TALKING TROUBLE

INSTITUTIONALITY AND IDENTITY IN A YOUTH DETENTION HOME

Karin Osvaldsson
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Karin Osvaldsson
Linköping Studies in Arts and Science

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Till mina föräldrar
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Linköping in the never ending summer of 2002

Karin
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Part I

Background, Theory, and Method
Chapter 1

Youth Detention Homes as Discursive Arenas

This study deals with talk and what talking may achieve. It addresses the issue of female adolescents undergoing assessments in a Youth Detention Home. Such assessments and such homes are unusual in the sense that the majority of youth never have contact with them. However, for the young people who do undergo such assessments, as well as for their families, their encounters with these institutions may constitute unusual or critical events in their lives. During these encounters, their past, present and future are examined thoroughly by a number of professionals representing different societal institutions, such as the Social Welfare Agencies and the National Board for Institutional Care (Statens Institutionsstyrelse). Nevertheless, assessments and the assessment procedure might be seen as ordinary business for the staff at the homes and the social services that deal with troubled young persons on a daily basis. Also, as the assessment procedure has its course, it may become familiar business for the adolescents as well.

Issues of Institutionality and Identity are at the heart of the present study. These notions will be treated as interactional accomplishments, as products of situated and coordinated courses of social action. Hence, institutionality and identity are something people achieve. Both are seen as social practices, accomplished in situ and will be studied accordingly.
Presently there are 41 Youth Detention Homes in Sweden (Statens Institutionsstyrelse, 2002a). They vary in size from around 6 to more than 40 beds. Larger institutions are divided into several smaller entities. Since 1994, these homes are owned and managed by the Swedish State. More specifically they are organized under a national board, the Swedish National Board for Institutional Care (Statens Institutionsstyrelse). Many of the institutions have a long history, the oldest one still in operation being Råby outside Lund, founded in 1838 (Levin, 1996).

About 1000 adolescents undergo assessments or receive treatment within the system of Special care for youth (Särskilda ungdomsvården). On average, slightly more than 300 of these are female (Statens Institutionsstyrelse, 2002b). This group of troubled youth is only a small part of the 16,000–18,000 children (0–12 years) and young persons (13–20) who receive institutional or residential care in Sweden every year (Hessle & Vinnerljung, 1999; Statens Institutionsstyrelse, 2002a). The majority of the children and adolescents are placed in various foster homes (Sallnäs, 2000).

But despite the relatively small population, young persons receiving special care for youth attract a great deal of attention in media and other forms of public debate. In the late 1980s and early 1990s for example, an intensive debate occurred in Sweden when it came to public knowledge that a small group of juvenile delinquents were sent on a sailing trip to the Mediterranean as part of their treatment program. This debate has been analyzed by Hydén (1993) and connected to the wider question of care or punishment (Levin, 1996) that seems to run through virtually all discussions concerning the group of “delinquent youth”.

Despite this example, scholarly research has until recently been rather scarce. In 1994, when the institutions once again were organized under a national board after being locally administered for some years, a research board was attached to the administration, funding several projects (Statens Institutionsstyrelse, 2001a), including the present one. It seems fair to say that we have witnessed something of a research boom in the field during the past few years.
Terms and Definitions

Translating the Swedish terms and labels related to the institutions for residential care – or for that matter their residents – into English proved far from unproblematic. Often, there were many approximate alternatives but none that seemed to fit very well. In what follows, I will present, in some depth, the terms I finally settled for.

The institutions and their residents

I will use Youth Detention Homes as an overall label for the Swedish institutions studied (Särskilda Ungdomshem, lit: Special Youth Homes). It is important to note, however, that these are not just any homes for residential care but specially approved homes (see more below on legal matters). The particular institution studied in this thesis will be called a Youth Detention Home, although this might seem to imply that it is a place where the young persons stay for a long period of time. At the institution studied here, which specializes in assessments rather than treatment, teenagers normally stay for a period of eight weeks and then move somewhere else, either to their own homes or to some other form of residential care. In contrast, at the homes specializing in treatment, residents may stay for several years. Nonetheless, sometimes the young persons in the present setting stayed longer at the Detention Home than the presumed eight weeks as they were awaiting a future placement.

My choice of calling the institution a home is related to a long-standing Swedish tradition of using that label for societal institutions. In my opinion, this is a rather noteworthy practice, but it will not be possible to elaborate upon this issue within the scope of the present thesis.

The staff members themselves referred to the persons who stayed there as the pupils (eleverna), and sometimes as the young persons (ungdomarna). The girls/young women were also referred to as tjejer. Notably, the young persons themselves also used this term. Unfortunately, tjejer has no proper equivalent in English. It is a
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colloquial expression for a girl or young woman. The expression is widely used, and it is bordering on standard Swedish. For example, a grown up woman may refer to herself as *tjej* if she in some sense wants to stress her youthfulness, in general you may also align with someone you refer to as *tjej*. *Tjej* is less formal than girl / young woman, but more formal than *broad*/*chick*/*lassie*/*sheila*, which are more equivalent to the Swedish term *brud*. *Tjej* does not index the sexual connotations of broad or chick. If anything, it can be seen as a female version of *guy*.

After due considerations, I have chosen to refer to *tjejerna* (the plural form of *tjej*) by their first names wherever possible. Otherwise, they will be called girls or young women. Sometimes they will also be referred to as female adolescents, or simply as young persons.

Legal Matters

There are three Swedish laws that are of importance for the placement work being conducted at the Detention Homes. The Social Service Act (Socialtjänstlagen [SoL: 1980:620]) hereafter abbreviated to SoL. SoL is the main law that governs the entire social welfare system in Sweden. It is based on voluntary placement and cooperation. If an adolescent and her/his legal caretakers give their consent, admittance in an institution may be arranged in accordance with this law. Two other laws concern young persons only: The Care of Young Persons Act (Lag [1990:52] med särskilda bestämmelser om vård av unga), hereafter abbreviated to LVU, as well as one concerning punishment for young perpetrators: Secure Institutional Treatment (Lag [1998:641] om verkställighet av sluten ungdomsvård,), hereafter abbreviated to LSU (Clevesköld & Thunved, 2001). It should be noted that Sweden has two parallel judiciary systems, where LVU is handled within the administrative courts (Länsrätt, Kammarrätt and the supreme administrative court Regeringsrätt) and LSU is handled within the ordinary court order (Tingsrätt, Hovrätt and the supreme court Högsta Domstolen). In the majority of cases (79%), placement in a Detention Home is arranged according to LVU, followed by SoL (10%) and LSU.
The proportions are roughly the same for both assessment and treatment homes, but since 1994 the relative number of youth entering the institutions according to LVU has increased (Statens Institutionsstyrelse, 2002b).

Based on a court verdict from the administrative court (Länsrätten), LVU regulates involuntary placements, and it is in accordance with this law that the social welfare agencies take legal custody of children and young persons. According to LVU there is a paragraph (§6) for immediate detention to be used by the social welfare agencies if they decide that there is an acute problem with the young person that cannot wait for a court verdict. An example of such a situation is when the police find a runaway or when someone has been taken care of after being found very intoxicated. In these cases, the decision for an LVU placement is delegated to the Social Welfare Agencies, and even, from the local political board that governs them (The social welfare board, Socialnämnden) to the individual social worker her/himself. The case, however, must be raised at the soonest upcoming board meeting. The decision from the social welfare board must reach the court within a week; otherwise it will be canceled (Clevesköld & Thunved, 2001).

About 60% of the admittances at the detention homes are executed according to §6 LVU (Statens Institutionsstyrelse, 2002b). The other 40% who stay according to LVU stay in line with § 2 and 3, which concern forced care resulting from a court verdict in Länsrätten.

When SoL is applied, parents and the Social Welfare Agencies have agreed to the actions taken. It is, however, important to note that “voluntary” placements are often made possible under the threat of taking legal custody of the young person (informal communication with a staff member at the Detention Home).

**Problem Formulation and Aims**

I have already mentioned the rapidly growing body of research concerning youth in Detention Homes. However, the majority of
studies deal in various ways with mapping the admitted adolescents’ background or reported problem profiles, personality traits, criminal behavior, committed crimes or the outcome of specific treatment programs (Armelius, Bengtson, Rydelius, Sarnecki & Söderholm-Carpelan, 1996; Statens institutionsstyrelse, 2001a, 2002b, 2002c). Very few studies have tried to take the perspective of the young persons themselves (for exceptions see Berglund, 1998, Bondeson, 1974; Levin, 1998, and Wiberg, 1976; ). Even fewer studies have taken the detailed study of everyday face-to-face interaction at the institutions as a starting point. Therefore, the study at hand can be seen as an attempt to fill this gap by exploring the mundane interactional practices that occur as part and parcel of the institution’s work.

On a general level then, the present study concerns talk and what talking may amount to, in terms of social organization. It should be stressed that I do not intend to evaluate the talk going on at the detention home. Rather, I strive to examine talk as an inherently dialogic enterprise, through which participants can be seen to pursue a variety of interactional goals. With this backdrop I am particularly interested in what has been called the politics of representation (c.f. Holquist 1983; Mehan, 1993), that is, competitions about the correct or preferred way of representing objects, events or people. In the present context, this begs the question of how the girls or young women and their history as well as their future are represented at the institution’s meetings. For instance, who gets to choose the relevant bits and pieces of the young person’s story, and who gets to make predictions for their future? In this sort of competition, participants can for example be seen to “do normality” or to “do deviance” as situated accomplishments of talk. Accordingly, a central problem deals with how institutionality may bear on and inform identity work and identity description.
**Perspective and Theoretical Foundations**

Why study conversation in institutional settings? The simplest answer to this is that different types of professionals as well as lay participants, in fact, use conversational interaction as their main tool for coordinating institutional business.

The field of discourse analysis has grown rapidly over the past 20 years and research traditions that describe themselves as discourse analytic now consists of a wide range of applications and interests. It is not within the scope of this thesis to review them all (for useful introductions see: Jaworski and Coupland (1999); Levinson (1983); Schiffrin, Tannen, and Hamilton (2001); van Dijk, (1997a, 1997b); and Wetherell, Taylor and Yates (2001). For the present purposes, I will only map a subset of discourse analytic approaches.

The epistemological boundaries for this thesis rest on several research traditions, but derive their greatest debt to ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967/1984), and especially the ways in which the ethnomethodological project was elaborated by Harvey Sacks (1992). Perhaps the most widespread offspring of his work is known today as conversation analysis, (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks, 1977). Another important source of inspiration for the present work may be found in discursive psychology, developed, among others, by Edwards and Potter (1992; 2001).

The term ethnomethodology (EM; “people’s methods”) was coined by Garfinkel (1967/1984), who outlined a program of sociological inquiry dedicated to investigating the practical methods through which people understand and make sense of the life-world. Ethnomethodology developed as an empirical elaboration of Schutz’ writings. Schutz had already incorporated Husserl’s philosophical phenomenology into sociology (Cuff, Sharrock & Francis, 1998; Psathas, 1999a). The basic premises of ethnomethodology, with a special concern for the thesis at hand, deal first and foremost with culturally distributed forms of knowledge, or common sense. Here, Garfinkel (1967/1984) shows how members’ practices of reasoning orient to a locally taken-for-granted, commonsensically given state of affairs, no matter how “profes-
sional” the specific participants may be and how specialized and professional the setting.

Important to note here is that social conduct in ethnomethodology is seen as practical rather than symbolic, as for example in the case of symbolic interactionism and Goffman’s theory of face work (Goffman, 1967). In the ethnomethodological sense, social conduct comprises members’ practices of interpreting and producing socially recognizable (accountable) actions, and members share a set of procedures, or methods, for making sense in and of the world. A crucial feature of this procedure is that members always act on the assumption that others share this knowledge with them, they act upon it as a factual reality, hence the orientation to common sense. Members are people who share a language game (Wittgenstein, 1953/1981). They share a common language through which they engage in joint practices of situated reasoning.

The practical aspects of social conduct can also be understood as situated, informed by the current local circumstances and the principles of meaning making, as opposed to a view of actors as following an extrinsic logic, posed or dictated by sociological theory (Mehan & Wood, 1975). In Garfinkel’s words (1967/1984) such theories tend to view members as “cultural dopes” (p. 68).

This is an important difference in relation to structural sociology as well as most of the work within critical discourse analysis (CDA), where theory is based on the assumption that members’ practices are informed and constrained by societal (discursive) and cultural asymmetries, economy based models of gains and losses, as well as rights and obligations. (Fairclough, 1995; Sarangi & Roberts, 1999, Wodak, 1996). As Sarangi and Roberts put it “CDA draws on social and philosophical theory to read into text” (1999; p. 33) which is primarily an analysts’ and not the participants’ concern.

Over the years, conversation analysis (CA) has become an increasingly popular branch of ethnomethodology. Conversation Analysis was initiated in the late 1960s by Harvey Sacks, and later elaborated together with his associates (Sacks et al., 1974) as a practice-based system of concepts applied to the study of conversation. At a most general level, the early CA studies sought to develop a
generic machinery of conversational structures, with a focus on the sequential ordering of turns (or actions) at talk. A thorough presentation of the details of conversation analytic practice falls outside the scope of the present review, suffice is to note here that the most central premise for conversation analysis is to understand the organization of talk-in-interaction from the participants’ own perspectives, as revealed in their dialogical responses, for instance, the second (and third) parts of so called adjacency pairs (e.g., question - response - [evaluation]).

Discursive psychology (henceforth DP) shares a number of basic assumptions with EM and CA, for instance with respect to knowledge and the nature of scientific inquiry, but, whereas EM and CA evolved as fractions within sociology, DP addresses “classic” psychological topics such as perceptions, attitudes, and dispositions. The main difference to mainstream psychology is that these topics are not seen primarily as reflections of individuals’ mental states but, above all, they are issues at stake for members engaged in social encounters. Moreover, discursive psychology often includes rhetorical analyses of conversations, as revealed in, for instance, competing versions of “social facts” (Billig, 1991, Edwards & Potter, 2001; Potter, 1996a). Hence, rather than starting out with a set of hypothesized mental prerequisites or traits, discursive psychology begins the analysis with the observable-reportable, or displayed, social action. In Edwards and Potters’ words, it is approached as “a domain of action in its own right” (2001, p. 12). Through this approach, discursive psychology argues (and provides means) for studying core issues of concern for psychology, as practical achievements and as socially distributed phenomena. In sum, DP provides for an understanding of social behavior without an initial reference to individual mental states.
The Disposition of the Book

The book is organized along the following lines: After this introductory chapter, I will discuss some earlier research (chapter 2). This review presents some of the research on this special domain of the social welfare system in Sweden and the ways in which this group of youth has been described before. It shows that, with a few exceptions, earlier research has paid very little attention to what actually gets done in the institutions by paying detailed attention to the everyday business taking place there. This, as well as some other problems with earlier research, will also be discussed. Beginning with some of these problems, the chapter also offers some solutions by reviewing important research concerned with social interaction in institutional settings, in order to give a baseline for the way in which institutionality will be understood in the following empirical studies. The emphasis on social interaction has important implications for how the concept of Identity will be studied. Identity is central both to the thesis at hand as well as to much earlier work in the field, and I will define the way I understand and will make use of the concept.

Chapter 3 deals with the empirical setting and research procedures. Thereafter follow four empirical chapters.

Chapter 4 discusses devices used in the meetings in order to achieve institutionality and what “doing institutional talk” looks like in this particular setting. What is the work to be done by the organization and do all the participants have the same possibilities to form the interaction?

Chapter 5 deals with editing work and the collaborative construction of facts. It is argued that social identity is partly bound to distinct contrastive narratives that can be ascribed to two different groups of representatives. This editing work makes a difference in terms of accountability and identity construction.

Chapter 6 discusses laughter and how it is found to be a carefully ordered activity in doing assessments. How can we understand the ways participants laugh and in what sort of interactional environments does laughter occur?

The last empirical chapter (chapter 7) is based on individual
interviews. It discusses ways of doing normality and deviance as local accomplishments. The book ends with a concluding discussion (chapter 8).

Notes

1 I will use Youth Detention Homes as an overall label for the Swedish institutions studied here (Särskilda Ungdomshem). See also Terminology below.
2 ‘Girls’ voices in Youth Detention Homes. How different groups of adolescents are heard in meetings and records.’ This study was made possible by grants from: The Swedish Social Sciences Research Council (SFR), Project numbers 97-0125:1C; and the Swedish National Board for Institutional Care (SiS), Project number U 97-3005-1.
4 SoL was updated in 2001, (Socialtjänstlagen 2001:453) when the data collection in this study had already been terminated. References to SoL in this study therefore refer to the 1980 act.
5 LSU is an act concerning youth convicted of severe crime.
6 The interested reader may find Watson’s (1992) paper on Goffman’s versus an ethnomethodological understanding of everyday language interesting, as it develops this issue in far more depth.
7 The interested reader will find comprehensive introductions to CA concepts and practice in Psathas (1995), Hutchby & Wooffitt (1998) and ten Have (1999).
Overview of Research

This chapter is divided in two main parts. The first part offers a brief description of earlier research focusing on Swedish youth in various types of institutional care. In so doing, it again points to a lack of research, mentioned in the introduction, on the actual practices taking place in such institutions in Sweden. Hence, with very few exceptions, the situated practices of “doing assessment” and “doing treatment” remain virtually unexplored. Turning to the international literature, the second part of this chapter offers a brief account of research with an approach to the study of institutions as arenas of social interaction. In particular, it will focus on interaction involving both professional and lay participants in judicial, therapeutic and social welfare settings. The chapter also offers a discussion of the two main concepts of this thesis, institutionality and identity, both of which will be treated as situated accomplishments.

Youth in Institutional Care

This section deals with some central issues concerning youth in institutional care. The scope is not to cover the state of art in youth research or research about child and youth welfare in Sweden, but
to discuss some of the issues that will help to situate the study at hand. For those interested in a more thorough review of child welfare in Sweden, I recommend Hessle and Vinnerljung (1999).

Several studies have described the problematic life situation for this group of youth with reference to family situation, crime, class or psychological well being (Bergström & Sarnecki, 1996; Forsling, 1987; Sarnecki, 1996; Söderholm Carpelan & Runquist 2002). The National Board for Institutional Care (SiS) distributes annual reports about ADAD results (Adolescent Drug Abuse Diagnosis), a survey interview administered to those admitted to a detention home for the first time (Statens Institutionssstyrelse, 2002c). In short, in all nine areas covered by the ADAD interview, physical health, schooling, occupation, spare time and friends, family issues, mental health, criminal behavior and the use of alcohol and narcotics, the reports using ADAD results point towards a very problematic life-situation for youth admitted to detention homes, as compared with the average young person in Sweden.

**Perspectives on Youth Detention Homes**

The picture of the group of youth entering institutional care as deeply troubled is well established. As the laws suggest (LVU and LSU), the treatment of those who enter into forced care for youth falls somewhere between care and punishment (Levin, 1996). With respect the outcomes of the treatment or care it is more difficult to get a clear-cut picture (Sallnäs, 2000). In follow-up studies the life-situation for those who are discharged is often not improved but may be even worse (Bondesson, 1974; Levin, 1998; Wiberg, 1976) or it may be improved to some extent (Sarnecki, 1996). However, as discussed by Sarnecki (1996), the difficulty with follow up studies, is that it is hard to tell just what it is that accounts for the improvement. Was it the treatment at the detention home or some thing else in the young person’s life?

Research originating in different theoretical positions has accounted for the shortcomings in helping these young persons in basically two ways. Either that the institutions primarily have another function: (i) They can be seen as symbolizing the State’s need
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to identify and organize various forms of delinquent behavior in order to separate it from normal behavior. As such, they have proven very efficient, which would also account for their capacity to survive. Or as the other position argues: (ii) The Youth Detention Homes need to be more professional, professional in the sense that they should be more specialized with better educated staff so that they are better equipped to rehabilitate the troubled youth.

Arguing from the first position, Jönsson (1989/1993) studied the difficulties in doing treatment, as the institution he studied had the form of a total institution (Goffman, 1961/1980), guided by the idea of separating the deviant from the normal, in order to normalize the former, in due time. Jönsson (1989/1993) argues that, “the modern home-imitating institution is sort of engrafted on the ancient tree of social enclosure” (p. 217, my translation).

Taking both a historical and a contemporary approach to the treatment provided by these institutions in Sweden as well as its outcome, Levin (1997, 1998) discusses the growth and placement of these institutions within a societal context. Levin points to the apparently paradoxical situation that these institutions, despite repeatedly poor treatment results over the years, survive and are considered very successful organizations within the welfare system. According to Levin’s (1998) view they are not:

...organizations in the technical sense. They are not tools for producing anything particular where success can be measured in forms of effectiveness. They are organizations which have taken an institutional form and their success lies in how well they adapt to the expectations of their environment (Levin, 1998, p. 340).

The second strand of research addressing the achievements of Detention Homes focuses more upon suggestions for improvement of these institutions and their inner work, rather than upon their relations within a wider political and societal framework. The key issue here seems to be professionalization, and the advised solution is to further educate and qualify the staff in order to improve the outcome of treatment (Armelius et al., 1996).

Since 1994, when the institutions once again became a concern for the State, the Swedish society has primarily chosen the latter path. Several programs aiming to develop the Youth Detention
Homes and their staff have started (Statens Institutionssstyrelse, 2001b; Uggla, 1999).

The striving for professionalization is, however, not new. Lundström (1993) conducted an in-depth study of child and youth forced care during the 20th century with an emphasis upon legislation and professionalization and the impact this has had on the practice of taking coercive action in childcare. In his conclusions, Lundström (1993) remains mildly skeptical as to whether social work will ever receive standardized diagnostic instruments and tools for assessment of problems as well as their treatment. Rather, he expects social work to remain a profession in which the differences between individual cases will always guide the action taken. Furthermore, in a recent study of institutional and residential care for children and young persons, Sallnäs (2000) points to a lack of contact and common language between the different institutions owing to how they are managed, financed and under which principles they conduct their work.

Arguing for individualization of how professionals evaluate troubled youth, Berglund (1998) is critical towards what he considers an overemphasis on the sorts of problematic backgrounds the young persons share. In Berglund’s view, this brings with it the risk of an overly narrow perspective upon problems – a perspective that may blur the vision of professionals, causing them to underemphasize the individual capacities of the young persons. Let us therefore consider in the next section some studies that strive to give heed to the young persons’ own perspectives.

The Young Person’s Perspective

One of the earliest Swedish studies to incorporate some views of the young persons themselves was reported by Bondeson (1974). As part of a very large project evaluating the correctional system in Sweden, she conducted interviews with young persons in what was then labeled Ungdomsvårdsskolor (Reform schools). The interviews focused on socialization processes in reform schools, juvenile prisons¹ and ordinary prisons in Sweden. The findings indicated that, more than anything else, reform schools and juvenile
prisons functioned as hotbeds for a future criminal career.

Råby Ungdomshem (Råby Youth Detention Home), earlier Råby Yrkesskola (Reform School), has been the focus of a series of evaluative reports (Levin, 1997, 1998; Wiberg, 1976) that included interviews with earlier residents. These studies report negative effects of the treatment similar to those found by Bondeson (1974). More recently, Berglund (1998) focused on the young persons and their current life situation. During several years, he followed fourteen young persons, all of whom had undergone assessment in youth detention homes, with the help of repeated informal interviews. Looking at the youngsters as active constructors of their own lives (and thus stressing their capabilities), he showed how these young persons, portrayed in the assessment home as vulnerable and problematic, actively chose their own lifestyles, and how they coped with their life circumstances and constructed a variety of different identities.

Although it does not specifically deal with youth in Detention Homes, but rather the wider field of children and youth in institutional care, Andersson’s (1984, 1988/1991, 1995) work should be mentioned for its uniqueness. Since the first report came in 1984, Andersson (1984, 1988/1991, 1995) has followed a group of children she met already as infants or very small children. Her longitudinally designed interviews give unique knowledge about the long-term consequences for a child of being separated from its parents. Andersson (1995) repeatedly points to the lack of continuity characterizing the lives of these children. Accordingly, she argues for a more continual relationship between the children and their social welfare secretaries, so as to give children a possibility to trace and document their own history, for instance by means of a “life book” (1995).

Troubled Female Youth Today and Yesterday
The picture of the troubled female youth entering institutional care outlined above is also found in international research. In a review of the literature on girls and delinquency, Calhoun, Jurgens and Chen (1993) discuss the similarities and differences
between female and male delinquency. They note that the female delinquents seem to come from a more traumatized background with more dysfunctional families. However, they also found that in more recent research, the degree and type of female delinquency has both increased, as well as become more similar to that of male delinquency. However, unlike the males, the most frequent cause for admittance of adolescents to institutions still seemed to concern issues surrounding sexuality.

Girls and young women are often brought to the social welfare agencies due to issues concerning sexuality and the female body. A number of contemporary studies testify to this; for Swedish examples see Andersson (1993, 1996) and Schlytter (1999), for Great Britain see Frost (2001), the United States Calhoun et al. (1993); Chesney-Lind & Sheldon (1998) and a wider European context Cain (1989). Despite their different national settings, these studies report on rather similar findings.

Schlytter’s (1999) study is, for instance, based on an examination of Swedish court records, and she strongly argues that a double standard is operating in the judicial system concerning LVU. According to Schlytter (1999), the gender bias is systematic in that young females more often than young males enter forced care according to paragraphs in LVU that do not concern their own actions. Girls and young women enter forced care because they are subjects to various forms of abuse. As she argues, they become carriers of problems they are not primarily responsible for. In spite of this, their bodies and their gender become viewed as the central source of these problems.

Similar patterns are also found in older Swedish social research (Jonsson, 1977, 1980) as well as in historical research. In a study concerning a Swedish children’s welfare board in the early 1900s, Sundkvist (1994) reports on how the female youths’ delinquency was connected to other people, and how it was a relational delinquency. The studies above concern Sweden, but reports from the U.S. for example Gordon (1988/1989) and Odem (1995) describe similar findings.

