (0.2)  
144 one or two replied privately  
145 .hhh We knew of a court **that no one ↑uses** that  
146 **doesn't have a lo:ck.**  
147 .h Erm:: we just went along there arrived **separately**  
148 .hhh **stood either side of the ne::t** got some (0.5)  
149 **brand new balls out (0.7) standing twenty metres**  
150 **apar:t hit for (0.5) half an hour forty minutes**  
151 **and we don't feel we're- .hh in anybody's way or**  
152 **doing anybody any harm or or getting too close to**  
153 **one another** and and and we really enjoy it I mean  
154 the sense of **relief** of .h just hitting a ball over  
155 a net again is fantastic.  
156 (1.7)  
157 NICKY: And what about the ball:.  
158 MIKE: S-s- (0.5) [so what we do is we we just- ]  
159 NICKY: D- [touching the touching the ball.]  
160 (0.7)  
161 MIKE: We disinfect the balls after the ga:me (0.5) erm:  
162 and er and ↑yeah we go home and wash our hands in  
163 the regular way:3 so .h we feel we're doing a common  
164 sense thing and **we hope you °can° #con↑firm# that.**  
165 (2.2)

166 NICKY: .mtk (0.5) Yah.

167 JAMES: Again Nicky erm- (0.2) a thousand case studies and  
168 scenarios could be played out.

169 Men- ↑Many police ↓forces have got frequently  
170 asked questions as does many other agencies (0.7)  
171 which try and build with .h the many many questions  
172 that the the public the public are having around  
173 this.

174 .hhh And ↑↓gen .hh a-a-a-I-I can't give .h a a  
175 com↑PLETE↓ly (0.2) erm accurate answer on every  
176 single case study.

177 .h What- our message has been to use common sense  
178 to act reasonably if the the the if the journey  
179 to take exercise is is .h is is very smor::l .hh if  
180 it's a if it's a reasonable journey .h um if it  
181 is to take exercise if the exerci:se (0.2) um could  
182 be done in a safe way then and it's a reasonable  
183 then officers will use their discretion.

184 .h But these these [are very difficult to take ( )]  
185 (MIKE?): [Well that's good perhaps they ]  
186 can do it.

187 JAMES: every scenario.  
188 (3.0)

189 NICKY: Does that help you?  
190 (1.0)

191 SCOTT: Er [yeah ] thank you Nicky erm: I think that's the  
192 MIKE: [Yeah.]

193 SCOTT: best that they can do under the circum↑stances.  
194 There's just too many as I said at the beginning  
195 too many permutations so (0.5) as long as common  
196 senses will pre↑vai:l .h you know if I was told to  
197 go home and not pick up the dog because it's not  
198 essen↑shul I know that to be true and I would  
199 simply go ho:me.

200 NICKY: Yah (0.7) the thing ↑is: (0.2) h ((sighs)) it's erm  
201 (1.0) in most circumstances the situation where the  
202 police are doing a terrific job.  
203 There have been exceptions but there have  
204 SCOTT: °Hm-mm°  
205 NICKY: been exceptions with the public as we:ll those  
206 idiots having barbecues an-and so forth.  
207 =↑I mean I was ↑wondering why the [teni- .h the]  
208 ( ): [Yeah yeah ]

209 NICKY: .h the tennis court is ↑↓pen in the ↑first ↓place.  
210 (1.0)

211 MIKE: Huh huh huh .h well it doesn't have a gate ↓erm::  
212 so we've kind of helped our selves in in in all  
213 honesty but erm .h a↑gen we just feel that (0.2)  
214 you're sufficiently dischreet you're you're not  
215 .h (0.5) bothering other people you're being careful  
216 with what your doing .hh er: and then we just get  
217 on with it .h play have a bit of fun .hhh have a  
218 bit of ↓exercise and and go ↑home ↓again and and it  
219 just feels like it works really well in the  
220 situation.

221 NICKY: Mmm.  
222 (0.5)

223 JAMES: Nicky the erm- I-I-I share I share your callers  
224 frustration.  
225 I'm I'm a family man I've got teenage children that  
226 are climbing the walls: here.  
227 .h I have (.) neighbours all around me that keep  
228 asking me why they can't (.) do this why they can't  
229 do that >and so< I- and of course the weather .hh  
230 is turned beautiful certainly down here in the south  
231 it's looking beautiful today.  
232 .hh Erm and we're set fair for the weekend and I  
233 I I do appreciate .hh how tortuous this is frur for  
234 us ↑orl (0.2) to have to continue in this lock↓down  
235 and the confinements of ↑lock↓down .h erm for just  
236 what ↑seems to be just a few more weeks .hh erm  
237 listening to ministers each evening .hh erm it seems  
238 that our scientific advice is pushing this out  
239 just a bit further .h to ensure that we don't go  
240 into this the the ↑night↓mare (0.5) [of what the-]  
241 NICKY: Yeah [yeah um the]  
242 JAMES: [second (.) infection- ](.) °°yeah°°  
243 NICKY: [danger is of course more] more mixed messages or  
244 messages I should say which are (.) difficult to  
245 JAMES: Mmm.  
246 NICKY: interpret for people.  
247 .h Thank you very much Mike.  
248 **I'm not I don't wanna be judgemental about anything**  
249 **but I <just feel a little bit> I don't know about**  
250 **our listeners er texting but I just feel .hhh**  
251 **slightly uncomfortable about (0.7) the ten↑nis?**  
252 ↑Lis↓ten erm James Vorn I know you've got to go  
253 Chief Constable of Dorset .hh but #a a I ↑think a  
254 **message from you on the coming bank holiday weekend**  
255 **would be (0.2) very important.**  
256 (1.0)