Between the 1930s and 1970s more than 60,000 people were sterilized in Sweden. An overwhelming majority of these were
women. Women, who were often categorized as “feeble-minded” and “reckless”. According to Runcis (1998) being labeled “feeble-minded” was not too difficult. She reports on the society’s fear of a:

...sexually unreliable and uncontrolled ‘public’ woman. On the basis of such precepts, women who for instance spoke openly about relations and sexuality or women who were seen on dancefloors or simply in the company of men risked being branded ‘feeble-minded’ and ‘reckless’ (Runcis, 1998, p. 369).

However, a recent examination by Sarnecki (1996) reports that the high frequency of promiscuity/prostitution as a reason for admission among girls and young women no longer seems to be an issue. In his study, female youth admitted due to such matters were few, fewer even than the females admitted due to criminal activities. However, as Sarnecki (1996) points out, this does not necessarily imply that they do not have problems related to sexuality in a broad sense, but rather that this was not an issue seen as relevant by the social workers or staff at the institutions.

Focus Upon the Work Conducted in the Institutions

There are a few Swedish studies dealing specifically with Youth Detention Homes and the everyday work conducted there. Bangura-Arvidsson and Åkerström (2000) studied how staff at Youth Detention Homes discussed the young persons’ families, and the ways in which the families could and should be involved in the treatment. Andersson (1997) studied a detention home that had changed from previously admitting both female and male youth into an institution for girls and young women only. She found that the staff in general found it to be a calmer everyday environment, but that the male staff had difficulties finding their work identities in the new organization. An older example is Jönsson (1989/1993) who studied the working situation of the staff, as well as the everyday situation for the young persons, in a newly established treatment home.

Up to this point, we have seen that apart from the latest reported studies that focused on the work conducted in the institutions, the studies reported generally deal with issues of the past,
either with the historical growth of institutional care for youth or the background problems youth entering into residential care may carry with them. Another issue concerns general categorizations of the population of youth admitted to care.

I have also described some of the ways female youth in institutional care have been mapped and categorized. I have deliberately kept the presentations rather short, as the idea is not to cover the field in great detail, but simply to inform the reader about some issues that have been of concern for earlier research. Based on the present review, it may still be safe to say that there is a need for more research that takes into account what is actually going on, on an everyday basis, in the practical accomplishment of assessment and treatment in Swedish Youth Detention Homes. Such research is, of course also important in terms of my own theoretical interests in member’s conversational practices. How are ambitions and goals about institutional care accomplished in the everyday interaction? The scarcity of research of this type has also been noted by both Lundström (1993) and Sallnäs (2000). Let us therefore shift the focus to consider some studies taking a situated approach to the study of institutions.

**Talk and Social Interaction**

In the introductory chapter, some theoretical starting points were presented. Before turning to a review of studies of social interaction in institutional settings, some basic theoretical and methodological issues need further elaboration.

As mentioned earlier, within an ethnomethodological framework, members’ social conduct is seen as primarily practical. That is to say, in going about their business, members exploit an array of methods to accomplish socially accountable actions as well as to make sense of other members’ actions. Hence, the philosophical problem of intersubjectivity is cast as a practical matter in members’ practices of reasoning and meaning making. In his work on the role of language, Garfinkel (1967/1984) discusses two
basic concepts relevant to our understanding of members’ procedures for practical reasoning. These are indexicality and reflexivity.

According to Garfinkel (1967/1984), there are no actions or utterances that can be understood without reference to the concrete circumstances in which they occur. Hence, members’ actions and utterances can only be sufficiently understood within the social context. Conversely, all actions and utterances rely for their interpretation on the local context. Garfinkel (1967/1984) further suggests that actions and utterances index relevant parts of their context, and that this indexicality is an intrinsic feature of all language use, or any other semiotic systems. Furthermore, due to this indexicality of expressions, the context in which they occur is reflexively created. That is to say, through utterances and expressions, the social context is brought about in situ, as a relevant part of what is being done through talk. In Mehan and Wood’s words, “talk itself is reflexive. An utterance not only delivers some particular information, it also creates a world in which information itself can appear” (1975, p. 12 original emphasis).

Today, perhaps the most widespread branch of ethnomethodological inquiry is known as conversation analysis. As already mentioned, CA aims at an understanding of the organization of talk-in-interaction from the participants’ own perspectives as revealed in their conversational actions. This policy clearly presents a range of methodological challenges for researchers, and over the years conversation analysts have developed a set of methodological principles, today known as analytical “proof procedures” (Sacks et al., 1974). Perhaps the most important of these procedures deals with the issue of “participant orientation”, which guides the analytical search for interactional phenomena of relevance to the participants. Roughly, the emphasis on participant orientation includes two important elements: (i) Any analytical claim must be demonstrably relevant to the course of action. (ii) In addition to being relevant (since many observations may be correct but unimportant), the analytical claims must be demonstrably consequential for the course of (inter)action (Schegloff, 1987). That is to say, it is not enough merely to establish participants’ orientation to an
analytical claim; analysts also need to demonstrate the *upshots* of the observed phenomena for the participants’ conduct. It should also be mentioned that today there are at least two different kinds of CA, pure CA and applied CA (ten Have, 1999). Pure CA, to quote Heritage “examines the institution of interaction as an entity in its own right” (1997, p. 162, original italics) while applied CA “studies the management of social institutions *in* interaction” (Heritage, 1997, p.162, original italics).

With this brief theoretical outline as a backdrop, let us now consider the consequences of this approach for the study of identity and related phenomena.

**Social Identity as Attribute or Action**

It should be pointed out from the start, that the view on identity adopted here has little in common with most views on identity as presented in “grand theories” of psychology. Instead, the present study shows what a discursive, *practice-based* approach may contribute to the study of identity. Hence, the issue is not whether the young persons have a healthy, weak, solid, good or bad or indeed, even a *true* identity. That is to say, identity does not refer to an intrapsychological state or even to something of a purely individual character. Rather, issues of identity (or indeed identities) are constantly at stake for the participants’ themselves, as part and parcel of whatever interactional business participants can be seen to pursue. In a nutshell, identity is seen as a *product of interaction*, negotiated and co-constructed through mutually coordinated trajectories of recognizable actions.

In a series of analyses based on group therapy encounters with teenagers, Sacks (1979, 1992) discussed the issue of social identity in relation to naming practices. For instance, the discussions among the teenagers revealed their preoccupation with cars. In these discussions, the teenagers would refer to themselves as *hotrodders*, and Sacks (1979) points to the local relevance of this descriptive term to their sense of what could be called in-group identity. That is to say, considering that a wide array of description terms could be accurately used, such as, teenager – that might be
used by an uninitiated adult – their choice of the term hotrodders marks and displays the relevant sort of knowledge, values and dispositions crucial for membership within the group. In essence, any displays of, and claims for, membership within the group of hotrodders is accomplished in opposition to alternative memberships, such as those their parents, representatives of the law, or the adult world in general would offer. More generally, such identity claims provide a means for members to position themselves within a specific social order.

Another early ethnomethodological study related to issues of identity and its practical accomplishment was presented by Wieder (1974), in an analysis of the exchanges taking place between inmates and correctional officers in a California halfway house. According to his analysis, when interacting with the staff, inmates were found to engage in a practice labeled “telling the code” (Wieder, 1974). That is to say, the inmates’ everyday life was permeated by a set of values, according to which “snitching” was the ultimate offence. Now, in order to avoid being categorized as “snitches”, the inmates would frequently display their allegiance to “the code”, when apprehended by the staff, by pointing out that they can not answer their questions because they will not snitch. Since being ascribed the identity of a snitcher would have fatal consequences for the inmates, the activity of “telling the code” provided the inmates with a resource for avoiding such an identity ascription.

These early studies demonstrate two important points. First, that identity is a matter of discursive action. And second, that any one identity is accomplished in relation (and often in contrast) to alternative sets of identities. Hence, identity work clearly provides an instance of highly motivated action.

From these early studies follows a range of research on the social accomplishment of identity. For instance, in a study of school conferences discussing the referral of students to special education, Mehan (1993) presents different identity ascriptions, concerning a boy that were produced by the different representatives during the conference; the teacher’s, parent’s and school psychologist’s contrasting accounts of the boy’s school conduct. In
another study, Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) approach the question of youth subcultural identities from a different perspective than better known accounts produced within sociology or especially in the New Subcultural Theory (e.g. Hall & Jefferson, 1976/1983, Hebdige; 1979,). Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) are critical towards what they argue are taken-for-granted claims within the new subcultural theory, first, “that the style does symbolise resistance to the oppressive social order, and that the individual recognises this” (p. 25), and second the lack of interest in addressing the member’s own accounts. When members’ themselves were interviewed, Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) found that the first claim seemed difficult to support. Instead, they found far more diverse positions. Their informants were negotiating issues of identity and membership as practical issues. They were for example handled as ways of dealing with group affiliation and authenticity.

Finally, in a recent volume edited by Antaki and Widdicombe (1998a), several ethnomethodologically oriented researchers approach a variety of settings with a focus on identity as construed within the local fabric of social interaction, in which members’ practical, commonsense-oriented reasoning allows them to accomplish identities-for-local-practical-purposes, within culturally available domains of meaning. One such example is found in Edwards (1998) chapter, showing how a married couple and their counselor make use of the categories of girl, woman or married with children in order to account for various life-choices and activities when discussing their marital difficulties. Another example (Hester, 1998) discusses the categorizations made when children in school become defined as “problematic” or “deviant”.

To sum up, these and related studies show that identity is a project of participants’ situated interactional work. Clearly, identity work is motivated with whatever interactional project participants may be pursuing. Furthermore, identity work raises for the participants the practical problem of contrasting versions (of events, people and objects) in everyday life (Cuff, 1994).

These issues are also relevant to the purposes of this thesis, and we will see in the empirical chapters how various methods are exploited to produce contrasting accounts of past actions. In an im-
portant sense, conversational practices deal with the social construction of “facts” (Potter, 1996a). Furthermore, we will see how different sorts of accounts are built in in order to ascribe, or indeed to avoid the ascription of, certain types of identities, which may have a bearing on the assessment process. In investigating these practices, a particular focus will be placed on the multiparty aspects of the network meetings, taking place in the detention homes. Given the potential complexity of participation in multiparty talk in what may be relevantly glossed as institutional settings, we may ask about the upshots of such a setting for the participants’ identity work. Before further pursuing these issues, let us consider another strand of ethnomethodological analysis, very much related to the specific methods through which members accomplish identity in interaction.

Some analyses in this study draw extensively on Sacks’ (1972, 1992 vol. I) notion of a Membership Categorization Device (henceforth MCD). On this view, the categories made relevant by members reflexively create the context for a shared understanding of actions by indexing the relevant conceptions of the world. Through such documentary method of interpretation (Garfinkel, 1967/1984), members achieve a provisional sense of their understanding of the world as shared (Schutz, 1962/1973, Schutz & Luckmann, 1973) “for all practical purposes” (Garfinkel, 1967/1984, p.7).

According to Sacks (1992, vol. I), the MCD constitutes a collection of commonsense categories and rules about how to apply them. Through the MCD, members may construe identities by invoking sets of shared categories. In Coulters’ (1999, p. 178) words: “persons (speakers/hearers) are construed as assemblies of occasioned features, contingent upon how local cohorts’ practices constitute them”. Although the notion of a MCD has been much debated over the years, conversation analysts seem to agree, largely for the reasons above, that any treatment of members’ categories needs to entail a proof procedure for demonstrating the relevance of the acclaimed categories to the participants’ own conduct. Thus, in his introduction to Sacks’ lectures (1992, vol. I), Schegloff points to the risk of using MCD for claiming a certain category-
boundedness, without demonstrating that it is relevant for the members themselves. A category such as gender (e.g., male/female; girl/boy) is only relevant in as far as the participants in fact invoke category relevant concepts in talk-in-interaction. Yet, during the past three decades, conversation analysts have not elaborated on Sacks’ work on categorization to any great extent. It has instead developed as another strand of ethnomethodological reasoning (see Jayussi, [1984] for an early example).

Membership Categorization is to be seen as a cultural, methodical activity, which has meaning in specific contexts. According to this view, categories are “cultural resources, public, shared and transparent” (Watson quoted in Silverman, 1998, p. 129). In other words, Membership Categorization Analysis provides a tool for examining the sorts of culturally distributed resources members use for the purposes of situated identity work. In his tribute to Sacks’ work, Silverman (1998) argues that analyses of members’ categories as well as conversation analytic approaches to interaction may indeed be seen as complementary, locating Sacks’ notion of MCD in the sequential organization of talk. Similarly, Watson (in Silverman, 1998) stresses that Sacks’ primary interest never concerned contents of categories alone but rather their dynamic features (how they are processed and understood).

Recently, conversation analysts have shown a renewed interest in Membership Categorization. For example Psathas (1999b) views it as a “complex, on-going, interactive achievement” (p. 139), “accomplished in the talk and interaction of the parties” (p. 139). An entire volume of “Studies in Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis”, edited by Hester & Eglin (1997), is devoted to issues related to MCD. In line with Schegloff’s reasoning, they distinguish between ethnomethodological Membership Categorization and a “decontextualized” MCD, which is drawn upon in, for example, cognitive anthropology (Tyler, 1969), where categorizations are seen as the outward reflections of mental representations.
Talk in institutional Settings

In a seminal series of studies, Garfinkel (1967/1984) examined the relation between ordinary conduct in various professional settings and commonsense-based practices of reasoning. For instance, investigating the production of coroners’ records concerning cause of death, Garfinkel found that these records were formulated on the basis of situated reasoning rather than objective systematic procedures. Hence, the cause of a person’s death was established for all practical purposes, that is “the investigator’s task consisted of an account of how a particular person died in society that is adequately told, sufficiently detailed, clear, etc., for all practical purposes.” (Garfinkel, 1967/1984, p. 15). Any description had to fit into a distinct collection of categories; accident, suicide, homicide or natural death. Yet, it should not provide more information than that. It should be economical with respect to local contingencies.

Another study concerned the ways in which jury members organized their interaction according to the instructions they received about dealing with the facts and evidence in a case, rather than personal opinions. Here, Garfinkel (1967/1984) showed how personal opinions still permeated the reasoning practices when they elaborated on defendants’ motives for their crimes. In sum, his studies demonstrate how institutional talk, no matter how professionalized, is permeated by commonsense-based procedures for reasoning and meaning construction.

It seems fair to say that Garfinkel’s (1967/1984) early studies laid the ground for a much broader field of inquiry we today know as studies of institutional discourse. Within this field, we find a variety of discourse analytic approaches to a range of institutional settings, including courts, medical encounters as well as classrooms. However, a common theme found in many of these studies is that they address the relation between lay and professional knowledge and construction of meaning.

In a Swedish context, a few studies will be considered. An early example is Norman (1979), who investigated the therapeutic rhetoric in a social-psychiatric ward. Her analysis demonstrated how the conversations between patients and staff on a surface
level resembled everyday discourse between equal participants, but how the patients were never allowed to question premises for the discourse itself. A decade later, Adelswärd, Aronsson and Linell (1988) examined the courts’ constructions of social identities from the perspective of the defendant. Their findings point to frequent discrepancies between the defendants’ lay understanding of the trial and other judicial procedures and the how the “professional” participants understood the same procedures. In a ground-breaking study conducted in a psychiatric hospital, Sjöström (1997) studied the implementation of a new act concerning compulsory psychiatric care as well as the practices involved in “doing psychiatry”. His thorough examination of the mundane reasoning and everyday practices making up professional judgment makes the study unique in Swedish research.

In a comprehensive review of some of the early studies of institutional discourse, Agar (1985) critically raises the issue of what constitutes institutional discourse proper. Is it sufficient to rely on the fact that it is conducted in a professional/institutional/official setting or does the interaction itself have to depart from everyday reasoning practices in systematic ways? Here, a particularly troublesome feature found in many studies is, according to Agar (1985), the tendency to impose theoretically grounded notions of inequality and asymmetrical power relations upon the data. To the extent that the discursive (re)production of power relations is a feature of institutional discourse, this needs to be demonstrated empirically, rather than through theorizing. This is also a point frequently raised by researchers within conversation analysis, discursive psychology and ethnomethodology, who stress that the question of whether power related asymmetries in fact do permeate discourse taking place in institutional settings can only be answered by investigating the practical methods through which participants bring about and accomplish such relations in situ (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Watson, 1986).

Such an empirically grounded view on institutionality is presented in the already classic volume Talk at work edited by Drew and Heritage (1992). Drawing on samples of talk from a broad range of professional encounters, the studies included demon-
strate that certain institutional settings may inform, or even constrain, the flow of interaction in systematic ways, as well as provide for various ways of doing resistance. For instance, Heath (1992) examined how patients withheld reactions and responses to the diagnosis they received from their doctor despite their doctor’s invitations them to respond and further elaborate on the implications of their diagnosis. Moreover, Heritage and Sefi (1992) studied the interaction involved in advice giving between health visitors and first-time mothers. They argued that “HVs tend to act on a presumption of systematic doubt” (1992, p. 413) concerning the first-time mother’s competence in child care, a doubt which manifested itself in a flow of pieces of advice, offered before they were asked for. Similar patterns concerning health visitors and mothers were recently found in a Swedish study (Baggens, in press).

However, Drew and Heritage’s (1992) introductory review of special constraints in institutional talk has not remained without criticism. In a recent critical discussion of the “institutional talk program”, Hester and Francis, (2000 a, 2000b) argue that Drew and Heritage’s (1992) reading of data is informed by the same type of preconceived and commonsensically based assumptions that they themselves have vigorously dismissed. For example, they criticize Heritage and Drew for analyzing a mother’s choice of terms (e.g. “epidural”) in terms of making claims to “considerable medical expertise” (Drew & Heritage, 1992, p. 29). According to Hester and Francis (2000a), as she had just given birth, such terms had been part of her everyday life during her pregnancy, and it was thus not relevant to view her use of “professional” terminology in terms of an orientation towards expertise. For the mother, such terminology had become part of her lay understanding of the practices related to giving birth.

Perakylä’s (1995) study on AIDS counseling examines rather informal counseling situations in a London hospital, in which the talk did not orient to a prescheduled format. The therapists that took part in the study were theoretically trained and working according to the Milan school of family therapy (Boscolo, Cecchin, Hoffman & Penn, 1986). Quite naturally, such counseling involved
addressing certain dreaded issues and Peräkylä (1995) demonstrated how the therapists made systematic use of certain techniques, for example asking hypothetical questions, or circular questioning, in order to overcome the clients’ reluctance to address certain sensitive topics.

Against the backdrop of this brief presentation of some issues related to studies of institutional discourse, let us now consider some research dedicated specifically to the study of youth in institutional settings.

Discourse, Juveniles and Justice

In his pioneering study, Cicourel (1967/1995) examined the social organization of juvenile justice in two California cities. One of Cicourel’s (1967/1995) main interests concerned the casual conversations taking place between the juvenile delinquents and their probation or police officers, as opposed to the written formal reports. For Cicourel, a central finding was the arbitrariness observed in the transformation of the spoken word into written text. For instance, he demonstrated how confessions were made into coherent narratives. A juvenile suspect may have answered merely “yes” or “no” during interrogation, but in the written report the perspective was often changed so that one got the impression that the juvenile had spontaneously told a complete story of what had happened. Linell and Jönsson (1991) showed similar findings in a Swedish context in their study of police interrogations.

The findings of Cicourel’s study show that the law may not always be the same for everyone, and that law, justice, delinquency and reality are concepts under constant negotiation. As he put it:

The “delinquent” is an emergent product, transformed over time according to a sequence of encounters, oral and written reports, prospective readings, retrospective readings of “what happened”, and the practical circumstances of “settling” matters in everyday agency business. (Cicourel, 1967/1995, p. 333.)

Cicourel shows, for example through detailed case study analyses, the difference in how working-class and middle-class teenagers’ cases were handled, and how the middle-class parents mobi-
lized all kinds of expertise to help their cases. Middle-class teenagers were also more often seen as suffering from personal problems or psychiatric disorders, as opposed to working-class youngsters who much more often received more repressive penalties, despite other similarities in the individual cases.

It is important to note that Cicourel (1967/1995) does something other than what is usually referred to as labeling theory (Becker, 1963/1997; Shoemaker, 2000). Cicourel does not merely identify social rules and/or the different groups in society that have an interest in labeling certain persons as delinquent. Rather, his project was to describe the common sense methods that are the basis for the decisions made by probation officers and judges. According to Cicourel, it is therefore impossible to differentiate the sociological phenomenon of juvenile delinquency from the methods members make use of in order to identify delinquency. This is another example of the double reflexivity (Mehan & Wood, 1975) typical of ethnomethodological work.

With this overview in mind, it is now time to turn to the specifics of the present thesis.

Note

1 Juvenile prisons do not exist in Sweden today.
The present investigation was carried out in a Youth Detention Home specializing in assessments and is part of a larger project entitled “Girls’ Voices in Youth Detention Homes.” The present analyses draw on data from multiparty assessment talk and interviews with the young persons who took part in these meetings.

**Selection of Detention Homes**

The initial procedure of finding an institution or two that would be willing to take part in the project was guided by the following principles, which reflect both practical issues and research interests: (i) The home admitted female adolescents. (ii) No other major research projects were being conducted during the period in question. (iii) The home employed a method that included meetings or some other setting where I would be able to record multiparty interaction between residents and staff.

As I was interested in recording multiparty interaction (see more about the assessment home and its assessment model later in this chapter), it is fair to say that the assessment procedure, taking place at the selected institution, fitted my research interests.
The Setting

Within the larger project, three Detention Homes were selected, one treatment home and two assessment homes. Multiparty network meetings constitute the basis for the main research data in the present thesis and they were only routine events in one of the assessment homes, the one chosen for the thesis at hand. I will therefore present some information about the institution, which may facilitate the reading of my transcripts from the network meetings and the interviews in the four chapters comprising the main part of this thesis.

The institution is located in the outskirts of a midsize Swedish city. It is a relatively small institution, hosting a maximum of nine beds. Both female and male adolescents are admitted for assessment. The institution is divided into two wards, one for those who arrive in compliance with LVU (forced care) and one for those who arrive according to SoL (the main social service act). The staff at the home represents diverse professions, including teachers, psychologists, assistant social workers (Swe: behandlingsassisterenter) and administrative staff. The home houses its own school, which follows the national curriculum. There is staff present at all times. Occasionally there was a vacant bed at the home during the data collection, but most of the time the institution was full.

Monday to Friday were school days. School started with a gathering at 8.30 a.m. and ended at around 3.30 p.m. The rest of the day was devoted to homework or recess activities. Some residents were allowed to leave the Detention Home on their own, but generally staff accompanied the young persons on visits to town, the cinema or on errands. The young persons and the assistants (social workers) took care of all household work together, including cooking, cleaning, washing up and so forth. When a girl or young woman was scheduled for different assessments, meetings or interviews, she was temporarily excused from the daily schedule. On weekends, those admitted on SoL sometimes left for home. Young persons who had arrived recently, or were considered prone to escape, were not allowed to leave. Some were not allowed to leave the Detention Home at all. Occasionally, family members would visit the residents.
The assessment model

The only way to be placed at the Detention Home for assessment was through referral by a local Social Welfare Agency. It was not possible for parents or even the young persons themselves to directly request an assessment. The social welfare agency would also finance the young person’s stay at the institution. Although the home was run by the state, individual assessments were thus financed by the municipal welfare agencies (Swe: Socialförvaltningen i hemkommunerna).

The Detention home’s assessment model was fairly standardized in that all assessments followed the same overall schedule. Each assessment was conducted over a period of eight weeks. The assessment proper consisted of five parts, which included: (i) A psychological assessment consisting of a battery of different personality and intelligence tests as well as clinical interviews. Four psychological areas are primarily covered: intellectual ability, conceptions of self, personality and emotional maturity. (ii) A summoning and a mapping of the social network and an evaluation of family relations. (iii) The youth’s educational background, experiences and general level of knowledge are investigated. (iv) Observations of everyday behavior at the institution. Particular emphasis is put on the youth’s relations to staff and other residents as well as general adaptation to living in the detention home. (v) A physical/mental health examination.

Every young person admitted to the home was assigned two assistants (social workers), one female and one male. These two assistants coordinated the behavioral observations and helped the young persons with practical matters. They also acted as communicative partners during the young person’s stay. One month after discharge from the Detention Home, there was a follow up meeting initiated by the municipal social workers, and two months later there was an evaluation meeting to which the young person, parents and municipal social workers were summoned. Finally, twelve months after discharge, a representative from the Detention Home conducted a telephone interview with the municipal social worker.
The Meetings

The multiparty meetings investigated in this study were found to follow a procedure, which will be presented briefly. During the adolescents’ eight-week-long assessments, many meetings and interviews took place. Two of these comprised large multiparty meetings generally referred to as network conferences. A network conference normally involved invited family members as well as the adolescent herself, other relatives, members of the institutional network, former teachers and other relevant persons. In sum three distinct parties attended the conferences: (i) the young person herself, and normally one or several family members, (ii) referring social welfare agencies’ staff, and (iii) Detention Home staff. A chair, usually the director or some other senior official of the Detention Home, would lead the introductory conference, which would take place during the second week of the assessment period. The meetings always started with a presentation of the participants and drinking coffee, tea or soft drinks. Often the resident had baked a cake together with her assistant and this was offered to the participants during coffee in the initial phase of the meeting. Following the coffee drinking, the chair described the institution, its official task and the localities.

After that, the word was given to a representative of each of the different professions that were to assess the young person, and they described in some detail the work they were about to conduct. Following this, the detention home staff in charge engaged in referral talk in collaboration with the referring staff, the resident, members of her family and sometimes with other relevant persons from the resident’s social network. In this procedure the word was given by rotation to each participant in the meeting, including the young person herself. The one goal of the referral talk was to arrive at a provisional joint problem formulation: Why is the adolescent referred to the home and what should be done? Maybe the best way to illustrate the meeting and the different institutional representatives is through a short extract:
Example 1 / AB314/ Present (abbreviations used in the examples within brackets): Bea, her mother [mom], her schoolteacher [tea-s] a school assistant [assist-s], Referral staff: (two social workers, [soc1, soc2], Detention Home Staff: the chairperson [chair], a psychologist, [psy], Bea’s assistant, [ast], and a teacher at the home [teach]. Present was also a researcher [res].

1 chair: yes: this is network meeting number one and e:h ((cough)) ja: det här är alltså nätverksmöte ett och ä:h ((host))

2 we will present un (. ) the assessment (. ) the (. ) vi ska i da presentera eh (. ) utredningen (. ) dom (. )

3 various parts of (. ) the assessment, how it is accomplished olika utrednings(.) delarna, hur det går till (. )

4 the set up uppläggnngen.

5 (1.5)

6 afterwards then (.5) it’s time for questions? And efter dä såå (.5) blir det tid för

7 then the social welfare service asks frågeställningar? Och så att socialförvaltningen kommer

8 questions (. ) of us, and uh if the others of you med frågeställningar(5) till oss, (.5) och åh ni andra

9 Here would like to (.5) we’d be pleased. som finns med här är vi glada om ni (.5) vill göra de.

10 (. ) But that’s more voluntary (.5) The social welfare service (. ) Men de e mer frivilligt (.5) Socialförvaltningen

11 has the pressure on them bu they hehehe (. ) hhh har ett tvång på sej me de hehehe (. ) hhh

12 questions then (. ) the meeting’s over (. ) and uh frågeställningarna så: är (. ) mötet över (. ) och eh

13 then (.5) there’s also time if I (soc) °(want dår:(.5) finns det utrymme också för om ja (soc ) °(vill

14 to talk with Bea)° Lena? (looking at psychologist) prata med Bea)° Lena?

15 psych schedule a time with Mom for a family talk and if boka tid med mamma för familjesamtalen och om det är
This extract captures the main agenda as well as the main expectations that the Detention Home had. The participants would continue to eat and drink coffee throughout the meeting. The second network conference took place during the sixth week and this meeting was usually a bit shorter. At this point, the Detention Home staff presented the results of the assessment as well as their future recommendations and the participants at the meeting further discussed these issues.

Participants

In the present thesis, I have chosen to concentrate on the interaction at multiparty conferences, that is, the network meetings taking place at the assessment home. The primary analytical unit of the present study is the communicative patterns at network meetings and interviews, rather than the individual communicators. Yet the reader needs to know a little about the overall participation patterns of the meetings, and more precisely what types of persons who participated. Ten young females (presented by their first name), their families, staff at a Detention Home, specialized in assessments, social workers and sometimes others took part in the study. The girls/young women were admitted to the home for a variety for reasons, the most common being drug abuse and severe truancy. Some of them were runaways. In addition they often had an older boyfriend, known to the social welfare agencies for involvement in drugs, criminal behavior or the like. An overview of the participants at the meetings is presented in table 1 below.
### Table 1. An overview of participants at the present meetings studied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEETING</th>
<th>FAMILY</th>
<th>SOCIAL WELFARE AGENCIES</th>
<th>DETENTION HOME</th>
<th>OTHERS</th>
<th>PRES. No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Anita and her sister</td>
<td>Two social workers</td>
<td>Chair, psychologist, Anita's assistants, family counselor</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Anita and her sister</td>
<td>Two social workers</td>
<td>Chair, psychologist, Anita's assistants, family counselor, teacher</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pia, her mother, and her younger and older brothers</td>
<td>Two social workers and an aid person</td>
<td>Chair, two psychologists, teacher, Pia’s assistant</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Pia and her mother</td>
<td>Two social workers</td>
<td>Chair, two psychologists, teacher, Pia’s assistant</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bea and her mother</td>
<td>Two social workers</td>
<td>Chair, psychologist, Bea’s assistant, teacher</td>
<td>Teacher, school assistant</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bea and her mother</td>
<td>Two social workers</td>
<td>Chair, psychologist, teacher, ward manager</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ella and her mother</td>
<td>Two social workers</td>
<td>Chair, two psychologists, Ella’s assistant</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Kajsa, her mother, father and sister</td>
<td>Two social workers and an aid person</td>
<td>Chair, Kajsa’s assistant, a psychologist</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Kajsa, her mother, father and sister</td>
<td>Two social workers</td>
<td>Chair, Kajsa’s assistant, a psychologist</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Linda, her mother and father</td>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>Chair, teacher, Linda’s assistant</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Linda, her mother and father</td>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>Chair, Linda’s assistant</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Maria, her mother and stepfather</td>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>Chair, teacher, psychologist, Maria’s assistants</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Lena, her mother, stepfather and grandmother</td>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>Chair, two psychologists, teacher, Lena’s assistant</td>
<td>Teacher, school nurse</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Lena, her mother and stepfather</td>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>Chair, two psychologists, teacher, Lena’s assistant</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Petra, her mother and father</td>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>Chair, teacher, psychologist, Petra’s assistant</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Petra, her mother and father</td>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>Chair, two psychologists, teacher</td>
<td>Teacher, social worker student</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Sofia, mother, father and sister</td>
<td>Social worker and family counselor</td>
<td>Chair, two psychologists, and Sofia’s assistant</td>
<td>Teacher, two social worker students</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Sofia, mother, father and sister</td>
<td>Social worker and family counselor</td>
<td>Chair, three psychologists, teacher, and Sofia’s two assistants</td>
<td>Social worker student</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be noted, ten people or more were gathered at most of the meetings. The persons in the detention home staff columns were often the same in meeting after meeting, but participants from the families, the social welfare agencies and schools of course varied. Whether the teacher is from the Detention Home or the ordinary school will be noted in each example.

The age of the young persons ranged between 13 and 17 years. Below is a table containing their ages as well as the law according to which they were admitted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>Anita</th>
<th>Bea</th>
<th>Ella</th>
<th>Kajsa</th>
<th>Lena</th>
<th>Linda</th>
<th>Maria</th>
<th>Petra</th>
<th>Pia</th>
<th>Sofia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGE</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>LVU</td>
<td>LVU</td>
<td>LVU</td>
<td>SoL</td>
<td>SoL</td>
<td>LVU</td>
<td>SoL</td>
<td>SoL</td>
<td>LVU</td>
<td>SoL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen that five of the residents were admitted according to SoL (the social service act) and five to LVU (the care of young persons act, forced care) and that most of them were between 15 or 16 years of age at the time of the assessment. In Youth Detention Homes at large, a majority of the young persons tend to be admitted according to LVU, which is the act that provides for forced care (see chapter 1 for legal matters).

It has already been mentioned that the individual participants do not constitute the unit of analysis in this investigation. What is analyzed here is *discourse*, which may be understood as “talk and texts as social practices” (Potter & Wetherell, 1994, p. 48).

The presentation of the setting gives a kind of contextual information intended to facilitate understanding of the empirical examples and the analytical points made in this thesis. However, I have tried to limit this sort of “background information”. The reason for this is that such preformulated categorizations may turn out to be the analyst’s concern only. What is the role of age and cause for admittance, for example? Are these issues of interest to the participants? In other words, the relevance of such factors is an empirical issue in itself – it calls for a detailed analysis and cannot a priori be seen as relevant. I will return to this. Let me just state
that such issues will instead form the subject matter of analysis as salient features of the participants’ conduct. Truancy, abuse, gender, ethnicity, class and so forth will be “conceived of as features of discourse, constructed and oriented to by the participants” (Cromdal, 2000 p. 90; see also Edwards, 1997 and Heritage, 1984). Naturally, descriptions of the immediate local context, such as the interaction taking place just before a chosen extract, which are necessary for the understanding of the examples will be presented in the example headings.

In the present study, all personal names have been fictionalized. This calls for another explanation concerning my practices of naming the participants. As seen in tables 1 and 2 (and as will be seen in the empirical chapters) some participants are labeled according to their professional role: social worker, psychologist and so forth. But the adolescents are labeled by their first names. If, in line with ethnomethodological reasoning, I am advancing the claim that the relevance of concepts such as “institution” and “profession” should not be taken for granted but rather be the results of analysis (Hester and Francis, 2000a; Watson, 1986), why not name all participants by their first names, as during the meetings, this is what the participants did?

Well, as I came to find out, at the onset of the meetings all participants presented themselves by name and something more. This something more could for example be a professional role: e.g. “I’m Anna Andersson and I’m Bea’s social worker”, or in some other way a description of the relation to the person undergoing assessment: “I’m Anna Andersson and I’m Bea’s mother.” The girl/young woman under assessment was the only one presenting herself by name alone, sometimes laughing a little when doing so. She was present at the meeting as the person undergoing assessment. This was an identity built into the participation framework, built in, in the sense that it was taken for granted and maintained by the participants themselves. At the meetings, this aspect of the girl’s/young woman’s identity as the one under assessment was taken for granted. It comprised what Garfinkel (1967/1984) has termed a “seen but unnoticed” feature of social conduct. For the current purpose of writing about the interaction taking place in
these meetings, I will use the first name reference as a way of indexing this “being-under-assessment” identity as a relevant, but largely assumed, feature of the network conferences.

Data

One of the main starting points for the project was not to “stage” data, but to simply record ordinary assessment procedures. This means that the procedures that were to become my data would have occurred even if they had not been recorded, with the exception of the interviews. The material was collected during 1996–99. In collaboration with the staff at the Detention Home, I tried to identify a recurrent feature of the assessment procedure that fitted my research interests and where I could easily take part and record. We agreed that the network meeting was an excellent setting to study, mainly because it was the only setting designed to gather all significant persons surrounding the young person undergoing assessment.

Network Meetings

The data presented here are drawn from 18 network meetings (of which 16 were audio taped). Usually, network meeting number two took place four weeks after network meeting one. The material consists of about 20 hours of audio-recorded multiparty conference talk during the girls’ / young women’s assessment periods. The meetings lasted between 50 and 120 minutes. I took part in all meetings and field notes were taken along with the recordings. These included non-verbal communication such as gazes and gesture exchanges, whispering and quiet talk and everything that was written on the boards during the meetings.
Table 3. Network meeting tape library

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEETING</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TAPE LIBRARY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>April 96</td>
<td>AA111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>May 96</td>
<td>AA122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pia</td>
<td>April 97</td>
<td>API221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Pia</td>
<td>May 97</td>
<td>API213*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bea</td>
<td>March 98</td>
<td>AB314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bea</td>
<td>April 98</td>
<td>AB325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ella</td>
<td>April 98</td>
<td>AE416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Kajsa</td>
<td>June 98</td>
<td>AK517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Kajsa</td>
<td>July 98</td>
<td>AK528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>July 98</td>
<td>ALi6210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>August 98</td>
<td>ALi6211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>October 98</td>
<td>AM7111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Lena</td>
<td>November 98</td>
<td>ALe8112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Lena</td>
<td>January 99</td>
<td>ALe8213, ALe8214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Petra</td>
<td>December 98</td>
<td>APe9115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Petra</td>
<td>January 99</td>
<td>APe9216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>February 99</td>
<td>AS10117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>March 99</td>
<td>AS10218</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interviews**

Between the two network meetings I conducted an interview with the girl/young woman. The interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. In total, the interview library consists of 7.5 hours of recorded interview material.
The interviewing procedure can be described as thematized but unstructured (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). The interview guide is found in Appendix A. The guide was formulated in line with a life-history approach. I wanted the interview guide to cover the interviewee’s views on relations and important events in the past, current experiences at the institutions as well as future dreams.

Table 4. Interview Tape library

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Tape library</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>9604</td>
<td>AA120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pia</td>
<td>9704</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bea</td>
<td>9804</td>
<td>AB322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ella</td>
<td>9805</td>
<td>AE423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Kajsa</td>
<td>9807</td>
<td>AK524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>9807</td>
<td>ALi625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>9810</td>
<td>AM726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Lena</td>
<td>9812</td>
<td>Ale827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Petra</td>
<td>9901</td>
<td>APe928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>9903</td>
<td>AS1029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Hanna</td>
<td>9811</td>
<td>CH1130</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As may be inferred from the interview guide, my initial ambition was to try to capture the girls’ / young women’s own perspectives on their life history, matters that were also discussed at the network meetings. Thereby I would, for instance, be able to identify misunderstandings and/or inherent difficulties concerning “being heard” in an institutional setting. Yet, as will be seen in chapter 7, disentangling the young person’s voices from various institutional/contextual constraints proved far from easy and my ap-
approach for interpreting the interviews was changed rather radically during the analytical procedure. This change will be elaborated below under the heading: Participant observation, “natural data” and interviews.

Written Documents
When all ten cases were closed, and the ten assessments were finished and filed, I returned to the Detention Home and collected material consisting of ten complete written assessment reports including sub-reports. These records are not included in the present thesis, but are currently being analyzed and the findings will be reported on a later occasion.

Transcription
During the analyses, the tapes, notes and transcripts have been used simultaneously. The material included in the thesis was transcribed following a simplified, and slightly modified version of the transcription scheme developed by Jefferson (see Atkinson & Heritage, 1984, pp. ix–xvi; reprinted in Jaworski & Coupland, 1999, pp. 158–166).

Table 5. Transcription symbols

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(.)</td>
<td>A dot enclosed in brackets indicates a pause of less than two-tenths of a second.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.5) (2)</td>
<td>The number in brackets indicates a time gap in tenths of a second or in seconds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=</td>
<td>The “equals” sign indicates “latching” between utterances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[</td>
<td>Square bracket between adjacent lines of concurrent speech indicates the onset of a section of overlapping talk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.hh</td>
<td>A dot before an “h” indicates speaker inhalation. The more h’s the longer the breath.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hh</td>
<td>An “h” indicates an exhalation. The more h’s the longer the outbreath. This is frequent in sequences of laughter e.g. hhehhheh.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(heh)</td>
<td>Laughter sounds within words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(()</td>
<td>A description enclosed in a double bracket indicates a non-verbal activity. Alternatively double brackets may enclose the transcriber’s comments.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Background, Theory and Method

- A dash indicates a sharp cut-off in prior sound.
: Elongated preceding sound.
! Animated tone.
( ) Unclear fragment within the tape.
(Guess) Transcriber’s best guess at an unclear utterance.
(?) Unidentified speaker.
. Stopping fall in tone. Does not necessarily indicate the end of sentence.
, Continuing intonation.
? Rising inflection. Does not necessarily indicate a question.
↑↓ Indicate a marked falling or rising intonational shift. They are placed immediately before the onset of the shift.
> < 'More than’ and ’less than’ signs indicate that the talk they encompass was produced noticeably quicker than the surrounding talk.
** “Croaky” voice.

Emphasis Underlining indicates speaker emphasis.

Written Written sequences are presented in italics.
...
X Gaze.

As mentioned, the names of all participants have been fictionalized. Moreover, all place names have been anonymized, and a few minor omissions or changes were made in the transcripts in order to protect the participants’ identities.

Table 6. Guide to abbreviations in examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family members</th>
<th>Detention home staff</th>
<th>Social welfare agencies</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The girls/young women are labeled by their first name</td>
<td>Ast: A social worker, assistant at the home (Swe: kontaktman, behandlingsassistent)</td>
<td>Soc: social worker</td>
<td>Appr 1 and appr2: Apprentice Social workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mom: mother</td>
<td>Chair: The chairman of the meeting, someone in a leading position at the home</td>
<td>Fam: family counselor</td>
<td>Prin: principal from ordinary school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All analyses started with listening through the audiotapes and compiling very rough transcriptions; something of a very detailed index, combined with transcribed simplified utterances. As I was present during the recordings I took quite detailed field notes. These field notes were referred to while listening to the tapes. Another research document was a notebook in which I wrote down initial analytical ideas.

Translation

Finally, it may be appropriate to discuss translating procedures, as this study is collected in a Swedish setting but presented in English. The analyses have been conducted on the Swedish originals, and these transcriptions have later been translated in collaboration with a professional translator, who was asked to do a rather literal translation. Both Swedish originals and the English translations are presented together, either side by side or below each other, depending on the preference of the journals to which the chapters also have been submitted. My personal preference, recommended by ten Have (1999), is to present the English translation and the Swedish original below it, primarily because this gives the bilingual reader easy access to comparing details in the interaction.
Comments on Research Procedures

Choosing a Setting
Finding one or a few institutions was not an easy task. I was in contact with 12 different Youth Detention Homes by phone or by letter, asking whether they were interested in taking part in a research project concerning girls’ possibilities and capabilities to take part in everyday institutional activities. Six institutions declined at once, mainly with the motivation that the study was too “sensitive” and/or intrusive for residents and staff. Six institutions showed an initial interest. I visited these homes in order to discuss the project further. Upon arrival, I found out that one home had just accepted a researcher to do a year of fieldwork, which ruled out my presence there. Finally, another home did not normally arrange multiparty meetings, but mainly employed different dyadic assessment procedures. Later, after I had started my research at the institution I chose, it turned out that some of the other institutions had internal problems, either due to re-organizations or, in one case, due to such grave internal problems that the institution was temporarily closed down. It would seem that these institutions had more immediate things to take care of to make the everyday practice work, than hosting a researcher at their meetings. Ultimately, three institutions, two assessment homes and one treatment home, agreed to participate in the study. I did not opt for more institutions, however, as I wanted to become acquainted with the Detention Homes. Also, I needed to establish rapport with the staff and those who were admitted there.

Participant Observation, Natural Data” and Interviews
Researchers who do not take part in the interaction they record usually celebrate the virtues of their absence. But let me complicate this view a bit. It is usually claimed that not taking part in the interaction limits the influence of the researcher on the “natural data” that are studied. While this may seem intuitively reasonable, it may also testify to a rather unreflected view of what to consider as natural data.
For what makes natural data truly “natural”? At what point in the research process do they become natural? And at what point and on what grounds do they lose this acclaimed status? This may not be very easy to pinpoint. From a discourse analytic point of view, Potter (1996b) argues that it may be that a better conceptualization of naturally occurring talk is to view “naturalness” as a theoretical and analytic stance on conversational interaction rather than simply an issue of the data collection proper. The upshot of this in terms of “naturalness” is that it can be handled in the analytical work.

For example, can we be sure that a recording apparatus without a researcher affects the interaction less than the same apparatus with a researcher present? I suppose we simply have to notice analytically whether her/his presence seems to affect the interaction and, if so, analyze in what ways and to what extent. In my experience, the participants stopped taking any notice of me just a short while after I put on the recorder. They had far more crucial matters to deal with. But had they had any questions, which happened on some occasions, I was there and could deal with them at once. They also had an extra possibility to ask me to stop the tape recorder (which actually happened only once). This is a rather important possibility in a project that may be considered rather sensitive, and with many ethical concerns (see more on this below).

However, my main argument for taking part in the meetings was neither analytical nor ethical. It has to do with the fact that they were audio recorded and not video recorded. Had I not been participating in the meetings, I would have missed some very crucial interaction, the most important being all the questions that were written down on the whiteboard and how these were intertwined in the interaction.

The interviews are the only data in the project that would never have occurred unless there had been a research project going on, and it may be argued that they are rather conspicuous within an overall theoretical frame of reference that emphasizes naturalistic data (bearing in mind the discussion above). The virtue of interviewing also contains its greatest problem. There is a possibility of gaining access to data of prime interest to the project in an eco-
nomical form (see for example the rather ambitious interview guide in Appendix 1!). But at the same time, through the very questioning procedure itself, there is a risk of “inventing data”. This is because the categorization and accounts may be established *a priori* in the interviewers’ and/or analyst’s categories through her/his very choice of questions, and formulations of these questions and then blend in with the interviewee’s answer (see also Baker, 1997 and Potter, 1996b). As the analyst and the interviewer are often the same person, there is an extra difficulty in identifying members’ own categories within the interview data. Another thing to take into account is that in an interview situation, the turn-taking system of ordinary casual talk (Sacks et al., 1974) is most often put aside and transformed (Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2000; Suchman & Jordan, 1990).

My solution for dealing with these issues was to replace my original theoretical frame of reference for doing interviewing. Instead of analyzing the interviews in line with a life-history approach (Lieblich & Josselson, 1994) and concepts of *voice*, for instance as applied by Brown & Gilligan (1999), the interviews were, in fact, also treated as conversational events and analytical attention was paid to the social interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee.

**Choosing Examples**

It should be mentioned that the examples finally chosen, though they, at times, may seem quite intense, are not at all exceptional examples. The network meetings were very dense with intensive discussions, argumentations and discussions of matter ordinarily considered as very sensitive. Thus, except for some deviant cases, these examples are rather routine activities. Very broad questions or interests have rather guided the choice of examples.

At times, initially identified patterns remained important throughout the analysis. More often, however, the initial impressions were revised, as detailed analyses revealed that other issues were of more importance for the participants. Often this called for a return to the tapes as well as for searching for other examples.
more in line with the new findings. Earlier research on similar matters also guided further analysis. In what ways are earlier findings similar to or different from mine? An example: an early idea concerned writing about the girls’/young women’s own contributions. When I extracted such examples I found that they often contained laughter. This called for more attention to what laughter achieved in the interactions taking place, both in my material and in earlier research. Such an approach to analytical work has sometimes been called an abductive approach as opposed to the hypothetic-deductive method applied in much quantitative work (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000).

In contrast to what many traditional textbooks on “scientific method” might teach, doing discourse studies is a much less linear procedure. For example, the analyst may very well use the original tapes quite late in the analytical procedure (sometimes even in the final presentation).

**Ethical Considerations**

All research materials were collected in accordance with the ethical standards for research within the humanities and social sciences adopted by the Swedish National Board of Science. The participants were informed about the project both orally (by the staff at the homes and the researcher) and in writing (by the researcher). In this information, it was made clear that participation was voluntary and could be terminated at any time. The project has been approved by a local ethical research board (Forskningsetikkommittén vid Hälsouniversitetet i Linköping, number 97127). In the beginning of each network meeting, we all presented ourselves to each other. I then informed all present parties telling them I was the researcher from the project they had approved to take part in. I also briefly described my participation status – that I was a recording observer taking notes, but that I would not participate in the “meeting proper,” that is, the work they were about to conduct. I asked for permission to turn on the tape recorder in
the beginning of each meeting or interview. The data are stored in a locked cupboard at the Department of Child Studies. When data are presented, this only occurs as transcriptions with fictive names and places.

**Notes**

1. This is the way residents’ stay or admittance was categorized both by staff and youth: – Is s/he here on LVU?, they could ask or staff could say: – S/he is here on SoL.
2. Apart from my own records from the institution, this presentation is based on oral communication with staff and a written report produced at the detention home. Due to the protection of anonymity, this report will however not appear in the reference list.
3. Swe: behandlingsassistent, kontaktman
4. Including the researcher who was also present on all occasions.
5. Present half the meeting
6. Note that in the case of Ella and Maria, only one of the two meetings, the first and the second, respectively, were included in the investigation. Thus the total number of meetings examined is 18.
7. See also Edwards (1998) for a discussion of categorization and contextualizing practices and also the debate in *Discourse and Society* between Billig (1999a, 1999b) and Schegloff (1999a, 1999b) on similar issues.
8. Recordings from meeting three and four consist of field notes recorded after the meeting.
9. No tape recording allowed.
10. Conducted at the treatment home.
11. See Appendix.
Part II

The Studies
Achieving Institutionality. Producing Formality and Informality in Multiparty Assessment Talk

ABSTRACT: This paper aims to demonstrate how members engage in different practices we may sometimes gloss as “institutional”. The analyses draw upon recordings of multiparty meetings at a Youth Detention Home (Särskilt Ungdomshem). Previous studies of discourse in institutional settings have mainly concerned the production of formality, and its discursive constraints. Similarly, the present study highlights some formalizing devices which attune the interaction towards particular organizational goals. More importantly, a systematic production of informality was observed to facilitate the organization’s work. An interesting feature of these informal events is that they are routinely introduced by the detention home staff. Deviations from this norm are shown to result in elaborate negotiations, including accounting and repair work. The findings are discussed in terms of institutionality as an observable–reportable feature of talk, and a locally relevant preference structure is introduced to account for these findings.

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Introduction

*Institutionality* is a gloss for a wide range of practices. “Doing institutional talk” is seldom the sole or even foremost goal of social interaction. Rather, in pursuing certain interactional projects, members engage in different practices we may sometimes label as institutional. This paper aims to approach social interaction from a members’ perspective, examining how the participants themselves produce and orient to their institutional realities (Hutchby, 1999). Specifically, I wish to demonstrate how these “institutionalities” are produced and managed by the participants. In other words, I will discuss the devices used to accomplish “institutionality” through talk, and the implications they have for this specific setting.

The analyses draw on recordings of network conferences, a type of multiparty meetings at a youth detention home (which produces assessments of adolescents in trouble [*Särskilda Ungdomshem*]). These events were quite similar with regard to their immediate setting in that they all took place in the same room around the same table. One of the participants (a staff representative) always functioned as a chair, and these meetings had a recognizably formal character. A central question thus arises: How do the parties attending the meetings produce this formality?

The issue of institutionality has often been taken for granted or at best been studied in a simplistic way: a description of a setting as medical, for example, has been seen as sufficient for describing and framing an institutional context (see Agar, 1985 for an early overview on institutional discourse). Following such a view, only certain ways of interaction may occur, as they are constrained by an already existing organizational structure (external constraints) and mental notions (internal constraints). Relatedly, studies in the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) frequently presuppose that an interactional asymmetry is operating, an asymmetry that renders the “professional” participants’ discursive advantages over the lay participants (e.g. Fairclough, 1989, 1992). However, I will suggest that this approach harbours certain problems. First, an analytical approach that begins with a preconceived
structurally grounded point of view always risks missing the crucial details that harbor the important variation in a material. Alternatively, when institutionality is studied as a situated accomplishment, other patterns may emerge. For instance, institutional constraints on talk may be violated (as will be shown in the analysis) and this will only become visible through detailed analysis of interaction. The analysis of such deviant cases may extend and elaborate our understanding of the institutional conduct.

The second reason is that probabilities for structural constraints on discourse can never serve as explanations for the selfsame constraints.

Reasonable expectations and explanations differ fundamentally. It is more reasonable to expect at the first attempt to toss heads with a coin than to win roulette on a given number; but the grounds why it is more reasonable do not explain why you succeeded in tossing heads and failed to win at roulette. After all, you might have won at roulette and tossed tails. With respect to explanation, chance situations where the odds are equal do not differ from those where the odds are fifty to one or a thousand to one. (Donagan, 1966, p. 133).