Mike is introduced by Nicky but the start of his experience is interrupted with Nicky starting what looks like a disclaimer (lines 131-135), possibly also anticipating the objectionability of Mike's action. While addressing the audience and clarifying the role of the Constable and the type of questions on air, this account contributes to creating a safe space for participants to present their potential breaches and get (dis)confirmation around what the police may take as (un)lawful. Nicky as a professional broadcaster calibrates his obligation as a broadcaster while mediating in a moral dilemma that he is facilitating people to present. Nicky then presents the upcoming as a question to be addressed to the Chief Constable and one that may apply to a larger number of people. Mike is invited then to ask his question (line 135).

After a gap (line 136) Mike frames his contribution as a possibly "common sense" question in line with prior questions in the show and launches a telling. He describes his relationship to tennis in an incrementally upgrading manner (Pomerantz, 1984) from "keen", to an "addict", to suffering the effects of withdrawal, missing it "desperately" (lines 139-140). As in the prior confessions, an account is produced relative to a condition but one which does not rely on any known medical diagnosis, just framed as such rhetorically. Unlike prior confessions, though, the breach is not confessed to straightaway after the mention of the condition, but rather, a narrative follows that involves awareness of the guidance but also displays an implicit disregard

for it. The grounds for this disregard reside in an ideology which sustains that the pursuit of individual self-interest while exercising “common-sense” would make everyone in a given collective better off.

Mike continues by disclosing his contacting a group of people (lines 141-142) for what he assesses as a “discreet” game (which may ambiguously refer to its being short while also orienting to its being morally dubious under the circumstances), and introduces people who “privately” (line 144) accept the invitation and who agree to play in a place that is not locked or in use, adding to the stealthy approach to the game. The presentation of this as secretive, private, and unnoticed by others adds to the planned and collective aspect of the breach, and a switch from his individual initiative for the breach (lines 141-142) to the shared responsibility and accountability with his “accomplices” for doing something that should not be done (lines 145, 148). The use of these assessment terms while displaying concern for not bothering other people and not trespassing, also reveal the intent and planning and full awareness of the fact that the tennis match should not have taken place. In line with the previous calls, a list of cautious measures ensues, forms of showing consideration for social distance: arriving separately (line 147), standing on either side of the net (line 148) twenty meters apart (line 150), using brand new balls (line 149), and playing a relatively short game. The breach is presented as a past event, but the reported feelings about it are in the present as if this was a regular activity. The reported feelings are presented as involving consideration for others and for each other. Distance was kept which in their understanding means no harm. The listing, however, ends with what could be seen as a selfish problematic collective “enjoy it” that is reformulated to a “sense of relief” and assessed as “fantastic”. This helps to paint the restrictions as a form of oppression and disregarding the same kinds of feelings/joy that the members of the public who have abided by the rules would of course also have given up on.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Two types of confessions by the callers were found, differing on whether personal circumstances could be said to warrant the breaches or not and whether the recipients more readily aligned with the accounts offered. These were organised differently in the temporal development of the call. Callers who disclosed their breaches at the first available opportunity presented them as unavoidable or warranted by a diagnosed health condition. Arguably, early self-categorisations of wrongdoing may prove useful against any future accusations. Those whose accounts for breaching were not as sympathetically received introduced their confessions later in the narrative. Both types of confessions were carefully crafted. The callers presented themselves as cognizant of “what moral and standards and norms of conduct are at stake in particular contexts” (Cekaite & Evaldsson, 2020:4) and displayed awareness of the fact that their behaviour or that of others can be evaluated as morally right or wrong. The measures taken to minimize the negative consequences of the transgressions were volunteered or prompted and treated as normative. In mitigating their transgressions and presenting them as the less harmful of two possible choices, callers crafted their moral personhood helped and reduce their accountability for violating the interest of the public.

The calls illustrate how civically engaged members of the public present and discuss the circumstances that led them to break the rules. In so doing, they showed their awareness of the

restrictions in place and reflected on how their actions may affect themselves and others. The reflexivity shown by the callers indicates the morally purposive nature of the calls, and the narration of the confessions offers a window into the shifting nature of morality during a pandemic. Callers alluded to government control over their own healthcare and wellbeing decisions as morally troublesome and, as a result of this, admitted breaking the rules in a public forum. In other words, the restrictions in place to contain the pandemic were experientially reported as curtailing individuals' right to protect their own autonomy and exercise their right to free choice. As I add the final touches to this essay, I note how morally troublesome pandemic actions, such as the overt resistance to wear a facemask to mention one, are shifting as we all learn to live with the virus.

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