Of course, this does not mean that there is no such thing as asymmetrical interaction, only that asymmetry, or even “power” to use a vernacular gloss, is more fruitfully seen as an analytical finding, not as a theoretically derived presupposition. That is to say, notions of power, asymmetry and institutionality need to be grounded analytically in the participants’ conduct as an observable–reportable product of their interactional work. Also from a dialogical perspective, the need to be careful about claims grounded in observations towards which the participants do not demonstrably orient is argued for by Linell and Luckmann (1991) when discussing various ways of approaching “asymmetries” in dialogue. See also Linell (1998) for an extended discussion on context and talk in interaction based on a dialogical tradition, related, to some extent to an ethnomethodological perspective. The argument here is not, of course, that careful analyses of discourse are not part of the CDA practice. Rather, the critical difference between CDA and ethnomethodologically grounded approaches resides in the analytical orientation. Whereas ethnomethodological studies strive to interpret the data in alignment with the par-
participants’ own orientations to their situated understanding of conduct, empirical analyses within CDA frequently include the analysts’ theoretically grounded orientations towards the participants’ practices. As Sarangi and Roberts illustratively put it: “CDA draws on social and philosophical theory to read into text” (1999; p. 33) which is primarily an analysts’ concern.

As noted by Drew and Heritage (1992), getting a rudimentary sense of a setting as institutional just at a glance is often rather easy. On a very general level, “talk in institutional settings” certainly seems to hold certain common characteristics. They include: “(a) orientations to institutional tasks and functions; (b) restrictions on the kinds of talk that are, or can be, made; and (c) distinctive features of interactional inferences” (Drew and Heritage, 1992, p. 25), see also Heritage (1997) for a comprehensive overview. However, analyzing what this institutionality is comprised of is another and much more delicate matter. Still, this is the enterprise we need to embark on if we wish to study, rather than merely assume, an institutional context.

This implies a view of context as both a resource for and a result of the participants’ interactional work. This line of research has been promoted by several conversation/interaction analysts. Schegloff (1987, 1991, 1997), Drew and Heritage (1992), Peräkylä (1995), and Hutchby (1999) to name but a few have all presented analyses compatible with a members’ perspective on the institutional order and explicated the methods participants employ to accomplish “institutionality” in talk. Earlier instances of this perspective will be found in Boden and Zimmerman’s edited volume (1991), which includes a section on talk and institutions. Of special interest in that section is Heritage and Greatbatch’s (1991) study on news discourse and ten Have’s (1991) work on doctor–patient talk. Thus to date, work on a member’s perspective on “institutionality” comprises quite a large body of studies (according to Hester and Francis it may even be that today the majority of CA work actually concerns interaction in various settings involving both lay and professional participants (2000a).

Recently Arminen (2000), has promoted several suggestions for development of the analysis of “institutional talk”. He suggests
that analysts should make explicit use of their knowledge of more
global aspects of context, such as ethnographic knowledge or
other transcontextual features, in order to enhance analyses of in-
stitutional interaction. Hester and Francis (2000a, 2000b) are more
critical to the “institutional talk” program (2000a; p. 392). Accord-
ing to their critique, the institutional talk program hosts’ crucial
methodological fallacies that have to do with the departure of CA
from ethnomethodological principles. Following their argumen-
tation, the whole analytical tradition is at risk for losing its mem-
ber’s orientation, due to its exclusive emphasis on turn-taking
phenomena. This emphasis forces analysts to rely too heavily on
their own presupposed and unexplicated knowledge rather than
examining the members’ procedures of commonsense reasoning.
Thus, their suggested solution is almost directly opposite that of
Arminen’s.

That is, rather than grounding analyses in the analyst’s notions
of social structure, Hester and Francis argue for even more care-
fully situated dissection of the local and unique, where member’s
orientation to issues of sequence, category, topic, membership are
given paramount status. In a similar vein, Watson (1997, 2000), and
Psathas (1999) argue for an analysis of Membership Categories
that is always grounded in the sequential unfolding of talk.

The aim of the present paper is to further problematize the issue
of “institutionality” by asking what may be accomplished, in
terms of social action, when “institutional talk” is being done. Spe-
cifically, I wish to demonstrate how the interactional accomplish-
ment of institutionality may take on many different forms over
and above the formalizing and constraining nature of such talk.
Note that, here, the concepts of formality and informality are used
as very local achievements and should not be confounded with
Drew and Heritage’s (1992) division of institutional settings into
formal (such as court proceedings where turn allocation is strictly
distributed) and non-formal (where the turn taking itself may very
well have rather “mundane” conversational features) or informal,
as Peräkylä (1995) labeled the counseling situations in his study.
Data and Procedure

The present data are part of a larger corpus of field notes, institutional records and recorded talk (about 60 hours) belonging to a project focused upon assessment and treatment practices, involving fourteen female adolescents, their families and different professionals at three Youth detention homes in Sweden¹ (two assessment homes and one treatment home). Participation in the project was voluntary and could be terminated at any time. The author was present at all meetings, and careful field notes were taken. The examples presented here are drawn from a material of 18 multiparty meetings (on two out of the 18 occasions taping was not allowed) in an assessment setting. The meetings lasted between 50–120 minutes, which makes about 20 hours of recorded material.

During the adolescents’ eight week long assessments, many meetings and interviews took place. Among these, two meetings were large multiparty events (so-called network conferences) involving the adolescents and their families, the social services, and sometimes former teachers or other significant persons. Detention home staff members were also present. A network conference normally involved invited family members as well as the adolescent herself, relatives and members of the institutional network, that is, a series of participants, representing three different types of parties: (i) the adolescent herself, and normally one or several family members, (ii) referring social services staff, and (iii) Detention Home staff including various expert(s) such as psychologists. A chair, the director or some other senior official of the Detention Home led the introductory conference. During the conference, the staff in charge; the Detention Home staff, in collaboration with the referring staff, engaged in “referral talk”, trying to arrive at several provisional joint problem formulations: Why is the adolescent referred to the home and what should be done?

Then followed a four-week period during which different staff members, such as teachers, social workers, psychologists and others, together with the adolescent worked with the assessment questions. During the second network conference, these results as well as future recommendations for the adolescents were reported.
and discussed. In the analysis at hand, examples are taken from both kinds of conferences. The meetings were transcribed according to a transcription scheme, which is a simplified and slightly modified version of the system developed by Jefferson (see Atkinson and Heritage, 1984, pp.ix–xvi). Written turns are presented in *italics*. Names were fictionalized and minor omissions or changes inconsequential for the present analysis were made in the transcripts in order to protect the participants’ identities. Transcripts and tape were used simultaneously in the analytical procedure. Segments of the meetings that focused in a wide sense upon producing and reporting assessment questions were mainly chosen for detailed transcription. The analysis focuses upon situated practices and participant’s own orientations to their mutually coordinated actions. The analysis was conducted using the Swedish original and the final versions of the transcripts were translated in collaboration with a professional translator.

**The Production of Formality**

All social interaction needs to be produced. This is an enterprise in which the interactants engage by drawing on culturally available methods for the production of recognizable, or accountable, actions. The examples discussed here show how the interaction is formalized through certain types of turn allocation, or by the production of written action in combination with talk. The devices were frequently occurring in the interaction but for the present purposes their analyses will be kept to rather short examples, as the main body of the findings is devoted to what I choose to label in-formalizing devices.

**Turn Taking and Orchestration**

It was found that the chair orchestrated the interaction mainly using three types of turn allocation, here labeled allocation proper, re-allocation and pre-allocation. Orchestration, as it is used here, refers to the allocation of turns as well as the monitoring of who is to talk to whom (Aronsson & Cederborg, 1994).
Allocation Proper

First I will present an example of an allocation proper. The example below constitutes the final lines (47–51) of example 6.

Example 1 /AS10117/ Present (abbreviations used in the examples within brackets): Sofia, her parents [mom, dad], her sister [sis], her schoolteacher [tea-s], Referral staff: (social worker, [soc], family counselor, [fam], and an apprentice social worker, [appr1]), Detention Home Staff: the chair [chair], three psychologists, [psy1, psy2, psy3], Sofia’s assistant, 3 [ast], and an apprentice social worker, [appr2]. Present was also a researcher [res].

47 chair mm (. o::↑key (. let’s highlight those
mm (. o::↑kej(. då ska vi lyfta fram

48 questions thate:h (. you want (. us to
frågeställningar some:h (. ni vill (. att vi

49 ↑work with now during the assessment period
ska ↑jobba med nu under utredningstiden. och

50 and so I’m turning to Noa ((soc)) to begin with
då vänder jag mej först till Noa ((soc))

51 soc mm (. e::h we’ve split this up into three domains...
mm (. e::h vi har delat upp i tre områden...

In lines 47–49, we see how the chair sets the agenda for the meeting by actualizing its purpose, and in line 50 she explicitly gives the next turn to the social worker (Noa), who immediately and without hesitation starts to present their questions.

Re-Allocation

Another form of turn allocation used by the chair may be labeled the re-allocation of turns, whereby (s)he takes the turn away from one participant and gives it to another.

Example 2 /SA10117/ / Present (abbreviations used in the examples within brackets): Sofia, her parents [mom, dad], her sister [sis], her school teacher [tea-s], Referral staff: (social worker, [soc], family counselor, [fam], and an apprentice social worker, [appr1]), Detention Home Staff: the chair [chair], two psychologists, [psy1, psy2, psy3], Sofia’s assistant, [ast], and an apprentice social worker, [appr2]. Present was also a researcher [res].

1 soc ( ) then Sofia still has a place at
( ) sen har ju Sofia en plats fortfarande på
The Studies

2 the Rainbow school it's still there so there's
Regnbågens skola det finns alltså kvar så det är

3 nothing that ceases just because Sofia is here
ingenting som upphör bara för att Sofia är här

4 chair Have you considered whether that is-
Har ni nån undran över i fall de e-

5 soc Is correct?
E rätt?

6 chair if it's the correct educational plan or is that something
Om de e rätt skolform eller är det nåt som ni självklart

7 you know for sure so to speak
vet så att säga

8 fam well yeah well I'm thinking a little bit like this well that eh
ja asså jag tänker ju lite grann så här alltså att eh

9 would like to talk to Es [kil
jag vill prata med Esk [il

10 (soc) [mm

11 fam who is a teacher and has been sort of the main teacher
som e lärare och vatt huvudlärare

12 then for Sofia
då för Sofia litegranna

13 and he's been saying that Sofia is an easy (.)
och han har ju beskrivit att Sofia är ju en lätt (.)

14 learner and can say something about that
lård tjej och kan själv säga nånting om de

15 with respect to-
utilfrån-

16 tea-s yea:h when am l=
jae: När ska jag=

17 chair =yes I thought thate:h we could return to you
=ja jag tänkte ae vi kan återkomma till dej

In the midst of a discussion concerning whether Sofia’s future schooling also requires investigation, the following happens. The family counselor (backed by the family’s social worker) turns di-
rectly to Sofia’s schoolteacher (Eskil, lines 8–9). He starts to answer (line 16), but above all seems to seek clarification about when he is supposed to answer such a question, a phenomenon unusual for more mundane conversation (Sacks et al., 1974). As it turns out, the chair latches on to the teacher and thereby she re-allocates the turn away from the teacher. This example also demonstrates the monitoring aspects of orchestration, as the chair interferes with exchanges initiated by participants without the chair’s initiative.

Pre-Allocation of Turns

Finally I would like to give an example of the pre-allocation of turn taking in which the chair also engages.

Example 3 /ALE8112/ Present (abbreviations used in the examples within brackets): Lena, her parents [mom, dad], her grandmother [grand], her schoolteacher [tea-s], a school nurse [nurse], Referral staff: her social worker, [soc], Detention Home Staff: the chair [chair], two psychologists, [psy1, psy2], Lena’s assistant, [ast], a teacher at the home [teach] and an apprentice social worker, [appr2]. Present was also a researcher [res].

1 chair o.k? Well then (. ) we may just as well proceed to the o.k? Ja då e de (. ) Lika bra vi övergår till den andra

2 second part and= delen å=

3 psy1 =hrrhrrhpr((hawks)) =hrrhrrhpr ((harklar))

4 chair then start with you Stina ((soc)) and so well I thought då börjar me dej Stina ((soc)) å så va ja tänkte ja

5 believe that e::h questions I will write tror att e::h frågeställningar ja kommer att skriva

6 them on the whiteboard so that everyone can see, right dom på tavlan så att alla kan se de å så va

7 and then e::h (when it is finished) and everyone has då sen e::h (när man har gått runt ) å alla

8 asked their questions Lena will be given the option lämnat frågeställningar kommer Lena att få möjlighet

9 that is we will proceed through them question by question asså vi går igenom dom fråga för fråga
so that if it is unclear what question is written and so
liksom om de e oklart va de e för fråga som står där å så

if there are uncertainties there we will straighten them
om de finns oklarheter där så utreder vi

out at once “and clarify things”
direkt “och gör klart”

((chair leaves his chair, goes to the whiteboard, while this
((ordf. ämnar stolen och går till tavlan, medan detta

happens coffee is passed around the table))
sker skickas kaffet runt bordet))

What is here labeled pre-allocation is to be found in lines 8–12 after the chair has announced the agenda and presents Lena’s projected later possibility for clarification and explanation, when all the questions for the investigation have been posed. Here, receiving clarification is presented as a specified right. It may be interesting to note that in mundane conversation, this would not call for explicit announcement (Sacks et al., 1974). The example also shows how the agenda of the meeting is presented to the participants.

The Intersection of the Spoken and the Written

As seen in the former section, these forms of turn allocation resulted in more formal interaction. A second salient feature of these meetings involved the production of both spoken and written language. That is to say, in all meetings the chair used the whiteboard extensively, mainly for writing down questions (network meeting 1), which were supposed to guide the assessment of the adolescent. The whiteboard was also used for reporting back the results of the assessment and presenting the detention home’s recommendation(s) for how her problematic life-situation (meeting 2) could be dealt with in the future. This use of several semiotic systems often (but not always) shaped the interaction in formalizing ways. The next example follows only a few lines after the last turns in example 3. Note that the chair is already standing by the whiteboard.
Example 4 / ALe8112/ Present (abbreviations used in the examples within brackets): Lena, her parents [mom, dad], her grandmother [grand], her schoolteacher [tea-s], a school nurse [nurse], Referral staff: her social worker, [soc], Detention Home Staff: the chair [chair], two psychologists, [psy1, psy2], Lena’s assistant, [ast], a teacher at the home [teach] and an apprentice social worker, [appr2]. Present was also a researcher [res].

15 chair ye:ah? Please begin?
   ja?: Var så god?

16 soc ye::h? We are considering, or I am that is, it is (.5)
   ja::? Vi tänker på, eller jag då, de e ju (.5)

17 especially those underlying factors concerning Lena’s
   framförallt dom här bakomliggande faktorerna till Lenas

18 (. ) behavior
   ( ) beteende

19 chair y[e:ah
   j [a:

20 psy1 [huhu ((cough))
   [huhu((hostning))

21 soc has developed in a for her (.5) as I see it destructive
   har utvecklats till för henne (.5) jag tycker destruktivt

22 way (. )
   sätt (. )

23 chair well eh we:ll
   jaha eh in:

24 soc as to wha is wha it is that well- (. ) has resulted in or does
   för va åe va de år för ja- ( ) har gjort eller

25 result in so (. ) destructive (. ) both during school and
   gör så att det blir så ( ) destruktivt ( ) både me skola

26 and (. ) spare time.
   och ( . ) fritid.

27 chair we:ll? Could we? Well is it possible to be a bit
   ja?: Kan vi? Asså e de möjlit att vara lite

28 more (. ) that is (. ) destructive and so that is very=
   mer ( . ) asså e:h ( . ) destruktiv å så de e väldit=

29 psy1 =huh ((cough))
   =huh((hostning))
The Studies

30 soc  eh [m yes to
 m [m ja att

31 chair   [large issue so  [to speak-
P[stort område om man  [säger så –

32 soc        [well and yes it is of course
 [ja och jo de åe de ju

33  (1.5)

34 but if one may say this tendency that she hurts her self
men om man säger den här tendensen att hon skadar sej

35 when she gets ↑angry
↑själv när hon blir ↑arg

36 chair  what did you say? ((turns head))
vad så du? ((turns head))

37 soc  that she hu[rts herself when she gets angry
att hon ska[dar sej själv när hon blir arg

38 chair  [aha
[aha

39  (1)

40 soc why?
varför?

41 chair  ((writes:why does Lena hurt herself when she gets
((skriver:Varför skadar Lena sig själv när hon blir

42 angry)) ye:s?
arg))ja:

43 soc  and by that I wonder too (.) who it is she is really
och i det undrar jag ju med (.) vem de e hon skadar

44 hurting
egentligen

45 chair  ehm ((writes: towards whom is she directing her action))
mm ((skriver:vem riktar hon sin handling emot)

46 that is whom is she directing her action eh=
asså vem riktar hon sin handling eh=

47 soc  =towards yeah
=mot ja
This sequence demonstrates the impact of the intersection between the written and the spoken mode of interaction. This impact is demonstrated using three main devices: specification of questions, the chair’s orientation towards dictation and the other participants’ (here mainly the social worker’s) orientation towards the white board and the felt pen. The social worker and chair cooperate on this issue. Let us consider this in some detail:

After being given the turn (line 15), the social worker produces a question concerning the “underlying factors of Lena’s behavior” (lines 16–18) and its destructiveness (21–26). For our present purposes, however, the interesting part emerges in line 27 when she is asked by the chair to specify the issue of being destructive, as the chair puts it: “large issue so to speak” (line 31). The social worker then exemplifies in line 34–35 with: “this tendency that she hurts her↑self when she gets angry”. Immediately after finishing her question, she is prompted to clarify her statement by the chair who also turns towards her. She then repeats her utterance but with two changes. In the repeated question, the pre-positioned “tendency” is excluded. It may be that the expression “this tendency” is not considered proper enough for dictation. Because, as I see it, this exchange shows the chair’s orientation towards taking dictation and the social worker’s orientation towards him holding the whiteboard pen. It seems as though this is the way the social worker understands the chair’s request for a clarification. It is replaced by a post-positioned “why?” (line 40), which is also the first word in the question the chair is writing and which in fact is the next turn. Worth noting is also that it is not until the chair’s “yes?” in line 42 that the rest of the question is produced, “who it is she is really hurting” (lines 43–44). When written, this is transformed and concretized into “towards whom is she directing her action”. As seen in line 46, the chair paraphrases his own writing. While it seems as though writing on the whiteboard freezes the turn tak-
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ing, paraphrasing defrosts it and re-installs the regular turn-taking patterns. The next example will demonstrate how the interplay between written and spoken language may differ (among other things) in terms of lexical choice.

Example 5 /AS10117/ Present (abbreviations used in the examples within brackets): Sofia, her parents [mom, dad], her sister [sis], her schoolteacher [tea-s], Referral staff: (social worker, [soc], family counselor, [fam], and an apprentice social worker, [appr1]), Detention Home Staff: the chair [chair], two psychologists, [psy1, psy2, psy3], Sofia's assistant, [ast], and an apprentice social worker, [appr2]. Present was also a researcher [res].

1 soc Sofia often says that she hates her parents and we
Sofia hon säger ofta att hon hatar sina föräldrar och vi

2 wonder what is behind this statement (.)
undrar vad som ligger i detta uttalande (.)

3 chair Yes, o:.k what does it mean
Ja, o:.k vad de betyder

4 soc What it stands for, what it stands for
Va de står för, va de står för

5 chair ((writing)) Sofia sometimes expresses very strong
((skriver)) Vad står det för att Sofia emellanåt

6 negative feelings towards her parents. What does it
uttrycker mycket starka negativa känslor gentemot sina

7 stand for. O.k I just scribble a bit sloppily but I'll
föräldrar. O.k nu skriver jag lite slarvigt men jag

8 (what) does it mean ((points at an unclear word
ska (vad) betyder det ((pekar på otydligt skrivet ord på

9 on the board)) Sofia sometimes expresses very strong
tavlan)) Vad står det för att Sofia emellanåt

10 negative feelings towards her parents What does it
uttrycker mycket starka negativa känslor gentemot sina

11 stand for? will that do?
föräldrar. E de nog så?

12 soc yeh-
ja-

13 chair mm
mm
This example illustrates the complex interplay between the spoken and the written actions of the participants. One issue that emerges here is that of formality: Is it the case that spoken actions are less formal than written ones? Earlier research in legal (c.f. Cicourel, 1967/1995, Linell & Jönsson, 1991) or psychiatric settings (Hak, 1992), for example, has shown that written documentation tends to constrain and formalize what has been arrived at through interaction. More recently, Houtkoop-Steenstra and Antaki (1997) and Houtkoop-Stenstra (2000) have described in detail how the fixed survey interview format influences or even constrains the spoken exchanges. These studies differ substantially from the present data in the sense that the production of written questions is irremediably intertwined in real time with the spoken versions.

Let us further look into this issue. The formalization of the social worker’s issue in line 1 has an interesting upshot in terms of the representation of the problems to be examined (further) at the assessment home. Sofia now does not simply “hate her parents” (line 1), she “sometimes expresses very strong negative feelings” (lines 5–6) toward them, thus the very strong vernacular formulation “hate” is glossed in the written version as a more formal, and perhaps less threatening formulation (note the insertion of “sometimes”). Hence, the written mode facilitates the formalization of the spoken statements and questions. Note that this is not merely an analytical observation of formal properties of language, but rather that the reformulation is oriented to by the chair herself in line 8–9; after she has finished writing, she provides an account for her sloppy writing.

Now, I would argue that in orienting to her “sloppy” way of writing she does not just comment upon his handwriting, but rather crucially comments upon the very practice of writing on the board. Importantly, this is a way of in-formalizing the written version—and it implies an orientation to her previous formalization of the problem. Furthermore she clarifies that version and asks directly if it is acceptable by the social welfare agents in a way that casts a preferred agreement in the next turn (line 11).

To summarize the argument, it seems that in this context, writ-
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ing is an activity that is bound to “doing chairing”. Everyone who is orienting towards the writing person also orients to her as being the chair. This gives the chair the unique possession of two different semiotic systems. In creating an artifact omnipresent and visible for all, the use of the written mode seems to enhance formality in at least two ways. First, when use written and the spoken actions are as intertwined as in the present case, the written mode seems to have a special turn status. As it seems, it is the chair’s work to take a written transition relevant place (TRP) and start talking. As it seems, the chair’s written turn must be completed by her/him with the help of a spoken turn before ordinary turn taking may continue.

Second, the written mode can, but need not, provide for a shift into a more formal language. In example 5, the chair formalizes the question in her writing. Such formalized language makes the questions posed seem more neutral and free from personal interests (less stake) and ultimately more trustworthy (Potter, 1996a). But, and this is important, written language does not always get formalized here. In example 4 questions are more directly dictated. Although the formalizing aspects were indeed frequent (cf. examples 1–5) in the present data, the interactional production of informality or even “de-institutionalizing” events was also a prominent feature of the interaction. The remaining part of the present paper presents an analysis of what I will call in-formalizing devices.

The Production of Informality

The former section demonstrated how the use of the written mode could, but need not, produce more formal interaction. As mentioned earlier, many studies on “talk at work” have focused upon its goal-orientated nature and how one device in approaching this may be the use of different formalizing constraints. But the production of informality may be just as goal oriented. It may be, however, that other methods are required to detect it. This is, for example, found in research on focus groups where the moderator,
seemingly in order to make the participants feel at ease with their forthcoming task, may refer to the difference between presenting school work (and as a consequence being examined) and the responses expected from the participants in focus groups, where the participants’ immediate reactions and sensations are the required responses (Potter and Puchta, in press).

Small Talk, Agenda Talk and the Institutional Order

This example is taken from the very beginning of a meeting just after the participants have introduced themselves.

Example 6 /SA10117/ Present (abbreviations used in the examples within brackets): Her parents [mom, dad], her sister [sis], her schoolteacher [tea-s], Referral staff: (social worker, [soc], family counselor, [fam], and an apprentice social worker, [appr1]), Detention Home Staff: the chair [chair], two psychologists, [psy1, psy2, psy3], Sofia’s assistant, [ast], and an apprentice social worker, [appr2]. Present was also a researcher [res].

1 chair ...but maybe the ↑ rest of you want. Fill up ...men ni ↑ andra kanske vill ha. Fyll på innan

2 before we begin with the vi ska börja med

3 questions and stuff. frågeställningarna och så.

4 fam “e:h have some more coffee°
   ºe:h ta mer fikaº

5 ((whispering, looks at Sofia’s mom))
   ((viskar, tittar på Sofias mamma))

6 mom yeah ja

7 chair are we out of ↑lemonade or no there’s some ºin är saften ↑ slut eller nå det fanns ºi

8 that one °
   den där®

9 (1)

10 chair this was a re:ally go:od cake
det här va jättego kaka
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11 appr1 ((waving for coffeepot))
   ((vinkar till sig kaffekannan))

12 appr2 yeh wa [s’n’t it)
   vi st (var det)

13 (dad)   [e- eeh
   [ä- åhn

14 res     [hrnhm milk too? ((to appr1))
   [hrmhrm mjölk också? ((till appr1))

15 ast     [>(should) I have< another cake?
   [>(ska) man t< en kaka till?

16         [((po ur [ing ))
   [((håll [ande))

17 teach   [the cup (here) (. ) delicious cookies Sofia!
   [koppen (här) (. ) goda kakor Sofia!

18 Sofia  wha?
   va?

19 teach  very good cakes
   mycket goda kakor

20 psy1  yeh that one’s real good! didya try: them
   ja den var jättegod! hardu smakat på den

21         yourself? ((gaze shifts from teach to Sofia))
   själv? ((skiftar ögonkontakt till Sofia))

22 Sofia  ((shakes head))
   ((skakar på huvudet))

23 psy1  you haven’t? you don’t dare or what?
   du har änte de? du vågar änte?

24 mom   have some more coffee Mats? (dad)
   ska du ha mer kaffe Mats (dad)?

25 Sofia no I don’t wanna
   nå ja vill inte ha

26 mom   why not?
   varför änte då?

27 dad   nah she’s like ( ) taste ( ) got
   nå hon ja e: ( ) smaken. ( ) har

28 (?)   ( )
29 many hehehehehehe ((in unison))

30 mom well there's the risk you might get (full)
det kan ju hända att man blir (mätt)

31 No! its heavy that one ((looks at thermos))
Nå! den e tung den ((tittar på termos))

32 fam Mats ((dad)) have you got coffee?
Mats ((dad)) har du kaffe då?

33 dad thanks I'll pass thanks
tack jag står över tack

34 fam is that right?
de gör du?

35 dad yes
ja

36 fam why is that?
varför det?

37 dad here's no more in here
här är inte mer

38 many hehe heiheh (in unison))

39 ast ( ) complaint ( )
( ) klagomål ( )

40 fam well that's none of our problems then
det är änte inte vårt bekymmer då ju

41 ast well no I was wondering
nå jag undrade

42 (1)

43 fam I thought I'd have some ‘cause I won’t be left without
jag tänkte jag tar för jag ska änte va utan

44 (ast) nah
nå

45 psy1 ehhehehehe

46 soc nope (x)
nå (x)

47 chair mm (. ) o::↑key (. ) let’s highlight those
mm (. ) o::↑kei(.) då ska vi lyfta fram
The chair offers the participants more to eat and drink before pre-announcing an immanent change in the group’s activity, that there are questions to come, i.e., announcing an organizational activity. But first she invites the participants to engage in other issues.

In light of the chair’s announcement that there are questions to follow later on, this coffee talk can be seen as an instance of collaborative work towards non-institutional talk within an institutional setting. The participants seem to engage in “doing being at a coffee-party”. This is shown in both the extensive overlaps and the many parallel communicative exchanges. But most salient is the repeated praising of Sofia’s baking skills in ways that are clearly hearable as compliments. In lines 4–16, the adult participants are engaged in what I will label the “cozy-coffee project”, which is characterized by extensive overlaps and talk about nothing but coffee and cake.

The family therapist, sitting next to Sofia’s mom, immediately picks up the chair’s hosting manners and, whispering, invites Sofia’s mom to have some more coffee, which she accepts (lines 4–6). The chair again acts as a hostess, reassuring herself that there is enough lemonade. She then finishes her utterance with a positive pre-positioned assessment (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992) of the cake: “this was a really good cake” (line 10).

In a discussion concerning different forms of assessments, Goodwin and Goodwin (1992) found an interesting tendency. In social interaction, chances that the co-participants will pick up and continue increase when the assessment is positioned before the object being assessed. This happens here as well. The assessment is
first picked up and ratified by apprentice2 (line 12), who again employs a format designed to elicit a second assessment, and then by the assistant, who in a rhetorical question even considers having another piece. But something new enters the discourse in line 17. When, the teacher expresses his appreciation of the cake directly to Sofia (the baker), Sofia offers a minimalist response “wha”? (line 18). Thereby he can perhaps be seen as trying to recruit Sofia’s participation in the cozy coffee project, as she has been silent up to this point. The teacher stresses his appreciation in a more emphasized fashion: “very good cakes” (line 19).

This contribution is yet again piggybacked (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1990) by the psychologist (line 20), who uses the piggyback position to produce a direct question to Sofia: “didya try: them yourself?” (lines 20–21). The response from Sofia is a negative shake of the head, to which the psychologist replies with a tease: “you haven’t? you don’t dare or what?” (line 23). This tease may serve as an other-repair correction (Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks, 1977) in order not to threaten “the non-institutional cozy project going on”. The tease receives a po-faced response (Drew, 1987) in line 25: “no I don’t wanna”. So, whereas Sofia’s response in line 22 displayed mere non-involvement in the coffee-talk, her response in line 25 can be seen as an open rejection of the stream of compliments that may be seen as a part of the “cozy coffee-talk” project. Sofia’s po-faced response in line 25 may be seen as displaying open reluctance to be a part of all that.

Such an interpretation may find support in lines 26–27, in which her parents engage in a short sequence related to Sofia’s actions. Of special interest here is that Sofia’s mother questions her reasons, i.e., she is asking her directly why she will not have some cake. But it is her father who provides an answer, relieving Sofia of the responsibility to answer, orienting, in this way, towards a negative projection of her non-response. But the cozy project continues from line 30 until line 46, the difference being that Sofia is no longer addressed, possibly due to her marked reluctance to take part in the cozy-coffee talk. Certainly she does not initiate any exchange with the others.

Ultimately, the chair definitely transforms the interaction by
establishing the main agenda and the questions to be examined during the assessment period (in line 47). By virtue of the pre-announcement made more than 40 lines earlier (lines 2–3), the prolonged “oːː↑kej” with its emphasis and rising intonation, followed by the pause, functions as a terminator of all coffee-talk. The following pause may serve multiple functions. First, it further marks the transformation, while at the same time allowing the others to terminate all other activities such as finishing coffee, cookies or small-talk with their neighbors. Second, it also makes them pay attention to the very work-related next utterance in which the subsequent task is specified. The chair then explicitly allocates the fist request to one of the social workers. These lines constitute the very transformation of the cozy-coffee project into task-focused institutional talk, which is finally ratified in line 51, as the social worker responds to the chair’s request.

What is interesting is that, in comparison with analyses from focus group settings where focus was mainly upon the moderator as a producer of informality (Potter & Puchta, in press), in the present setting this was quite a collaborative achievement (with the exception of Sofia). So, this example shows not only the work required to create “institutionality” within this particular setting, in this case by the help of in-formalizing devices, but also how Sofia’s oppositions to small talk reveal how this part of the encounter is, in fact, part of an altogether different order.

Violation of the Normative Institutional Order

The next example concerns a so-called deviant case (Peräkylä, 1997; Potter, 1996b). A central aim for qualitative research approaches to the study of text and talk as social practices, is to identify regular patterns in talk-in-interaction (cf. the turn taking machinery). When something unexpected (for the participants) happens in the interaction, it is often worth investigating participants’ ways of dealing with the unexpected occurrence as this may give information not just about this irregularity but crucially about the normative conduct, that is the mutually oriented to values underlying participants’ expectations as to what should have
Thus, the following example demonstrates something unique, but not simply because a request for a cigarette break only occurred once in all of the meetings I attended. Rather, its uniqueness is demonstrated by the way in which the participants handle the request. It is taken from the second meeting concerning Linda, immediately after the results of her assessment were presented. The example shows how a “seen but unnoticed” institutional order suddenly becomes very explicit when it is violated. It also shows the extensive work required by the participants who wish to temporally bracket the order, as well as by institutional representatives whose actions strive to restore the self-same order.

Example 7 /ALI6210/ Present (abbreviations used in the examples within brackets): Linda, her parents [mom, dad], Referral staff: (social worker, [soc], Detention Home Staff: the chair [chair], Linda’s assistant, [ast]. Present was also a researcher [res].

1 chair °.eehwell then before well°
°.hhjo sen innan ja°

2 (?) well eh
ja eh

3 (2.5)

4 chair that was it (.) °dormitory° (.) (in) school(.) psychologist°
det var det (.) °avdelning (.) (på) skolan (.) psykolog°

5 (3) ((looks down at paper))
(3) ((tittar ner på papper))

6 then we may proceed with ↑e::h (.) the
då kan vi övergå till↑e::h (.)

7 recommen↓dations
rekommande↓tionerna

8 dad time for a smoke
nu tar vi røgpaus.

9 chair >sorry?<
>vasa?<

10 dad its time for a smoke
nu tar vi røgpaus.
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11 chair before?
innan?

12 dad I said it’s time for a SMOKE
nu tar vi RØ:GPAUS så ja

13 chair yea:h [(x)
ja: [(x)

14 dad you:e:h you got snu:ff in your mouth (pointing at
[do e:h do har: snu:s i monnen ((pek på
15 chair) (. you got snuff in your mo(uth ((at L.s assist))
du har snus i monnen ((mot Ls kontaktman))

16 ast [tiheheh
[tihhe

17 dad that gives us the right to a smoke Søren
då har vi raett att gaa ud aa røge Søren

18 (?) hehe

19 (?) [hehe

20 (?) hehe[h

21 ast (.Su[ne

22 chair [(

23 dad well doesn’t it? what’s FAIR is FAIR
har vi inte det va? RÄTT ska va RÄTT

24 many HEHEHEH ((in unison))

25 chair I heh couldheh take hehmhe out?
jag heh kan heh ta ut minheh?

26 dad we’ve seen you twice now, oneandahalf ho:urs
nu har vi varit inne hos dej tvaa ganger, enochen halv

27 each time, you put one >right into< your mo:uth,
ti:me hvar gangdu tar >raett i< mu:nen, aa saa bar

28 and then you just finish and >intothe< mo:uth it goes
avslutar du en aa saa >ini< mu:nen

29 you don’t think about the rest of us
du tänker inte på vi andra

30 chair “no you’re right”
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“nå du har rätt”

31 dad isn’t that so?
är det inte rätt?

32 chair yes it is
jo det är rätt

33 dad that’s correct. let’s go then ((people leaving table))
det är riktigt. då gaar vi ((folk reser sig))

34 chair let’s take a break then. ° maybe you can turn that off now°
då tar vi en paus.°du kanske kan stänga av den där nu°

35 (10 min)

36 dad you (have to) get that right there’s nothing more (than)
ni fattar det det är (ju) inte något annat me (det) där

37 that sitting a couple of hours not smoking but it’s
å sitta ett par timmar inte röka men det

38 (.) its just so funny people who sit there with snuff they
(. ) det är bara så roligt folk som sitter och snuser de

39 don’t think about-
tänker inte på att-

40 many °heheh°

41 (2)

42 chair °no that’s right°
°nå det är riktigt°

43 soc it’s the same craving
det är ju samma begär

44 chair yeh
ja

45 many °heheh°

46 (2)

47 chair ehmm (. ) yea:h
hmm (. ) ja:

48 (3)

49 chair well then based on these different (. ) assessments…
utifrån de här olika del (. ) utredningarna då så…
The example begins with the chair looking down at his checklist, talking in a low voice apparently checking that he has not forgotten to report any of the assessments to the group. After a rather long pause, he continues in line 7 in a normal voice with an announcement that summarizes what this institution (detention home) does – it gives recommendations. – “we may then proceed with ↑e::h (. ) the recommen↓dations”.

Now, using “we” for this announcement implies that he is speaking for more persons than himself. Also, offering treatment recommendations is an activity bound to the institution’s staff: it is part of this particular organization’s agenda. As I see it, these two features give the delivery of this utterance a recognizably institutional character. It is at this point that Linda’s father delivers a series of requests, proposing that the entire group take a cigarette break:

- dad  time for a smoke
- chair  ↓>sorry?<
- dad  its time for a smoke
- chair  before?
- dad  I said it’s time for a SMOKE
- chair  yeah [(x)

Perhaps this series of requests entails a misunderstanding between the father and the chair. Clearly, as the request is not immediately granted, perhaps even questioned, the father points out that certain individuals in the group are using snuff as they speak (lines 14–15). That is to say, they are allegedly already engaged in a non-institutional practice, in the sense that using snuff is not a goal-oriented activity of this meeting where the upcoming part of the agenda is to present recommendations (line 6–7). Here the father engages in a sort of moral reasoning that is essentially non-institutional and involves the idea that all participants have a right to their habits.

His conclusion in line 17 is met by laughter from several participants around the table, whereupon he reformulates his moral case as a direct question in line 23, which is also met by collective laughter. Everyone present, including those laughing, are orienting towards the father’s request as a violation of an unspoken norm (see
also chapter 6, on the functions of laughter). When the laughter becomes upgraded in lines 16, 18–20 and finally in 24, the father’s presentation of his moral case is gaining intensity, in that he explicitly spells out the injustice taking place. Moreover, he seems to hold the chair directly accountable for this minor injustice, pointing out that the chair himself is recurrently engaging in non-institutional activities by snuffing. That is to say, he is implicitly accusing the chair of being ignorant to other participants’ needs, while looking after his own habits. In sum, he is not merely delivering moral justifications for a cigarette break. He is in fact criticizing the chair’s way of conducting the organization’s work.

Note that this elaborate account of the morally asymmetrical practice does not elicit any laughter from the participants. More interestingly, the chair, who was the target of the accusation, “pleads guilty” (line 30) by producing a half-mumbled admission that the father is right. At this point, however, this no longer satisfies the father, and he demands a more convincing admission by asking whether his reasoning is not correct. Granted this, Linda’s father rests his case in line 33, suggesting that they take that break now – “that is correct. let’s go then”.

We might finally note that the chair wraps up this phase of the meeting by announcing a recess, possibly implying that the task of dismissing the group is, after all, the chair’s and not the father’s work (line 34). In a sense then, he is restoring the institutional order.

To sum up this section on the production of informality, the first example illustrated a very routine activity; the initial coffee drinking and cake or sandwich eating took place during every meeting I attended. In contrast, a request for a cigarette break occurred only once. These two examples reveal a range of practices we may relevantly gloss as institutional. I would like to argue that the extensive work required for the father to reach his goal – a cigarette break – shows that producing informality is the chair’s work. Indeed this seems to be what Garfinkel (1967/1984) would call a breaching episode: an instance that reveals and elaborates the “seen but unnoticed” social order. Informality, as it seems, is not for the clients to initiate during the conference meetings. It is the
chair’s work.

Drawing on my field notes, I would finally like to show that what from an outside point of view may seem like “institutional” discourse may very well flow into “non-institutional” small talk as well. During another meeting, I was too busy taking notes to eat the cake that another adolescent, Kajsa, had baked. Just as people were leaving the meeting, she asked me whether I was going to taste it, and I accepted a piece. While I was eating, Kajsa looked at me and asked: –well may I have an assessment? (Swe: “nå kan man få ett utlätande”?). It is highly unlikely that Kajsa’s question would have been posed in this particular way if the exchange took place elsewhere. Doing assessments is an activity bound to the work conducted at the detention home. Unless you were a health inspector in restaurants you would not be assessing food. The event is mentioned here as it also offers an anecdotal demonstration that the closure of the conference meeting proper opens up a possibility for Kajsa to comment upon the preceding meeting and particularly, its formal character.

Concluding Discussion

Previous research engaged in capturing “this thing called institutionality” concerned the production of formality concentrating on various features constraining the discourse. Along these lines the present study has highlighted devices that serve to attune social organization to particular organizational goals. Several of these devices were of a formalizing nature. For instance, particular forms of the chair’s turn allocation and her/his use of the written mode served the organization and helped its representatives do their work. These results follow the line of studies and concerned with the relation between formality and “institutional” interaction (for typical examples see Drew and Heritage, 1992).

Much less explored, however, is the systematic production of informality that also took place in the present setting. The accomplishment of informality seemed to facilitate organization’s goals
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as well. It was found, however, that informal episodes should preferably be introduced by the detention home staff. A detailed examination of a deviant case (example 7) shows that when an informal event is initiated by a layperson, this is treated as an extraordinary occurrence and calls for some elaborate negotiation. Accomplishing informality or in-formalizing talk was a somewhat subtle enterprise in several ways. The two transcripts exemplifying how informality is produced show the elaborate work involved in this enterprise. They demonstrate the collaborative production of informal interaction via different trajectories of talk, pointing to such phenomena as whispering among a few of the participants or the praising of the cake. Notably, and in contrast to the formal events at the meetings, these different local projects evolved into parallel exchanges. In sum, these phenomena worked together to shape the informality of the event.

In spite of these events, on a more general level members were found to orient to these meetings as basically formal occasions. This was analytically demonstrated in terms of the participants’ ways of participating in the flow of talk. An important aspect of this was found in their orientation to the chair’s orchestration of the interaction in accordance with a meeting agenda, rather than towards a turn-taking machinery prototypical for mundane interaction (Sacks et al., 1974).

What seems to be at play here then, is a particular type of preference structure related to the type of event initiated by the chair. For instance, in the cozy-coffee event the preferred form of interaction seems to follow the lines of mundane social encounters, as evidenced by the participants’ ways of accounting for Sofia’s rejection of the cake and her minimal involvement in the interaction. In other words, a bracketing of the institutional setting as a relevant feature of talk seems to be crucial here. In contrast, during the rest of the meetings devoted to problem formulation and questioning, participation was normatively organized by the chair’s different ways of allocating turns, including her/his ways of using the whiteboard to formulate and document question. As we have seen in example 7, deviations from this norm generated elaborate negotiation, involving an array of accounting and repair moves, thus
strengthening the notion of a specific preference structure.

Finally and in conclusion, the analyses revealed an array of methods for the production of institutional talk with the help of both formalizing, and in-formalizing devices. In the present case, this institutional talk resulted in a product, a document consisting of several questions that were to guide the young person’s further assessment. Importantly this document was co-produced by the participants attending the network conference. These conferences took place at a crossroad for different institutions, as well as the family and sometimes other laypersons. Together the participants defined and re-construed the adolescents’ problems and strived to agree upon what needs to be done. It was argued that such a co-production of a regulating document constitutes a specifically institutional (and institutionalized) practice. Thus, the forms of interaction through which the assessment questions were formulated provide for the description of these conference meetings as specifically institutional encounters. Conversely, the analytical description of “institutionality” is ultimately grounded in member’s tailoring of actions and the orientation of these actions toward the norms and expectations regarding the organization’s business proper.

Notes

1 Swe: Särskilda Ungdomshem.
2 Note that, with an exception of the adolescents under assessment and their parents, abbreviations refer to occupational identities. This may seem like an odd choice given the theoretical views presented in the introduction. But bearing in mind the membership categorization already made by this procedure, this naming system was still chosen in order to help the reader. See also the discussion between Schegloff and Billig on these and other issues concerned with contextualization in Discourse & Society (1999).
3 Swe: behandlingsassistent, kontaktman.
4 See also Peräkylä (1997) for a more elaborated discussion on deviant case analysis and its relations with reliability and validity.
5 /KA528/
6 Note that the Swedish equivalent to the English term “assessment” (utlätande) is used much more formally than in English. It would not normally be used in everyday conversation.
But see Hester and Francis (2000a, 2000b) critique of Drew and Heritage’s claims (1992), that “professional” lexical choice on behalf of lay persons should automatically imply an orientation to institutionality. This may sometimes be the case of course, but as Hester and Francis argue, as a presupposition it pays too little attention to the local context and becomes theory driven. Thus it becomes an analyst’s concern in the first place, not the participants.
Assessment Narratives and the Editing of “Social Facts”: Narrative Tense and Voice in Contrasting Versions of a Social Work Case*

Abstract: An important aspect of the manufacturing of assessment “facts” is for institutional representatives to construct descriptions that will withstand the critical scrutiny of other parties concerned. The present data are taken from a “referral talk” network conference, involving a female adolescent and two groups of professionals, concerning the nature and seriousness of her alleged troubles. This paper examines how lexicon, tense, and grammatical voice are re-worked in two contrasting account versions, altering the facts about her past actions and projecting different institutional identities. These identities are partly bound to distinct ways of locating the adolescent’s ascribed target actions in narrative time. Further, whether an action is cast in an active or passive mode makes a difference. Such agentive shifts project different ideas about her accountability, e.g. of her as a responsible/irresponsible person. In their reformulations and editing work, the two categories of institutional representatives can be seen to orient to the social implications of such formal variations in their choices of verb tense or grammatical voice. Shifts in focus are accomplished through extensive editing work, in particular by the chair, who partly adopts a mediating position aligning with the adolescent.

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**Narrative, Accountability and Temporality**

In this paper, we will discuss narrative accounts, presented by two categories of professionals (referring staff versus Youth Detention Home staff) in a so called network conference in a Youth Detention Home (*Särskilt ungdomshem*). This setting was chosen as a research site, as it is a type of multiparty setting where talk is highly consequential for the young person under assessment, that is, what is said and not said often has important implications for placement (home/institution) and for treatment.

To construe assessments, that locate or relocate relational trouble is the delicate business of a number of societal institutions, for instance, marital counselling (Buttny, 1993; Edwards, 1995). In several studies of therapy talk, part of the therapy involves the negotiation and renegotiation of “what is the problem” (Aronsson & Cederborg, 1996; Peyrot, 1987). Within such discussions, assessments and other person descriptions of persons are consequential for the parties at hand. Similarly, school conferences involve negotiations about social descriptions that are potentially important for the parties as such (Mehan, 1993).

In Sweden today, network conferences are popular organizational instruments in assessment and other evaluative practices both in psychiatry and social work. In Swedish psychiatric contexts, as well as in the present data, a Youth Detention Home, network conference are recurrently assembled because of some type of alleged trouble or problem in one of the participant’s lives. Such network meetings are, similarly highly consequential for the young person concerned. There is much at stake, as in the present case, where the results of the assessments could, for instance, mean a difference between continuing to live in a state institution or going back to living at home. Yet, in the present data which cover a series of network meetings in Youth Detention Homes, these meetings normally (although this did happen) did not turn into debates between the adolescent himself/herself and other parties. Instead, the standard scenario involved prolonged argumentations between two types of staff members, referral staff, on the one hand, and Youth Detention Home staff, on the
other. In this paper, we try to analyze the type of discursive devices that were drawn on in these negotiations. Also, we try to understand how the conversations can be linked to institutional interests and to institutional constraints in multiparty settings, trying to link our data to a discursive study of institutions.

In particular, we will discuss how different descriptions recurrently involved contrasting versions of reality. Much work within ethnomethodology has featured analyses of contrasting versions (Cuff, 1994). Moreover, analysis of different versions of reality is a key feature of discursive psychology (Edward & Potter, 2001).

In our analyses of the descriptions in the present data, we will demonstrate how such contrasting versions recurrently draw on a rhetorical exploitation of grammatical features, e.g. passive mode/active mode and speaker voice, or past tense versus present tense. Also, they may exploit subtle lexical down- or upgradings, as in what Pomerantz (1986) has called extreme case formulations. Our point is not that some special set of grammatical features implies alignment and some other set disalignment with a co-participant. In the present context, an important empirical point of departure is simply that open conflicts were quite rare in the present data corpus of network conferences. Yet, the two types of institutional representatives (Referral staff/Youth Detention Home staff) displayed different alignments through subtle contrastive uses of narrative features that produced relatively different accounts of past events, in ways that projected distinctly different identities for the young person under assessment (e.g. as more or less agentive in causing her alleged past troubles).

In multiparty contexts, an important aspect of the manufacturing of facts is for professionals to construe assessments that will withstand the critical scrutiny of other interested parties. The professionals must retrieve social “facts”, and they must be able to back them up in such a way that they are not immediately undermined by other parties who have a stake in the running of the case (for economic or other bureaucratic reasons).

Ascriptions with a bearing on treatment or other important consequences normally do not occur without premediating social
negotiations with the involved co-present parties. In the present work, our analyses concern accountability as an interactional phenomenon, drawing on insights from ethnomethodology (Sacks, 1992) and discursive psychology (Edwards, 1997; Potter, 1996a), foregrounding the role of negotiations concerning the allocation of responsibility and blame. Thus, accountability is treated as an inherently interactional concept (Buttny, 1993; Edwards, 1995; Potter, 1996a).

In this paper, we will analyse such counter-moves. In particular, we will analyse to what extent one aspect of identity work, challenges of ascribed social identity categorizations of a third party, can, in fact, be understood in terms of distinct temporal orders in narratives within “referral talk”, that is, talk concerning institutional categorizations with social implications for the person under assessment (cf. Hester, 1998). Some time ago, Schutz and Luckmann (1973) pointed out how temporal orders are often also moral orders. Is it possible to see social identity as a phenomenon that is partly bound to distinct ways of treating time in narratives? Time is a central dimension in the organisation of narratives, and structural aspects of the temporal organisation of narratives carry implicit moral messages (Gennette, 1980; Ricoeur, 1988). In our present investigation, we thus ask if the participants at conference meetings are concerned about time in distinctly different ways.

Yet, our primary overall question concerns the type of identity work that is accomplished through contrasting narratives in a multiparty context. To what extent do different institutional representatives present narrative accounts or narratives that project distinct identities? In what ways does any of the participants assume the position of spokesman of the person under assessment? Is this position bound to distinct institutional representatives or do different staff members act in random ways?

It has recently been argued that we should not look for what type of identity is at play, but “when and how identities are used” (Widdicombe, 1998, p. 195). In this paper, we will specifically address the issues of how identity is displayed in institutional narratives, and through what temporal contingencies: the past, present
or future, and through what type of grammatical voice. In institutional assessment settings, social identities are largely ascribed and negotiated as part of the conversational business at hand: for instance, diagnosis or blame allocations, as well as resistance towards such categorizations (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998b; Drew & Heritage, 1992b). Social identity is thus not discussed in terms of fixed social categories, but in terms of the work invested in negotiating and renegotiating such categories.

Data and Setting

The present data are part of a corpus belonging to a project focused upon assessment talk at Youth Detention Homes in Sweden. Participation in the project was voluntary and could be terminated at any time. The second author was present at all meetings, and careful field notes were taken. The case from which the present examples are drawn involves a material of 18 multiparty meetings, which lasted between 50–120 minutes, covering about 20 hours of recorded material. The present case is something of a standard case in the data at large in that assessment talk recurrently involved contrasting versions of accounts and narratives, where the two types of staff often adopted different positions.

The young person under assessment (girl/young woman 13–17 years of age) was always present at the meeting, and our initial research focus was on her voice. Yet, in most cases, she did not talk much in this type of multiparty setting (with 7 to 15 persons present (including the researcher), involving a large group of professionals, and where important decisions were at stake. Gradually, we therefore also focused on what was going on in terms of multiparty communication, and on what that might mean for the persons under assessment.

A network conference normally involved the adolescent herself, invited family members as well as relatives and institutional network members, that is, a series of participants, representing three different types of parties: (i) the adolescent and one or sev-
eral of her family members, (ii) referring staff, and (iii) Detention Home staff including expert(s) such as psychologists. All network meetings were initiated by the Detention Home and chaired by one of their senior staff members (a female chair in the present case). During the conference, the participants engaged in “referral talk”, trying to arrive at a provisional joint problem formulation: Why is the adolescent referred to the home and what is to be done?

The present network conference involved a 15-year-old, Sofia, who was referred to the Home for truancy and for keeping company with older youth in the so-called risk-zone. Co-present at the conference were 15 persons: Sofia’s school-teacher (teach), referral staff (social worker, soc, family counsellor, fam, and an apprentice social worker, appr1), Detention Home Staff (chair, three psychologists, psy1, psy 2, psy3, Sofia’s assistant, ast (kontaktman), and an apprentice social worker, appr2), and lastly Sofia herself and her parents (mom, dad), her sister (sis). Present was also a researcher (res).

The recordings were transcribed according to a simplified and slightly modified version of the transcription scheme, developed by Jefferson (see Atkinson & Heritage, 1984). Names have been fictionalized and a few minor omissions or changes have been made in order to protect the participants’ anonymity.

Contrasting Narratives and Institutional Identities

The ultimate purpose of referral talk in the network conferences was to formulate questions relevant to the assessment of the adolescents. Many questions in the present case were therefore more or less explicitly related to the assessment of Sofia’s character, and whether she would benefit from institutional care. In the following, we will try to demonstrate how both parties – the Social Welfare Agency staff, that is, the referring staff, as one party, and the chair and other Detention Home staff, as the other – employed a series of discursive resources, trying to create a convinc-
ing narrative account. The referring staff members could be seen to recurrently try to develop trouble descriptions, legitimizing the girl’s referral, and the Detention Home staff members were recurrently seen to reformulate and edit such descriptions in systematic ways. Our present focus is on the contrasting versions, produced by the two different types of staff members.

One of our first findings, when analyzing the network conference transcripts was that the girls themselves generally did not take part much in the assessment negotiations. Yet, many of the trouble assessments, could potentially be seen as blame accounts, from the perspectives of the person assessed or from her spokesmen. As it was, though, the young persons under assessment would respond to questions, but they rarely overtly challenged other account versions. In subtle ways, the two types of institutional representatives recurrently challenged each other, though.

At this point, it should perhaps be pointed out that both groups of institutional staff acted in perfectly rational ways, in view of the different organizational goals of the referring staff, on the one hand, and the goals of the Youth Detention Home, on the other. The first organization was responsible for the initial placement and thus had to legitimize the fact that the girl was seen as a case for institutional attention, whereas the latter organization was not accountable for the referral as such. The diverging positions taken up in assessment narratives could thus be seen as rhetorical ways of handling the organizational concerns of the two types of institutions. What is interesting in the present data is, however, not primarily that there seem to be two different institutionalities at work, but how they differ, that is, how the participants go about constructing contesting versions of the “same” social work case.

When discussing contesting voices in the following, we will particularly attend to the nature of direct or indirect character assessments that were contested by the two parties. In the present context, referring staff members rarely went on record criticising Sofia (the admitted adolescent), who was, as shown, co-present at the meetings. As in many other ways, the present case was a standard case also in this respect. The girl/young woman them-
selves normally attended the meetings, and the staff members’ evaluative descriptions were often cast as indirect forms of assessments.

In line with the proof procedures of conversation analysis (Sacks et al., 1974), we will identify value assessments in those cases where the opposing party, in fact, oriented to value implications in his/her subsequent turns. In so doing, we will try to demonstrate how assessment talk meant was handled by the two parties, and finally, on a more speculative note, what that may have entailed for the girl herself.

**Narrative Voice**

In Gennette’s (1980) model of narratives, accounts are organized in terms of tense and voice. In the following discussion, we will present our findings in terms of narrative tense and voice, partly following his differentiation between various aspects of narratives, foregrounding the local architecture of contrasting versions. In his model, narrative voice concerns analyses of speaker voice in narratives. In the following discussion of our present assessment narratives, we will adopt a broad view on narrative voice, discussing both voice appropriations, the choice of speaker pronoun (“I”, “we”), spoken/written mode, and choice of active or passive grammatical voice, that is, choice of active or passive modes in the narrative.

**Appropriations of Voice**

At the outset of the present network conference, the referring social worker presented what he construed as Sofia’s relationship with her family.

Example 1 [AS10117: 306-3 65]

306 soc Let me just start by saying that I have been in contact
Jag kan bara först säga att jag har haft kontakt
with Sofia for almost a year and we have had help from our family counselor A(fam). M (appr1) and A are here today. We have reached a point where we no longer know what to do anymore and that is why Sofia is here today. And Sofia and her parents have made this as a petition to the Social Welfare Service, an application and I think that is good. chair Mm soc E:r so there is no compulsion and no threat and we all agree about this, it was before Christmas we made this decision ( ) we have brought up a number of questions about her relationship with her parents then and the the first one is that Sofia often says that she hates her parents and we wonder what is behind this statement (.). chair Yes, ok what does it mean
What it stands for, what it stands for
Va de står för, va de står för

O.k I just scribble a bit sloppily but I'll
O.k nu skriver jag lite slarvigt men jag

(what) does it mean ((points at an unclear word
ska (vad) betyder det ((pekar på otydligt skrivet ord

on the board)) Sofia sometimes expresses very strong
på tavlan) Vad står det för att Sofia emellanåt

negative feelings towards her parents, What does it
uttrycker mycket starka negativa känslor gentemot sina

stand for? will that do?
föräldrar. E de nog så?

soc yeh-
ja-

mm

a follow-up issue is why Sofia then also (. ) offends
en följdfråga e varför Sofia också då (. ) kränker
her parents for instance that she sells things
sina föräldrar till exempel att hon säljer saker som
she gets from them, she: says bad things about them
hon får av dom hon talar illa om dom
she sometimes avoids eating she avoids eating
hon undviker ibland att åta hon undviker att åta deras
their food she steals from them she breaks promises
mat hon stjäl från dom hon bryter löften
and agreements. This is what we have seen
och överenskommelser. Det är de som vi har sett

during this year >°we've kept°< contact with her,
der under det hår året °vi har haft °< kontakt med henne,
this is a pattern and so we've got some questions
det är ett mönster å då har vi funderingar kring
as to why it is like that.

Chair: o:k so you think ther're strong feelings

Soc: [m::m]

Chair: e::r and e::r and e::r=

Fam: =yes well it is a related question it is a clarification of=

Chair: =both in the form of what she says and what she does=

Psy2: so there are many broken agreements and that or what do you mean do you have any thoughts about that too?

Fam: well it's a part of ((clock strikes)) it's a part of this whole conduct where if you think about negative feelings both physically and mentally you know you ( °by saying things you're doing things° saker så gör man saker°

Chair: yes: o:k

(46) ((clock strikes eleven and the chair writes on the board))
The first problem that the referring social worker reports has to do with why Sofia often “says that she hates her parents” (lines 320–321). At some point in the past, she may have told the social worker she hated her parents (or may draw on the parents’ reports of her reported feelings). Yet, the verb “hate” is a strongly charged word, in the present context of an institutional setting. In the everyday mundane lives of the present parties, “to hate” is a verb employed, in dramas or soap operas, or in intimate conversations, but normally not in public interactions. For instance, it is a low frequency word in the Swedish language (it is found in, e.g., 17 tokens out of 10,000 in newspaper texts, Allén, 1972).

Among young persons, however, the situation is probably somewhat different, and it is, for instance, not extraordinary for adolescents to talk about “hating” some food or a teacher. An affective verb like “to hate” can be seen as a relatively normal feature of spoken (youth) language. In the present institutional context, though a word like “hate” can be seen as an extreme case formulation (cf. Edwards, 2000; Pomerantz, 1986) in that strong emotions are reported in a relatively formal institutional context,
where other parties employ much less evaluative or emotional words.

Moreover, it is an adult, the social worker, and not the young person, herself, who talks about “hating her parents”, appropriating her own words, when reporting her purported feelings. When appropriated by an adult, her “own” words change in quality, in that they appear more charged. At this point, they are no longer her original words, but the words of a person trying to assess her in a novel context, employing her own past words against her, and Sofia herself, of course, does not talk about hating her parents at any point during the conference. In appropriating Sofia’s past talk about “hating her parents” into his present portrayal of her, the referring social worker crystallises and amplifies her feelings as if they were.

Notably, the social worker reports on her speech and feelings in her co-presence, appropriating her words. Yet, she does not openly display any orientation to his appropriation of her talk. However, in his subsequent move, the chair apparently orients to the strong charge of “hates” (and/or to the referring staff member’s appropriation of her voice) in that she does not repeat the glossing “hates” in his oral reformulation or when charting Sofia’s problems on the board. Instead, she reformulates “hates” into “very strong negative feelings” and “strong feelings” respectively (lines 328–329, and 342).

**Personal Pronoun Shifts when Constructing and Deconstructing Collective Responsibility**

In his presentation of Sofia’s problem, the social worker started out speaking in the first person singular (example 1, line 306), but he almost immediately changed to the plural form, “we” (line 307), invoking the authority of a social work collective. He used this form recurrently in this episode. For instance, he employs the plural we-form when presenting his epistemological stance “this is what we have seen during this year => we’ve kept < contact with her” (example 1, lines 338–339). He thus does not assume any responsibility for describing events that occurred before they
“kept contact with her” (line 339). The first person plural is a common form in discursive backings of responsibility or authority in institutional encounters such as medical consultations (Aronsson & Sätterlund Larsson, 1987; Brown & Gilman, 1989).

Interestingly, the chair does not accept the invocation of such a collective responsibility in that she, in fact, responds by addressing him in the informal second person singular form du, repairing his choice of the plural pronoun form (line 342) and thereby challenging his way of positioning himself as someone who speaks on behalf of a collective.

**Written Mode Versus Spoken Mode**

During the entire meeting, the chair summarised selected key issues on the whiteboard, where a series of transformations were crystallised into a written text: past actions -> social worker’s report -> chair’s spoken report -> chair’s written list. Obviously, quite extensive editing took place in this process. This is an interactional type of editing in that at least two parties seem to be involved at each step, referring staff and Detention Home staff, and two related types of contrasting narratives. It could, of course, be argued that the chair was merely involved in transforming her own spoken report into a written report. Yet, it could be seen that she recurrently adjusted her writing, downgrading the evaluative (negative) charge in the referring staff’s reports, as when relaying “hate” in terms of “very strong negative feelings” (cf. our analysis above of example 1, lines 328–329). In the present meeting, the social workers is the person who first formulates what is the problem. Yet, it is the chair, who ultimately formulates a privileged verion of the network meeting in that she is responsible for the written, more “official” version of what actually counts in the meeting. On a somewhat speculative note, it can perhaps be said that the referring staff may feel a need to exploit stronger rhetorical means (e.g., extreme case formulations) in that their voice is less privileged in the present context. They need to make themselves heard more clearly.
Grammatical Voice and Agency

What is also interesting is that, in the narrative of the referring staff, Sofia is, in fact, rendered responsible for her own abuse, in that she “lets” all this happen; she “lets” (låter) older male friends control and abuse her (see further below, example 2).

Example 2 [AS10117: 453–475]

453 soc exactly (. then I’ve been wondering, Sofia doesn’t precis (. Sen undrar jag, Sofia har ju inte så
454 have many e.r as far as we know female friends but she många e.h va vi vet tjejerkompisar men hon
455 has (. older male friends and we wonder why she often har (. äldre killkompisar och och vi undrar varför hon
456 lets herself, she lets herself be controlled by them and ofta låter sej, hon låter sej styras av dom och hon
457 she lets herself be abused and e:r (. also humiliated låter sej utnyttjas och e:h (. också förmångtras
458 by them. she has said that they have hit her av dom. hon har berättat att dom har slagit
459 sometimes. (. and we (. why is she letting på henne ibland. (. och vi (. varför låter hon
460 this happen? detta ske?
461 chair mm so there’re (. people mm så det finns (.umgångar
462 soc mm
463 chair around mm
464 soc mm
465 chair her who mm mm
466 soc mm mm
Sofia is thus cast as an active agent, rather than as a victim of abuse. Also, the social worker’s employment of the historical present simultaneously locates her past actions in a sphere of habitual actions: that is, this is the way Sofia tends to act, e.g.,

Lines 455–456: why she often lets herself
Line 456: she lets herself be controlled by them
Line 457: she lets herself be abused and e:r (.)

The referring social worker thus reports that Sofia “lets”, that is, allows people to abuse her, indirectly casting her as accountable, rather than recounting in a more neutral fashion that Sofia was badly treated by some peers on a few discrete occasions. Yet, the chair apparently identified the finalistic quality of “let” in that she reformulates the referring social worker’s active voice glossing into a passive voice construction of “mm so there’re (. ) people [...] around [...] her who [...] simply treat her badly?” (lines 461–467). Sofia is thus seen as a victim of abuse, and not as someone who has “let” it happen.
Ultimately, though, the chair (lines 472–473) also relays the social worker’s initial utterance, which casts Sofia as an active agent. Interestingly, the chair’s reformulation then provides her with the means to move the discussion from the past into the future (“=how can we help her with this?”, line 475). Thereby, Sofia is simultaneously recast from someone who has “caused” her own problems by letting things happen, to someone who will receive help. This is then a case of grammatical voice (and narrative tense) being contested by the opposing party.

**Challenging Finalistic Word Choices**

Moreover, her “avoiding” eating her parents food and sleeping at home’ (example 1, lines 336; 361; 362–363) is again construed as intentional action on Sofia’s part, as a finalistic type of construction. She does not merely sleep away from home, but she refrains from doing so in that she “avoids” it, which implies goal directedness on her part. If the social worker had merely stated that Sofia sometimes did not eat at home or that she sometimes did not sleep at home, the overall impression of her agency would have been different. This can be seen as a type of, what we will call *value leakage* in that the social worker does not explicitly make negative judgments about Sofia’s deliberate or “willful” actions (cf. also our discussion above about to “let” things happen). Instead, his orientation to her actions is displayed through a finalistic choice of words and through extreme case formulations. Obviously, the girl herself does not openly orient to his choice of words. Yet, the chair does. In commenting on the social worker’s recurrent use of “avoid”, the chair, in fact, challenges his word choice – “you used both avoids eating and avoids” (line 365). As discussed by Pomerantz (1984), such challenges of someone’s word choices are dispreferred in mundane conversations in that they can be seen as criticism.
Narrative Tense

As discussed, referring staff normally did not go on record criticizing the teenager. Many of the staff members’ critical assessments were instead identified in terms of what we have called value leakage, that is, indirect or delicate ways of expressing assessments. As shown, value leakage operated on many linguistic levels: grammatical voice (active mode/passive mode), and lexical choices (including, for instance, finalistic word and choices extreme case formulations).

More importantly, we will now show how the editing work and the two parties’ contrasting projections of agency (self-afflicted abuse/victim), did not only involve grammatical voice and deletions or additions of evaluative word choices, but also how it was manifested in selective choices of verb tense (on grammar and narratives, see also, Ochs & Capps, 1996).

In his theorising on lived time and narrated time Bakthin (1981) discusses different chronotopes, that is, different time-space metaphors, including the chronotope of a “route”, on the one hand, and a ‘threshold’, on the other. The route is related to tragedies and other dramas such that there is a fixed route, which the hero has to follow. In contrast, the threshold chronotope opens up towards new options and choices. The threshold is the liminal zone between old and new, between the known and unknown – everything is still quite open.

Auerbach (1974) makes related distinctions in his discussion of tragedies with stereotypical good/bad heroes, on the one hand, and character narratives with complex heroes, on the other. He exemplifies the latter type with some Old Testament stories, in which the actions of the heroes are hard to predict in that they are both good and bad. They also act in inconsistent and surprising ways, thus the reader ultimately does not know if they are bound for failure or redemption. In the subsequent analyses, it will be shown how it is possible to see similar shifts from routes/stereotypes to thresholds/character narratives in the discussions concerning Sofia.
Talking About Past Actions in the Historical Present

The social worker recurrently talked about Sofia’s family relationships in the historical present she “often says that she hates her parents” (cf. example 1, lines 320–321 above). He thus did not refer to one or two occasions or specific contexts when she has said that she hated her parents. Sofia’s hating her parents was not projected as a finished event in the past, but instead as ongoing business. Similarly, all the complaints on his list were voiced in the historical present (our italics):

(i) she *offends* her parents (lines 333–334)
(ii) she *sells* things that she *gets* from them (lines 334–335)
(iii) she *says* bad things about them (line 335)
(iv) she sometimes *avoids* eating (line 336)
(v) she *steals* from her parents (line 337)
(vi) she *breaks* promises and agreements (lines 337–338)

Obviously, the target events he talks about supposedly refer to events in the past – occasions when the girl sold something, stole or broke a promise. Yet, all actions are located in the historical present. As discussed, her actions are thereby presented as things she habitually does rather than things she has done at discrete points in time.

Similar patterns can also be seen, somewhat later in the same example (cf. above, example 1, lines 360–363; our italics):

*Sells* things she got from her (360)
parents and didn’t want to have any (360–361)
more and *avoids* eating their (361)
food, *steals* from them (.) *breaks* (361–362)
*promises* (.) e.r and *avoids* (362)
sleeping at home (363)

Again, a specific action in the past is relayed in terms of the historical present mode. Thereby the girl’s overall conduct is cast as something habitual: ongoing actions that are somehow typical for her. The historical present is thus employed as a temporal mode that also invokes notions of stereotypical conduct. Also, it is cast in a script type description (Edwards, 1995), where lines 334–339 are, as shown, very similar to the description in lines 361–364 (points *i* – *vi* in the above list)
Past or Future Tense Narratives?

At a somewhat later point in the discussion, the social worker discusses the parents’ role.

Example 3 [AS10117: 4064–17]

406 soc then there is quite an obvious associated sen har vi då en följdfråga då e:h som är ganska

407 question (.) what the parents’ role is today (.) what are självklar (.j)hur föräldrarnas roll ser ut i dag(.)

408 their strengths, what are their weaknesses and how all vad dom har för styrkor, vad dom har för svagheter och

409 this that has been going on for the past year hur det här har påverkat dom som nu har pågått i ett-

410 year and a half has affected them. ett och ett halvt år.

411 chair so:: you wonder a bit how to (.) go on working så:: ni undrar lite granna hur ni ska (.) jobba

412 with the parents vidare med föräldrarna

413 soc °mm° °mm°

414 fam °exactly° °ja just de°

415 (5)

416 chair mm mm

417 (1)

In his contribution about the parents’ “strengths” and “weaknesses”, the referring social worker partly orients towards the past in that he talks about how they have been affected by what “has been going on for the past year- year and a half” (lines 409–410). By using the verb with a somewhat evaluative touch, “going on” (pågått), and foregrounding the extended duration of the
course of events, the implication that the parents have been negatively affected by implied undesirable events is backed up. As can be seen, the referring social worker’s questions are partly located in the past, with respect to how what “has been going on” in fact “has affected them” (lines 409–410). In contrast, the chair clearly relocates the question as a problem formulation cast in the future tense: “so:: you wonder a bit how to (. ) go on working with the parents” (lines 411–412), and as a shared problem, “how you”, that is the social welfare staff, will work with the parents.

It can be noted that the parents are cast as the objects (if not victims) of past events in the referring staff’s account version. They become portrayed as the people who have been affected by Sofia, not the other way around, and their agency in relation to untoward past events is downgraded. Conversely, Sofia’s agency is upgraded in the referring staff’s account version. As can be seen, both narrative voice (cf. our prior discussion) and tense can be employed to produce contrasting versions of the target persons’ agency.

In a subsequent sequence, the social worker returned to Sofia’s past actions, again talking about her conduct in the past tense, trying to formulate an overarching assessment and explanation of her “conduct” and when it “changed”.

Example 4 [AS10117: 432–453]

432 soc then there was the matter of Sofia’s conduct. And if we sen var det Sofias beteende. Och vi frågar då

433 ask Sofia well Sofia changed quite suddenly in the Sofia ja Sofia har ju förändrats ganska plötsligt

434 autumn of ‘97 from having been conscientious and alltså hösten 97 från att tidigare ha vatt skötsam och

435 well-behaved as far as we know that is we have no well-behaved as far as we know that is we have no ordentlig va vi vet alltså vi har ingen kännedom om

436 knowledge of Sofia before that so the picture is one of a Sofia tidigare utan bilden är en

437 conscientious girl who ->functions at school and functions skötsam tjej som ->funkar i skolan och funkar

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5 • Assessment Narratives and the Editing of “Social Facts”

438 at home°<. Something happens in the autumn of ’97
hemma°<. Nånting händer hösten 97

439 and Sofia herself sometimes says as an explanation that
å Sofia säger ju själv som förklaring ibland att

440 it is related to a specific event but she takes that back
det är relaterat till en konkret händelse men det tar

441 sometimes so we wonder (. ) has anything happened and
hon tillbaks ibland så vi undrar (. ) har det hänt

442 what these major changes depend on?
nånting och va beror dom här starka förändringarna på?

443 The autumn of ’97.
Hösten 97.

444 chair mm
mm

445 (50) ((writes on the board))
(50) ((skriver på tavlan))

446 chair hmm well bearing in mind that there have been major
hmm så med tanke på att det skett stora

447 changes in Sofia’s conduct since the autumn of ‘97.
förändringar i Sofias beteende sedan hösten 97.

448 soc mm
mm

449 chair what caused them, and did something happen?
va beror det på, och har det hänt nånting?

450 soc mm
mm

451 chair is there any way we can help her ° (that’s what) you
e de nåt vi kan hjälpa henne med ° (de va) så ni

452 thought°=
tänkte°=

453 soc =°exactly°...
=°precis°...

In his attempts to localise her “conduct” (line 432) in time, the referring social worker probes into the past, talking about the au-
tumn of 1997 when (“something happens”) “so we wonder (.) has anything happened and what these major changes depend on? The autumn of ‘97” (lines 441–442).

Moreover, changes are again primarily located in Sofia’s past. This orientation to the past does, of course, make organizational sense in that the referring staff can be seen to be accountable for recommending that she be sent away for assessment. In contrast, the chair reformulates the problem, orienting towards the future: “is there any way we can help her.” (line 451). As in Example 3 above, the referring social worker is oriented towards the past, whereas the chair responds by orienting the conference participants towards the future, trying to set another time perspective, as it were. Furthermore, the chair is again indirectly aligning with Sofia when she enlarges the circle of accountable parties, by asking whether there is “any way we can help her” speaking in the first person plural (line 451, our italics).

Concluding Discussion

In this paper, we have tried not to take sides, neither with the referral staff, nor with the Detention Home staff. However, one of our initial aims was to try to take the perspective of the adolescents under assessment, that is, to try to understand what the organization’s business of doing assessment might mean to the assessed persons themselves.

Elsewhere we have analyzed some of the ways in which the participants oriented to the meeting through laughter, non-laughter and through various ways of displaying mild or open resistance.

In the present network conference, the girl herself said very little, and her participation was, at large, quite marginal. Yet, she was the protagonist of both sides’ accounts, and questions of accountability implicitly (or explicitly) mainly concerned whether she was to be seen as responsible for some of the untoward prior events or whether, she was merely to be seen as a victim of un-
happy circumstances. In the analyses presented, it can be seen how different categories of staff drew on different discursive resources in their construction and reconstruction of her case. The psychologist and the chair at the detention home recurrently positioned themselves as her allied parties in that they implicitly and explicitly challenged many of the implicit blame allegations that were involved in the overall design of her case. Such a positioning makes organizational sense in that these staff members were at the time her guardians as it were, in that she was a resident at the Detention Home.

Trust is probably a necessary part of doing a good job of assessments. In a way, the chair, as well as other Detention Home staff members can thus merely be seen to do their jobs. Conversely, the referring staff had decided that she should temporarily be sent away from her home, which means that it makes organizational sense for them to defend and validate their referral of her by producing an account that is rhetorically convincing. In so doing, they can be seen to draw on appropriations of her voice, exploitation of extreme case formulations, as well as verb tense and grammatical voice (active/passive) constructions that imply a high degree of agency and therefore accountability. On a somewhat speculative note, her projected institutional identity in their descriptions is one of a young person, who needs professional care (institutionalization). Conversely, the projected institutional identity of her in the descriptions of the contrasting narrative accounts is one of someone, who has had a bit of bad luck, and who merely needs a bit of help. In all this editing work, the chair is a key negotiator, and someone, who positions herself as her ally in that Sofia’s actions are systematically reformulated into candidate versions, where she is seen as more of a complex rational being, and less of a victim or perpetrator.

Value Leakage and the Editing of Social Facts”

Without a moderator, the adolescent would have been relatively lonely, facing a group of adults, who partly had rational organisational interests in rhetorically demonstrating that the admittance
decision was a wise one, and that she was placed for assessment for good reasons. Obviously, the present data involve an institutional balancing of voices, where the two parties presented narratives that could partly be construed as fragments of a trouble narrative or as fragments of a contrasting version. Each type of narrative was primarily linked to one type of institution, the referring staff (trouble talk) or Detention Home staff (contrasting version). In contrast to the classical study of Mishler (1984), it was thus not a matter of a medical, social work or other professional voice, on the one hand, and a life-world voice, on the other. Instead, there were two contrasting institutional voices, where the chair could recurrently be seen to oppose or reformulate what the social services staff had just said, recurrently challenging the warranting or underpinning of the referring staff’s narratives through various types of editing work, such as changes of verb tense and grammatical voice, as well as other words substitutions or deletions.

In the present paper, editing work has been our primary focus in that the tension between the two contrasting perspectives was primarily identified through the chair’s editing work, undermining the referring staff’s narratives and partly replacing them with fragments of a contrasting narrative, projecting a candidate identity of a competent girl. The chair could constantly be seen to try to counter-balance a diagnostic search for trouble or failings, projecting the identity of a girl in need of institutionalisation.

Not everything was said in terms of outspoken assessments of the adolescent. Instead, conference talk was often impregnated with value leakage, that is, indirect or implicit assessment. Yet, in the present case of opposing narratives, the Detention Home staff recurrently challenged any fixed interpretations of the adolescent’s past actions, re-locating her actions in future time, and in a more open horizon of potential action. Through her repair work, the chair simultaneously validated the specific (complaint) quality of some of the referring staff’s lexical and grammatical choices.

What we have called value leakages thus operated on many levels of editing: choice of lexicon, the architecture of lists, choice of verb tense, projection of agency as in active mode/passive mode (on grammar and narratives, see also, Ochs & Capps, 1996).
Table 1: Value leakage, type of narrative and the editing of “social facts”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referral staff narrative</th>
<th>Detention home narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative voice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st person plural</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoken mode</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active mode</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative tense</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past tense</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On several occasions, the chair, for instance, shifted to another verb mode – from active to passive forms, casting Sofia as less responsible for having been abused (example 2).

The two types of narrative thus both involved value leakages (which were primarily identified through repairs of such leakage by staff from the opposing camp). Or formulated somewhat differently, the narratives involved distinct discursive devices that could be seen to underpin or strengthen one version, while undermining the opposed version in a number of ways. It could be seen how the chair challenged the referring staff’s choice of terminology, as well as combinations of character categorisations. She was apparently very much aware of fine nuances in staff talk at the network conference. It is, of course, not surprising that the two sides employed evaluative word choices in different ways, downgrading or upgrading, for instance, the projected strength of Sofia’s feelings (e.g., when talking about her “hating her parents” versus “her strong feelings” in example 1). Similarly, the referring staff’s narrative account involved lexical choices, involving value leakages – such as “going on”, “letting things happen” and “avoiding” – which were, in turn, successively reformulated into a contrasting version.

It is perhaps more noteworthy that the two parties, in fact, also employed active versus passive verb forms and verb tense in quite distinctive ways. On several occasions, the Detention Home staff reformulated the referring staff’s choice of verb tense – from past to future verb forms or from a historical present to future verb
forms. In both cases, the shift of tense involved a shift of time horizon, as it were, projecting a more open and less determined perspective on the adolescent concerned. A preoccupation with the past could be seen as more determined and less open than a (therapeutic) orientation towards the future.

Both the past tense and the historical present were prototypically employed in trouble-oriented narrations, whereas the future tense was primarily employed by the Detention Home staff members, who were, in fact, also more accountable for Sofia’s future. When Sofia’s actions were formulated in the historical present, they were, on an underlying level, cast as perpetual, ongoing actions. At this point, it should perhaps again be pointed out that the temporal divide is obviously related to the type of work the two parties (representing two different institutions) must perform in their lines of duty. The referring staff are to report on the past, as part and parcel of their organisation’s work. In contrast, the Detention Home staff are to prepare the adolescents for a better future – hence their systematic relocation of the time perspective mirrors, in a compelling way, a different type of institutionality. Again, strategic grammatical choices can thus be related to professional responsibilities and rationalities.

We have been discussing shifts in linguistic forms. Yet, these shifts would not be interesting in the present context if they did not have social implications. The very fact that the Detention Home staff quite consistently reformulated aspects of the grammatical forms of assessment narratives can be seen to indicate that grammatical choices carried social meaning. Obviously, shifts in lexical choices also implied value shifts or value glides. Similarly, shifts in pronoun choice and verb voice (active/passive) implied shifts in agency. In some cases, Sofia was initially, in fact, implicitly cast as responsible for her own abuse (by “letting” things happen), whereas the chair redirected the focus towards how she had been treated. Such shifts in agency were particularly important in that they also implied shifts in accountability. Someone, who, for instance, has “let things happen” is also responsible for her/his own misfortune, whereas someone who “has been maltreated” is not rendered accountable.
Fine nuances in the choice of active or passive mode, that is, grammatical voice, can therefore have important implications for how we look at accountability. Similarly, projecting a time horizon that includes the future more easily opens up towards novel identities than do narratives that are firmly and irreversibly located in the past. The horizon of potential action is considerably broadened when the future is also included in network narratives.
ABSTRACT: This study examines the interactional upshots of laughter in multiparty network conferences. It focuses on the tightly coordinated interactive work preceding, overlapping with and following upon laughter in exchanges characterized by participants’ displays of disagreement. The data are part of a corpus belonging to a project focused on discursive practices in Youth Detention Homes in Sweden. In sequences of disagreement, parties would often laugh, make use of others’ laughter or noticeably not laugh. Laughter was found to establish a participant’s orientation towards a situation as sensitive or tense. Typically, the participants seemed to laugh at an awkward situation rather than at a certain person. Laughter occurred at specific instances, often when it seemed difficult to continue the interaction along the lines of current disagreement. Moreover, in relation to laughter, the analysis accentuates other salient features of interaction. For instance, laughter is shown to be an efficient tool for the structuring of interaction, as it provided both lay and professional participants opportunities to participate meaningfully in the flow of talk without actually expressing much through words. The findings are discussed in terms of locally situated means of participating in multiparty adversative exchanges in formal network meetings.

* Osvaldsson, K. Submitted for publication.
Introduction

This study examines the use of laughter as a member’s resource in multiparty assessment talk. It is part of a larger project concerning talk in a Swedish Särskilt Ungdomshem “Youth Detention Home”, a setting that has not previously been investigated from a discourse analytic perspective. As an attempt to understand the interactional upshots of laughter and joking in this setting, the analyses examine the fine-grained and tightly coordinated actions preceding, overlapping with and following laughter. In a broad sense, analyses of membership categories as well as the sequential organization of talk show how both “professional” and “lay” participants exploit laughter as an interactional device. According to such an interactional approach, laughter is shown to be a tightly ordered activity, rather than something that occurs at random.

In a seminal work on the sociological aspects of humor in relation to modern society, Mulkay (1988) noted an imbalance between psychological and/or philosophical versus more interactional research on laughter, where the former type had received considerably more attention. Here psychological research is understood as that dealing with the inner mental states of an individual. As a distinctive human activity, laughter and humor have long attracted analytical attention. Aristotle, to name but one early example, presented a theory of people laughing at one another due to a feeling of superiority. Within psychological perspectives, laughter tends to be viewed as something uncontrolled, like a different state or imbalance, associated with a physiologically altered state within the human organism. This altered state becomes regulated by an outburst (flooding out) of laughter. See for example Freud, [1905/1966] whose main explanation concerns laughter as a type of tension relief). A comprehensive overview of the philosophy and psychology of laughter can be found in Morreall (1987).

As Mulkay (1988) points out, neither psychological nor more philosophical approaches manage to sufficiently take the social character of laughter into account. Studies that take the organiza-
tion of social interaction as their scope of inquiry have stressed the irremediably situated nature of laughter. Hence laughter has been seen to have a very broad range of interactional functions.

Starting in the mid 1960s, Harvey Sacks, in one of his early lectures, discussed the crucial importance of *placing* for laughter (Sacks, 1992 Vol. I., lecture 14), that is, that laughter tends to be tied to the immediately preceding turn at talk that contains a “laughable”. Sacks further noted that, in comparison to conversation, a special feature of laughter is that it can be accomplished without giving heed to the most basic rule of conversation, the “one party at a time rule” (p. 745). In ordinary conversations, participants who miss the appropriate moment to enter conversation, miss their chance to make a contribution on that specific matter then and there. With laughter, the case is different. Clearly, people often “laugh in unison”, or they may join into already ongoing laughter, which leads to “relay rounds of laughter” (Jefferson, Sacks & Schegloff, 1976). In a sense then, it is as if laughter is a parallel activity to the ordinary turn-taking machinery (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). Thus, the basic notion of order at all points (Sacks, 1984) holds for laughter as well. Another early analysis of laughter as an interactional phenomenon can be found in Schenkein (1972).

In a series of papers, Gail Jefferson (e.g., 1979, 1984a, 1984b, and 1985) has further explored the specific order of interaction in sequences where laughter occurs. By proposing detailed procedures whereby laughter can be transcribed rather than merely described, Jefferson (1985) showed how instances of laughter can be explored that would otherwise have remained hidden. Specifically, her analyses demonstrate participants’ techniques for inviting laughter (1979), such as using a post-utterance laugh particle by which the speaker may demonstrate that laughter is appropriate. She also analyzed failed laughter invitations, where the laughter inviter recurrently started laughing her/himself to stress the funniness. Another finding concerns instances where the recipient responded to the content of the utterance instead of taking up its funniness, c.f. the case of po-faced receipts of teases (Drew, 1987). In her work on trouble-telling, Jefferson (1984a, 1984b)
dealt with the phenomenon that trouble-tellers often end their turn with laughter (showing they are trouble resistant), while the recipient gives a serious answer (showing trouble receptiveness). See also Goodwin (1984), for a painstakingly detailed analysis of “story structure and the organization of participation” (p. 225), including an analysis of laugh tokens at the climax of storytelling.

Adelswärd (1989) has argued against Jefferson’s (1979) assumptions that laughter is triggered by something funny (see also Mulkay, 1988 on this issue) and that laughter has an inviting character. With examples from various institutional settings, such as job interviews and conversations between social welfare assistants and parents, she shows that participants often laugh alone and that unilateral laughter can be used to modify attitudes and expressions. Mutual laughter, on the other hand, is frequently a sign of agreement.

With the exception of Adelswärd, the previously mentioned studies all deal with laughter as a feature of mundane interaction. However, laughter has also been of some interest to researchers of discourse taking place in institutional settings. Within this line of inquiry, interest in laughter has mainly focused on doctor-patient interaction in dyadic settings (West, 1984). Studying the interaction between doctors and patients, West found a specific interactional pattern for laughter. Patients volunteered to laugh considerably more often than doctors, and their laughter was not very likely to be taken up or accepted by the doctor. In contrast, when the doctor invited laughter, it was much more likely that the patient also started to laugh. Recently, the arguments developed by West have been elaborated by Haakana (2001), who demonstrates how patients orient to interaction and topics as “delicate” by laughing. Patients were also found to use laughter to perform certain activities, such as legitimizing their visit to the doctor despite an atypical problem. Patients also laughed when rejecting the doctor’s understandings, or if they further problematized the doctor’s advice. In a case study of family therapy, Aronsson and Cederborg (1997) similarly found asymmetrical laughing patterns in that the therapist and mother laughed more often than did the patient, a teenage girl.
Laughter may also serve to regulate issues concerning intimacy and distance (Aronsson, 1998; Glenn, 1995). In a paper on therapeutic humor, Buttny (2001) has demonstrated how therapists often use humor in instances of retelling the client’s telling. He argues that humor seems to provide an environment in which contrasting or challenging interpretations may be presented. Likewise, humor was found to be a useful resource when “serious” therapeutic interventions did not work well.

Another issue concerns what may be called the direction of laughter. How do we, for instance, know if we are being laughed at or if we are laughing in alignment with the other(s)? Glenn (1995) analyzes trajectories of actions over many turns to show how participants negotiate the affiliate status of laughter. He proposed that four crucial features of the interaction are able to distinguish whether someone is being nominated as a butt and laughed at: (i) a “laughable” is presented that nominates someone co-present as a butt, (ii) someone other than the nominated butt produces the first laughter after the laughable, (iii) if then a second laughter is produced by someone other than the nominated butt, this reinforces the interpretation of the situation as “laughing at” (p. 46) and (iv) the unfolding of the subsequent talk may be an indicator of the situation as a “laughing at” situation. For instance, the “funny” topic may be extended through word or phrase repetitions or participants may exploit the post-laughter environments for own purposes.

Much work on laughter concerns dyadic interactions. Studies from multiparty settings are rather scarce, which makes the analysis at hand a contribution to an under-analyzed field of inquiry. As seems to be the case with most conversational phenomena it may be that laughter departs in important ways from two-party interaction. For example, in dyadic interaction the current speaker may invite laughter by initiating it herself (Jefferson, 1979). A few studies from multiparty settings show somewhat different patterns (e.g., Glenn, 1989), in that a person other than the current speaker generally produced the first laugh.

In a study concerning the place of laughter in multiparty referral talk, Hester (1996) reports findings showing that laughter, ac-
According to the participants, could be seen as demonstrably both in and out of place. In order to analyze the interaction, Hester makes use of sequential aspects as well as Sacks (1992, Vol. I) notion of a Membership Categorization Device (MCD). With respect to the participant’s orientation to the unfolding interaction, laughter “in place” could be initiated by invoking certain category anomalies; laughter in place was shared and could produce further candidate laughables. But, for example, making a joke about sad details in one of the waiting list’s referrals was considered “no laughing matter” or “laughter out of place” by the participants (Hester, 1996, p. 260). Such joking was instead shown to become the focus of a “category-generated censure” in terms of “members” analyses of the context and the membership categories operationally relevant therein” (p. 262).

The analyses at hand aim at tracing the interactive work accomplished by laughter in connection with disagreement in multiparty assessment meetings. The meetings were organized around two central questions: What is the problem (meeting one)? And what are the recommended measures to take (meeting two)? In the negotiations related to these questions parties sometimes disagreed. My initial interest in laughter was related to the finding that laughter was rather frequent in the material, and especially in sequences of disagreement. I will not present any quantified data. Determining what exactly counted as laughter, where it started and ended, or to define whether certain laughter situations should count as one, two or even more proved more than difficult and not very fruitful. But very roughly, it can be noted that something identifiable as laughter happened between every third and every tenth minute in every meeting. The starting point for the analysis became instead to investigate the interactional functions of laughter, as laughter seemed to be intertwined in rather complex interactional work. What kinds of such work were observed? To answer that question, we need to come up with a description of the interaction that is relevant to the participants’ conduct, that is, an analysis based on the participants’ own orientation to the functions of laughter.

In sequences of disagreement parties would often laugh,
The Studies

make use of others’ laughter or noticeably not laugh. This begs the question of what kind of interactional projects may be pursued by the participants through the different actions taken in laughter environments. To address these issues, the analysis will focus on the sequential organization of laughter and, to some extent, on the categorizations deployed in talk.

Data and Procedure

The present data are part of a corpus belonging to a project focused upon discursive practices in Youth Detention Homes in Sweden. Participation in the project was voluntary and could be terminated at any time. During the adolescents’ eight-week-long assessment period, many meetings and interviews took place. Among these, two meetings were large multiparty events (so-called network conferences). A network conference normally involved the adolescent herself as well as invited family members and members of the institutional network, that is, a series of participants, representing three different types of parties: (i) the adolescent herself, and normally one or several family members, (ii) referring social services staff, and (iii) Detention Home staff including various expert(s) such as psychologists. A chair, the director or some other senior official of the Detention Home led the introductory network conference. During that conference, the Detention Home staff in collaboration with the referring staff, engaged in “referral talk”, trying to arrive at several provisional joint problem formulations: Why has the adolescent been referred to the home and what should be done there?

The initial meeting was followed by a four-week period during which different staff members, such as teachers, social workers, psychologists and others, together with the adolescent worked with the assessment questions formulated at the meeting. The results from the assessment as well as future recommendations for the adolescents were reported and discussed during the second network conference. In the analysis at hand, examples are
taken from both the pre- and post-assessment conferences. The author was present at all meetings, and careful field notes were taken. The examples presented here are drawn from a material of 18 multiparty meetings in an assessment setting. The meetings lasted between 50-120 minutes, which makes about 20 hours of recorded material. For the purpose of this article, I have extracted laughter events arising in two main forms of activities at the network meetings: assessment questions and the reporting of assessment results.

The meetings were transcribed according to a simplified and slightly modified\(^1\) version of the transcription scheme developed by Jefferson (see Atkinson and Heritage, 1984, pp. ix-xvi). Names were fictionalized and minor omissions or changes inconsequential for the present analysis were made in the transcripts in order to protect the participants’ identities.\(^2\) Transcripts and tapes were used simultaneously in the analytical procedure. Segments of the meetings that primarily focused on assessment questions were chosen for detailed transcription. The analyses are focused on situated practices and participants’ own orientations to their mutually coordinated actions. The analysis was conducted using the Swedish original, and the final versions of the transcripts were translated in collaboration with a professional translator.

**Findings**

Very roughly, laughter seemed to occur in two types of conversational environments. The first one had to do with teasing among staff members. Various forms of teasing, joking and laughter mainly occurred just before the start or in the very beginning of the meetings, before I had the chance to ask for permission to start the tape recorder. An extended analysis of these events is therefore impossible. It can only be noted that earlier research analyzing joking in comparable settings has argued that such “heckling” may aim at displaying solidarity between the participants (Aronsson & Rundström, 1989, Holmes & Marra, 2002), or
showing that the place is a setting for involvement and intimacy (Norrick, 1994).

The other form of laughter environment occurred in the midst of problem formulation or the reporting of assessment results. Here, laughter was formed to provide for participants’ orientation towards a situation as sensitive or tense. Hence, a sequence of argumentation, or as in the first example, of giving compliments often culminated in laughter. There were a few instances in which participants laughed at other persons, but on the whole they seemed to laugh at a situation rather than at a person.

The analyses will discuss, at some length, the unfolding actions in “laughter events”, rather than simply the laughter turns proper. Analyses of laughter events are organized in three main parts: “pre-laughter events”, that is interaction that culminated in laughter, the “laughter event proper”, and finally analyses will be conducted on the “post-laughter event”. The last phase is of great interest here as it turned out that it provided a location in which participants tried to exploit the laughter event for different purposes (see example 3 and 4).

No But Seriously...

The first example begins when Maria’s assistant, a social worker at the detention home, is describing Maria’s improvements during her stay at the institution. It is taken from Maria’s second network conference. The analysis will especially focus on Maria’s responses to the assistant’s flow of reporting events.

Example 1 [AM7111] Present: Maria (M), her mother and stepfather (mom, dad), her social worker (soc), the chair, a detention home teacher (teach), a psychologist (psych), Maria’s two assistants (ast1, ast2) and the researcher.

1 ast1 M. functions a lot better now in the activities than she did in the M. fungerar mycket bättre nu i aktiviteterna än hon gjorde

2 beginning. we’ve seen a marked difference during the ↑last three i början. de ↑sista tre veckorna har vi sett en markant

3 weeks ( ) she keeps time a lot be[tter ( ) skillnad ( ) hon håller mycket bättre tider[na ( )

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4 M [X ((looks at her assistant))]
[X

5 ast1 no but seriously you were
nå men de var du faktiskt

6 M we:llhhh
ja:hhh

7 ast1 you were very careful (.) in the beginning there was a bit of
du var väldigt ordentlig (.) i början där så var det lite

8 running away, you ran (into town and to the kiosk)
rymningar, du sprang (till stan och till kiosken)

9 (2)

10 M ther’s nowhere to go(heh) any lon(heh)ger
finns ingenå gå till(heh) lång(heh)re

11 teach [hehehe
[hehe

12 (3)

13 ast2 well there has been two (.) please! ((towards participant who
de ha ju vatt en två (.) varsågod! ((till deltagare som

14 stretches for a piece of cake)) some projects ( ) gone to
sträcker sig efter kaka)) en del projekt ( ) åkt till

15 Xtown ( ) in fact just one real escape otherwise there has
Xstad ( ) egentligen bara en riktig rymning i övrigt har det

16 only been short, short you just would go to the store, so there
bara vatt korta, korta du skulle gått till affären, så det

17 has only been one real (.) that to Xtown. but it has diminished.
har bara vatt en riktig (.) den till Xstad. Men det har

18 Maria has (remained) here.
minskat.Maria har stannat (kvar) här.

As we can see, the assistant is assessing Maria’s behavior in a way that solicits Maria’s attention (line 4), Yet, Maria looks at the assistant without saying anything. Notably, the assistant orient to Maria’s action as a token of opposition, and qualifies her previous statements, addressing her talk directly to Maria “no but seri-
ously you were” (line 5). In response to the direct address Maria produces a prolonged “we:llhhh”, which clearly displays less than an agreement with the assessment (line 6). Upon Maria’s lack of agreement, the assistant states matter-of-factly that Maria was very careful. The assistant points out that in the beginning, Maria used to run away, but she has discontinued this habit, which provides for the conclusion that she has improved. Then the assistant turns silent. After a two-second pause Maria responds to the praise with laughter in her voice: “ther’s nowhere to go(heh) any lon(heh)ger[(h)” (line 10).

Now, what does Maria’s self-initiated laughter (Jefferson, 1979) and joke accomplish at this particular point in the exchange? One obvious thing is that both Maria’s and the teacher’s laughter are disrupting the flow of reporting events, which can be seen in the ensuing three-second pause (line 12).

Clearly, the assistant’s praise functions as an assessment of Maria’s behavior. In the description lies an assumption that the improvement in Maria’s behavior has to do with something at the detention home, for example that “Maria functions a lot better now in the activities” (line 1). Maria challenges this assessment, by instead attributing it to changes in the circumstances outside the institution. She is thus disrupting the praise giving and even invalidating the praise directed at her. However, in the subsequent talk her challenge of the praise giving does not seem to be taken up as criticism of the Detention Home. On the contrary, the teacher’s alignment with Maria’s laughter may well display an alignment with her in not accepting the praise.

In the aftermath of laughter, after 3 seconds of silence, the second assistant picks up the assessment of Maria’s behavior, pointing out that while maybe one should only count one past incident as a true escape, it certainly has stopped now (lines 13–18). Thus, he is moderating the assessment of the first assistant. But let us return to Maria’s resistance towards the praise. One interpretation of her laughter in line 10 has to do with the management of a conversational preference for agreement with assessments (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992; Sacks, 1987). In the case of compliments this would imply that persons who receive compliments
generally tend to accept them.

However, this is often not the case, as shown by Pomerantz (1978), who found that compliments are in fact often rejected. Her proposed interpretation of this finding has to do with the fact that compliment responses are “subject to separate systems of constraints” (Pomerantz, 1978, p. 81), whereby the person receiving the compliment faces a preference for agreement with assessment, on the one hand, and a preference for avoiding self-praise, on the other. Along this line of interpretation, what Maria’s “ther’s nowhere to go(heh) any lon(heh)ger[(h)” (line 10), offers is a way of rejecting the compliment while managing to produce a humorous way of not agreeing with the assessment, that is producing a dispreferred type of action.

**No, That’s Not How I See It**

Our next example shows laughter occurring after a lengthy sequence of argumentation. The meeting is discussing Anita’s relationship to her family history and her former boyfriend. The chair has just made his point, that Anita is drawn to drug-related settings or to people who use drugs. Anita points out that it was, in fact, due to the drugs that she left her former boyfriend and his company, and their argumentation then continues as follows:

Example 2: [AA 122] Present: Anita, the chair (chair), two social workers (soc1, soc2), Anita’s sister (sis), two assistants (ast1, ast2), a detention home teacher (teach) and a researcher (res).

1 Anita ( ) abuse= ( ) missbruk=  
2 chair =yeah =jo  
3 Anita so there you have a reason as to why: [ (I didn’t) så där har du en förklaring till varför [r (ja inte)  
4 chair [we:ll [ja:  
5 Anita why: I wanted to leave va:rför ja ville [att gå
6 chair  

[↑yeah  

[↑jo  

7 Anita  

därifrån  

8 chair  

yeah, an’ that’s exactly it >well< when I th↑ink about it, I  

jo, å de e just de >asså< når jag th↑änker på det, jag  

9  

think, I mean I > have an idea that< it isn’t by chance (. ) that  

tror, alltså jag >har en ide’ att< det är ingen slump (. )  

10 you fall in lo:ve (. )  

att du blir kår (. )  

11 Anita  

åhum  

12 chair  

with an addict and choose to submit yourself to that situation  

i en missbruκare och du väljer att underκasta dig den  

13 instead of the >(ordered) situation of < your sister, I don’t  

situationen framför den >(ordnade) situationen hos< din  

14 think it’s just chance. I see a certain connection, or a kind of  

syster, jag tror de e ingen slump, jag ser en viss  

15 loyalty to your family hist↓ory (. ) caus’if one’s loyal to your  

koppling, eller viss lojalitet till din familjs histo↓ria  

16 family history >then one shoul< de:h abuse drugs. that is  

( . ) för om man e lojal med din familjs historia >då ska ma<  

17 unco:nsciously (.5)  

ne:h missbruca. alltså på ett o:medvetet sätt (.5)  

18 Anita  

no that’s not how I see it=  

nå så ser jag det inte på saken=  

19 chair  

=no, o.k  

=nå, o.k  

20 Anita  

you can say whatever[you want but I don’t see (it like that)  

du kan så vad [du vill men alltså de gör jaante (allspåsaken)  

21 chair  

[no no but n↑ow you’re beginning to talk  

[nå nä må’en nu börjar du sâga  

22 b↑ack! I ↓like that. ((smiley))  

ifr↑an|jag skiliar det. ((leende))
Here we see a laughter episode being built up by an argumentative prelude over many turns. The prelude consists of Anita producing an account concerning her leaving her boyfriend due to his drug habit (lines 1–7). The chair’s three single minimal responses (lines 2, 4, and 6) can be seen as preparatory for taking the turn. After the fourth response “yeah” (line 8), the chair finally takes the turn in which it becomes clear that the previous minimal responses were nothing like an affirmative to Anita’s argument. Rather they should be seen as preparatory for a counter-
story, in which he instead presents an idea that Anita has unconscious reasons for choosing a boyfriend with a record as a drug addict (lines 12–17).

Interestingly, Anita’s telling of why she left is countered with the issue of her falling for him in the first place. Note that in shifting the focus, the chair produces what looks like an affirmation and an elaboration “yeah, an’ that’s exactly it” (line 8). However, this is hastily disrupted by a series of hesitation marks “>well< when I th↑ink about it, I think, I mean I” (lines 8–9) that accomplish the transformation of his turn from a hearable agreement or affirmation to a countermove, accomplished by a shift of topical focus. Accordingly, the issue at stake is no longer why Anita left her boyfriend but rather why she fell for him in the first place. As we will see, Anita’s subsequent moves do not further elaborate her argument of leaving the boyfriend. Rather she engages in opposing the chairperson’s argument. But, let us stop to consider in some detail what it is she is opposing.

12 chair with an addict and choose to submit yourself to that situation
13 instead of the >(ordered) situation of < your sister, I don’t
14 think it’s just chance. I see a certain connection, or a kind of
15 loyalty to your family history (. ) caus’ if one’s loyal to your
16 family history >then one should abuse drugs. that is
17 unco:nsciously (.5)

What kinds of reasoning are presented in the chair’s characterization of Anita? The characterization is built around two possible lifestyles for Anita: (i) a situation of drug abuse, and (ii) the ordered situation of her sister. The chair’s description is presented as an active choice on Anita’s behalf to fall in love with a drug
abuser “choose to submit yourself to that situation” (line 12). The causes for Anita making this choice are presented as a chain of dilemmas. It could also be presented this way:

Anita makes a choice → this choice is not random → it is connected to a loyalty with her family history → which implies taking drugs → this choice is unconscious.

After the pause, we can see Anita is simply disagreeing with the chair’s arguing (line 18). Note that her disagreement matches the initial framework of the chair’s argument, which was set by his preface “I > have an idea that<” (line 9). If it is just an idea, it can be challenged by simply stating a divergent point of view: “no that’s not how I see it=” (line 18). Her disagreement receives a simple acknowledgement, “=no, o.k” without further counterargument, which seems to come across as more or less ignoring her position (line 19). Anita is then further elaborating and upgrading her opposition “you can say what you want but I don’t see (it like that)” (line 20).

Her last opposition entails not only a very strong disagreement, but it also puts an end to any further possibilities to continue talking in the same way, as the chair once again shifts focus, starting to overlap with Anita’s disagreement, he is starting to evaluate her performance instead of the content of her utterance. The positive assessment of Anita’s opposing action, i.e. her improved self-assertiveness combined with the chair’s broad smile both function as a laughter invitation and a topic closure for the other co-participants (see Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992). That is, by joking about Anita’s way of arguing and smiling while doing this, he gets most of the meeting participants to laugh with him. It should be noted though, that some participants, including Anita, do not laugh.

The upshot of the chair’s action is that rather than remaining a conversational partner in an adversative exchange, Anita is recast as the product of good therapeutic work. The ensuing laughter further deprives Anita of an option to continue the argument. We should also note that, as the laughter fades off, the chair self-selects as next speaker, gains the floor and continues his original account of Anita’s ways of relating to others.
Buttny (2001) found similar rhetorical devices in a case study of a therapy session. Here, the therapist often made a joke when an interpretation did not work out and making a joke was a way to put the therapeutic work back on track again. In the present case too, the extended laughter allows the chair to take a time out, with the help of which he may get the meeting back on the track of his choice.

The issue of why the laughing event occurs in the first place could be a somewhat extended though. The official overall aim of the network meeting is to report and discuss the results of Anita’s assessment. Earlier in the meeting (see note 4) it was reported that Anita is thought to have a problem of not daring to disagree, and that she rather suppresses her own wishes instead of risking a confrontation. Now, this description really does not fit very well with her behavior in this particular sequence. Shy and suppressed persons would be unlikely to engage in the kind of argumentation Anita has just taken part in. It may well be that this background adds yet another grain of humor to the chair’s positive assessment of Anita’s talking back (lines 21–22). Note that doing chairing entails a certain amount of social control. In that regard, humor and laughter can be an efficient tool (Mulkay and Howe, 1994). In other words, by creating a laughable situation, the chair can be seen to exert conversational dominance in an efficient, yet smooth and (it would seem) socially appreciated manner.

Should She Get a Summer Vacation?

The previous example showed how humor and laughter served to overcome an argumentative impasse. Along similar lines, our next excerpt shows laughter occurring at the peak of an adversative exchange. The participants have been discussing how to organize a minimized assessment of Linda’s educational level, due to the upcoming summer holiday, when the principal at Linda’s school questions the idea of her having a holiday at all.
Example 3: [ALi6210] Present: Linda, her mother and father (mom, dad), principal at Linda’s school (prin), her social worker (soc), the chair, a detention home teacher (teach), a psychologist (psych), an assistant (assist) as well as a researcher (res).

1 prin should she get a summer vacation? (.5) >I mean<
   ska hon ha sommarlov? (.5) >Jag menar<

2 she’s skipped so much [that she should=
   hon har skubbat så mycket [så hon borde=

3 soc [teheheh
   [tåheheh]

4 prin =really be studying here now. Make up for the time(.) she’s(.)
   =gentligen läsa nu va. Tå igen den tiden(.) som’on(.)

5 wasted
   skubbat bort

6 chair "unhuh"
   "mmeh"

7 prin shouldn’t you [Linda? ((turns away, looks at Linda))
   eller hur [Linda? ((vänder sig emot, tittar på Linda))

8 teach she has at this point home economics scheduled
   [hon har som det är nu schemalagd hemkunskap

9 (.5) phys-ed and (.5) art ↑class-
   (.5) fys och (.5) bild och ↑form

10 Linda unhuh
    mm

11 prin Swe=
    sve=

12 teach = (so that is)
    = (så det är)

13 teach Swedish English Math
    svenska engelska matte

14 prin that’s >what we talk about all the time<
    det >pratar vi hela tiden om<

15 teacher unhuh
    hämhämhåhå
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17 (mom) heheh
hå hå

18 prin: “that’s the way to go”
°det e så de ska va°

19 (soc) pffhhh
pffhh

20 dad I’m sitting here thinking-
jeg sæed og tænk paa-

21 (?) hehehhheh
håhåhhåå

22 chair ↑ye:h
↑ja::

23 dad I’m sitting here thinking that it can’t be so hard to see how
je sæed og tænkpaa da kanicke væresaa svaert og utrede hur

24 it (. ) you do at school cause that’s close to ze:rohhheh
de(.) Du ær me skolen fo de e nock naerpa: nu:hhhhheh

25 ((exhalatory laugh))
((utandningsskratt))

26 (2)

27 chair yes but then (. ) it’s important this to see wha:t (. ) eh
jo men då (. ) blir det viktigt allså det här att se va:d

28 resources Linda then has in her own [(right) so to speak
(.)eh Linda du har för resurser på eget [(bevåg) så att såga

29 soc [umhuh
[ehum

30 (6)

31 (?) .hhheh
.hhheh

32 chair some learn outside of school territory (. ) °so to speak°
en del lår sig utanför skolans ram (. ) °så att såga°

At the principal’s questioning of Linda’s right to a summer vacation, the social worker starts to laugh or rather giggle (line 4), as if marking that she has understood that the first part of the principal’s utterance is not to be taken literally. As the principal contin-
ues, it becomes clear that he was not joking and the chair’s “un(huh)” can be seen as the starting point for a mild objection to the principal’s attack (line 6). Yet, the principal takes another turn in which he closes his argument by addressing a possibly rhetorical question at Linda. But before he finishes his turn the teacher at the Detention Home refutes by presenting the kind of schoolwork Linda has already started with. Her report, and possibly the oppositional action, is backed up by Linda’s supportive token in line 11. However, the principal counters the teacher’s report stressing the importance of basic theoretical subjects such as Swedish, English and Mathematics (lines 12–14).

The teacher’s reply, “that’s what we talk about all the time” presumably refers to a pedagogy that integrates subjects into each other, which implies Linda may, for instance, learn Math though the syllabus says Home Economics (line 15). Her response is produced quickly in a rather abrupt way. It may be that what we see here is a competition between two different institutions and an argumentation over two different pedagogical systems and how well they apply to Linda’s needs. Speculating a bit, it can be the case that Linda and her mother laugh are produced in recognition of this competition (line 16–17) and possibly also of its outcome, so as to disqualify the principal’s argument. Second, it seems likely that the principal’s *sotto voce* contribution “that’s the way to go” displays recognition of the teacher’s success (line 18).

Following the laughter, Linda’s father terminates the side-sequence by redirecting the discussion back to the main question, that of Linda’s assessment, in the form of a joke, laughingly suggesting that the assessment is going to be an easy one due to Linda’s poor achievement in school (lines 23–24). Note that the father’s joke is parasitic on the laughter environment. That is to say, the father exploits the post-laughter event to contribute a humorous element to this situation. Note also that he comes across as the only person laughing at his joke. And I would like to suggest that, by not joining in, the other participants orient to the inappropriateness of the father’s joke (c.f. Hester, 1996, on joking out of place).
In other words, there are important differences between the sequences of laughter in this example. The first one is rather a giggle, with which the social worker seems to orient to the principal as being non-serious. Linda’s and her mother’s laughter occur at the peak of an argumentative exchange possibly orienting to the tension built up in the trajectories of oppositions. Furthermore it has some discourse organizing implications in that it contributes to the termination of the argumentative episode. The solitary laughter (line 21), on the other hand, is not taken up by anybody. Its inappropriateness is marked by the chair’s “↑ye:h” with a rising intonation, instead of joining in the laughter (line 22). Presumably, this is the chair returning the word to Linda’s father. Linda’s father’s mildly sarcastic laughter can be seen as an admittance of his daughter’s failure in school, but as we may again see from its uptake, being sarcastic about Linda’s problems is not seen as appropriate in the present setting (line 23–24).

Linda was quiet most of the time, but by taking a final look at especially Linda’s contributions to the laughter occasions it can be seen how she, through very well posed laughter, manages to participate in an oppositional sequence. Having aligned with her new teacher earlier in the exchange (lines 9–11), she is now able to distance herself from her principal and support the teacher’s argument through laughter in line 16.

You Won’t Be Doing Time!

About fifteen minutes after the talk in example 2, Anita is discussing her recommended future placement with the chair. Anita reports being worried there will be people with drug-problems living there. The analysis will concentrate upon the membership categorizations made by Anita and the chair, the implicit critique towards the institution formulated by Anita and how an assistant who enters the conversation questions this. While the analysis will focus on a few important fragments of talk, we need to consider an extended transcript.
Example 4: Present: [AA 122] Anita, the chair (chair), two social workers (soc1, soc2), Anita’s sister (sis), two assistants (ast1, ast2), a detention home teacher (teach) and a researcher (res).

1 Anita I don’t do it my self so I don’t wanna do time with those
ja håller inte själv på så ja vill inte sitta med såna

2 (.5) drug addicts when mayb- I’m gonna have a child n’ all.
(.5) narkotikamissbrukare nå’ ja kanskska ha barn och sånt.

3 (2)

4 chair y↓e:s
j↓a:

5 (1)

6 chair well
eah

7 (2.5)

8 chair I I think eh (.) thatthat it’s it’s a sensible argument, I’m
jaja tycker eh (.) asså asså de e ett vettigt resonemang,jag

9 not su- well it’s possible it is possible that it’s (.5) well going on
är inte såk- asså de e möjl det e möjl att de (.5) asså pågår

10 Anita mm
mm

11 chair a limited number
ett begränsat antal

12 Anita uhum
mm

13 chair as few as possible.
så få som möjligt.

14 Anita uhum
mm

15 chair there’s there’s [a risk
det finns [en(risk)

16 Anita [(but it) ( )
[(men det)( )

17 chair there’s there’s risk=
de finns risk=
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Anita =uhum=
=mm=

Chair =there’s risk=
=de finns risk=

Anita =uhum=
=mm=

Chair =that it could happen. °( )° a mother ( ) (. ) who
=att de kan bli så. °( )° en mamma ( ) (. ) som

Anita =uhmthat’s wha’ I mean I don’t wanna >do time with< those.
=mmde e deja menar ja villånte >sitta me< såna.

(2)

You w’ on’t be ↓[doing TIME!]
=du ska ↑tånte ↓[sittå!]

Anita =no so I don’t wan nabe round’em.
=nämenja villånte va [dår menån sån då.

(?)

Heheh
=höheh

Hehhm ((Anita and chair remain non-laughing))
=hehhm

She’s been doing two weeks now (. ) she SAYs
=hon är suttit i två veckor nu (. ) SÅjer hon

Teach [( )]

[makes me so mad
=ja blir så arg

Teach doing ti:me isn’( ) rea [l-]
=sitta åe ånt( ) ri [k-

[I’m gonna ↓do [ a ↑month ↓here
=ja ska ↓sitta hår [ en ↓månad.

Anita [( )]

Chair ye:ah?
=ja?:

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In the pre-laughter event (lines 1–23), Anita displays a worry that she will have to live with people with drug problems, and she says she does not wish to do that. She uses her pregnancy to further account for the impropriateness of her staying in such a place (lines 1–2). While the clearly preferred response here would be to grant Anita’s request, this may simply not be possible due to organizational constraints. Accordingly, in a response spanning over several turns, the chair thus declines the request. It may be noted that his response displays virtually all the features of a dispreferred action (Heritage, 1984). It entails long pauses (lines 3, 5 and 7), a solitary “y↓e:s” (line 4), hesitation sounds “well”
(line 6) and “eh” (line 8) and restarts: “it is possible it is possible” (line 9). Furthermore we find the chair agreeing (line 8) with Anita in her worry, and in her request. Producing several tokens of hesitance, he admits that he cannot guarantee a drug free environment, or as he puts it, “ther’s a risk” (line 15).

In other words, two participants agreeing over a problem build up the pre-laughter sequence, but where one of the parties has to engage in delivering the undesired message: Anita cannot be guaranteed a drug-free placement. Anita recaptures the previous exchange, reformulating her original request at the same time: “uhmthat’s wha’ I mean I don’twanna >do time with< those” (line 22). Notably, she receives no response at all, and the two-second pause is a rather marked event in this particular context, indicating that there is little interest on the part of the other participants to dwell upon this problem.

I would even claim that not being able to provide a drug free environment might be somewhat embarrassing for the staff, in light of Anita’s framing of the problem. The impasse is resolved in the next line by Anita’s assistant who exclaims: “you w↑on’t be ↓doing TIME!” (line 24). As it were, this also initiated the laughter event, so it may be interesting to take a closer look at the assistant’s production of this action. Her tone is animated and her message clearly stressed. The assistant’s turn shifts the topic to choice of words instead of questions concerning Anita’s future and the possibly embarrassing implications this may have for the participants from the social welfare agencies and the Detention Home staff.

Note that Anita orients to this exclamation very differently, than she oriented to the previous exchange with the chair. She overlaps the assistant, projecting the final part of her turn, and she acknowledges the change of wording together with the particle “so” (då), which in Swedish is placed in a turn-final position. This has the upshot of an instant invalidation of the assistant’s objection. Put another way, Anita displays an orientation to the assistant’s turn as clearly irrelevant to her previous argument. And now people start to laugh. Three individual laughers can be differentiated, but there are more people laughing in the back-
ground. How can we understand the laughter at this particular point in the exchange? What is funny about this situation, one in which people deal with very serious matters? Are they laughing at Anita, at her way of expressing herself?

I would claim that this is not the case. In order to account for that conclusion let us consider again the pre-laughter event. One notable feature of the interaction between Anita and the chair is that, despite the fact that she does not get the guarantee she requests, she is met as an equal speaking partner. As could be seen already in example 2, although the meeting expresses worries about Anita in relation to drugs, her present self-categorization as not doing drugs is not at all questioned here. We could say it is accepted for all interactional purposes. So her request that a drug-free person should be placed in a likewise drug-free institution is clearly received as relevant for the purposes at hand. That is to say her claim she is not doing drugs is one of the issues Anita and chair agree upon “for all practical purposes” (Garfinkel, 1967/1984) in order to continue their discussion of the future placement.

Now, with the assistant’s correction some completely different elements enter. When Anita gets corrected for her choice of words, she is cast as less than an equal partner in the exchange. What we have is a form of category anomaly (Hester, 1996), where the category-bound activity “doing blatant correction” does not match the category “equal speaking partner,” which was clearly established and oriented to in the previous exchange between the chair and Anita. Somewhat related reasoning is found in McHoul and Watson (1984), concerning categories put together in strikingly unassociable ways. In our present example we have seen that the discussion between chair and Anita addresses the sensitive and problematic issue of her future placement, and we have seen that the two parties agree upon a critical understanding of the future institution as less than a drug free environment and as a place potentially unsuitable for a pregnant woman. Note that for the purposes of that discussion, the category bound activity “doing time” otherwise associated with imprisonment is accepted as relevant to the institutional placement Anita may be facing.
However, this discussion is disrupted by the assistant who suddenly rejects the relevance of the category bound activity (“doing time”) for the institution the chair and Anita have been discussing. In a sense then, the assistant is highlighting and opposing towards a particular feature of the taken for granted understandings that have been informing the exchange between Anita and the chair. I want to argue that it is precisely this critique of Anita’s (but also by implication the chair’s) conduct that provides for the awkwardness of this situation, which I have argued results in laughter in lines 26–28.

Also, in tracing the “laughable” aspects of this episode, it has been suggested that Anita’s worry may be seen to express a criticism of the institutional care, by pointing out that the placement she is facing involves contact with drug addicts. This is also evident in her description of her stay there as “doing time”, which is a lay term for imprisonment and contrasts sharply with the official notion of institutional care. I have also argued that for the purposes of their discussion, the chair accepts the relevance of this description. It may therefore be suggested that perhaps the laughter is not merely responsive to the adversative exchange between Anita and her assistant, but it may also provide a way for the meeting to move on from the embarrassing situation of not being able to guarantee a drug-free environment. Indeed, this seems to be what the assistant is doing, by changing the subject to Anita’s choice of description. Note that this is done against the backdrop of the fact that Anita’s description was fully accepted by the other parties attending the exchange, including the chair who actively co-sustained Anita’s categorization.

Some other aspects of the post-laughter event may also be considered. In several lines (29, 31, 33 and 36), the assistant elaborates her argument, that Anita’s choice of description is not only inappropriate (possibly also supported by the teacher in line 32), but also provocative (31 and 36) and we find the assistant parodying Anita’s argument by animating her voice (line 33 and 36). In other words, the assistant tries to exploit the laughter event for the purpose of further joking and parodying as if the laughing was directed at Anita. However, nobody laughs at her parody, and we
may in fact see that the chair tries to terminate this sequence by picking up Anita’s turn (line, 34 inaudible) and by producing a disagreement token in line 37.

Laughter could then be interpreted as a display of embarrassment, on the level of social organization, between the representatives of a criticized branch. Neither the chair nor Anita take part in the laughing. It would seem that, for the two of them, laughter is out of place here (Hester, 1996), as Anita has made a rather heavy investment in accounting for her right to a drug-free environment as well as the place being somewhere you “do time”. Likewise, the chair has accepted and co-sustained Anita’s ways of categorizing her future situation. Starting to laugh would for both of them risk undermining their agreement. As it turned out, when the post-laughter period finally fades out, we can see that Anita and the chair re-engage in a discussion of the problems of her projected placement.

Conclusions

As we have seen in the analysis, in spite of the argumentative nature of these exchanges, in which participants display oppositional stances, the laughter is not clearly directed at a single participant. Rather, it can be seen as responsive to the awkwardness of a situation, created by the escalation of oppositional turns of talk. Likewise in Haakana (2001) the participants oriented to a situation as delicate by laughing. At the most general level, this observation is far from novel. In 1905/1966, Freud analyzed laughter as the organism’s way of relieving itself from drive-related tension in order to regain a balance in the structural organization of relations between the id, ego and superego. In other words, he argued for an exclusively intra-individual view on laughter. What seems to be operating in the present examples is laughter as a kind of tension relief on the level of social organization, where laughter is not a matter of simply bursting out, but rather appears as a minutely organized activity. As previously
noted by Buttny (2001), laughter occurred at specific instances when it seemed difficult to continue the interaction along the previous line of disagreement.

Moreover, in relation to laughter, the present analysis accentuated other salient features of interaction. For instance, laughter was shown to be an efficient tool for the structuring of interaction, as it furnished both lay and professional participants with opportunities to participate meaningfully in the flow of talk without actually expressing much through words. In example one, laughter provided a way of producing a dispreferred type of action in a humorous way. In the next example, the chair created a laughable situation, accomplishing an interactional time-out from a sequence of escalated disagreement, which seemed to have reached its peak. In other words, the chair could be seen to exert conversational dominance in an efficient, yet smooth and (it would seem) socially appreciated manner.

The sequences of laughter in example 3 demonstrated two important things: First, they show how, through carefully placed laughter, Linda was able to achieve and display an alignment with the teacher at the Detention Home, distancing herself, by the same token, from her old school. Second, the participants neglected to take up Linda’s father’s laughter produced in connection to his own sarcastic comment concerning his daughter’s failure in school. This neglect can be seen to display the notion that joking at Linda’s expense was considered inappropriate at the network conference. A similar example of joking out of place is analyzed in example 4, when the assistant tried to ridicule Anita’s way with words, exploiting the previously laughable situation. Finally, in examples 2 and 4, it was demonstrated that not starting to laugh might be important in not undermining one’s own line of argumentation.

An important feature of the present study is that it takes on the issue of laughter as a multiparty phenomenon. While in the present data laughter occurs when two parties are engaged in adversative interaction, it need not be any of these parties that produce the laughter. That is to say, the onset of laughter by the other participants provides for the multiparty aspects of these exchanges.
Hence, laughter may be a means of participating in adversative interaction, without taking an accountable stand with respect to the subject matter of the dispute.

Hopefully, the present examples have demonstrated that laughter does not occur in an interactional vacuum. Indeed, I have shown several ways in which it shapes interaction, providing for the very multipartedness of oppositional exchange. In this way the present analysis contributes some new features to previous research on laughter in institutional encounters (Buttny, 2001; Haakana, 2001) that do not focus upon the multipartedness of exchanges.

Notes

1 An unidentified speaker is marked with (?)
2 Note that, with the exception of the adolescents under assessment and their parents, abbreviations refer to occupational identities. Bearing in mind the membership categorization already made by this procedure, this naming system was still chosen in order to help the reader. See also the discussion between Schegloff and Billig on these and other issues concerned with contextualization in Discourse & Society (1999).
3 Earlier the meeting has discussed how Anita’s sister broke up with the family and nowadays is excluded from the family due to her critique of their lifestyle of taking drugs.
4 In order to contextualize this example (Example 2) a short extract is presented, taken from an instance about 20 minutes earlier in the same meeting. Anita’s assistant is describing the way Anita has behaved in the institution and what she (the assistant) believes Anita would benefit from.

1 Ast one thing I’ve thought of that you hehehe ((burst of laughter))
   En sak som jag har tänkt på som du hheheheh ((skrattpust)) (.)

2 that I maybe have a hard time explaining is that you
   som jag kanske har lite svårt för att förklara det är att du

3 really need to assert yourself more in everyday situations (.) and
   så
   skulle behöva ta mer plats i vardagliga situationer (.) och då

4 I mean that you should be able to say no more or following along with
   menar jag att du skulle kunna säga nej mer eller följer gärna med
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5 the rest of the group even when they’re doing things you maybe really resten av gruppen även om det är saker som du egentligen kanske

6 don’t want to do so anyway I have the feeling that you do it to inte vill så har jag i alla fall den känslan av att du gör det för att

7 (.) be nice and all you know (.) you should assert yourself more, like HERE I am(.) va snäll och så va (.) du skulle ta mer plats, alltså HÄR är jag

8 so, wave a little ↑more ((waves both hands in the air)) så, vifta lite ↑mer ((viftar med båda händerna i luften))

That is, Anita is explicitly recommended to learn how to express and assert herself.

5 A HVB-hem (Hem för vård och boende för unga mammor) A small institution for care of young mothers.
Chapter 7

“I Don’t Have No Damn Cultures”: Accomplishing a “Normal” Identity in a “Deviant” Setting*

**Abstract:** This paper reports on ten interviews with girls/young women referred to Youth detention homes. The present work treats the social interaction taking place between the parties to an interview as a site for investigating the joint production of social identities. Specifically, it shows how various notions of “ordinariness” permeate interaction, serving various functions in the unfolding talk. Sacks’ (1972, 1992) notion of membership categories proved useful in understanding how local identities were interactively produced and embedded in the jointly recognized project of a research interview. The idea that people share a preference for “doing being ordinary” as a basic way of organizing experience (Sacks, 1992, Vol. II) serves as a starting point for the analysis. In-depth analyses of interaction show that normality or ordinariness served as a tool for making plans for the future. Furthermore, the notion of normality was exploited when presenting presumably deviant behavior as an ordinary affair. Also, it served to relocate the notion of deviance from the subject to its social circumstances. Finally, the notion of normality was used to form explicit opposition to a presumed institutional categorization. In sum, the study highlights various devices used to manage institutional categorizations and identities based on notions of normality and ordinariness. The findings are finally discussed in terms of the relevance of an interactional approach to interview-based social science research.

* Osvaldsson, K. Submitted for publication
Identity as a Practical Achievement in Research Interviews

As part of a larger project dealing with referral talk (Hester, 1998) and other discursive practices in Youth Detention Homes, a number of interviews with girls/young women were conducted. During these sessions, various matters were discussed, related to the reasons why they were admitted to the home. In a sense then this specific study deals with talk about referral talk.

A prevalent feature of mundane conversations, is an understanding of one another as being normal until something else is proven. Accordingly, “normality” itself is seldom made an issue. In the present setting, however, things were somewhat different. When focusing upon usually neglected aspects of interview talk in such settings, that of reasoning practices, it was found that, when negotiating identities, issues of “normality”, or “ordinariness”, dominated the negotiation of participants’ identities. Hence, Sacks’ idea that people share a preference for “doing being ordinary” as a basic way of organizing experience (1992, Vol. II, part IV) provides a good starting point for the present analyses. Being ordinary is something that people can be seen to “do” in talk-in-interaction.

Nearly two decades ago, Carolyn Baker (1983), collected a large corpus of interviews with adolescents on the subject of being an adolescent and growing up. She argued for, and conducted re-readings of her material in order to find, an “additional order of data, located in the conversing” (p. 501), proposing that the interview transcript itself be seen as an instance of adult-adolescent interaction. More recently, Robin Wooffitt (1992) conducted unstructured interviews about paranormal experiences, highlighting the participants’ devices for presenting their stories as reliable (accounting for the ordinariness of the phenomena and, by the same token, their own normality). See also Wetherell and Potter (1992) for a similar methodological approach into their study of racist discourse.

Of great interest relevant for the present paper is a study reported by Widdicombe & Wooffitt (1995). Setting out to investigate why young people joined subcultural groups, they analyzed...
accomplishing a “normal” identity in a “deviant” setting

their material, with a discursive focus, treating the informants’ accounts as their topic of investigation, rather than seeing these accounts as passive resources for a conventional content analysis. This allowed for an approach to identity as an interactional achievement, as well as group affiliations as “constructed, maintained and negotiated in ordinary, everyday language” (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995, p. 1). For example, there is a widespread assumption that young people join and conform to subcultural groups in need of a collective identity while at the same giving up their own individuality. Widdicombe and Wooffitt however, could demonstrate that the informants themselves sometimes used this very assumption, in order to characterize some members’ “inauthenticity and shallowness” (p. 180). Analyzed from the members’ point of view Widdicombe & Wooffitt’s data proved to be a rich arena for exploring the complexity and richness of social categorization.

Analyzing interview categorizations as interactional products allows a movement beyond traditional theories of Identity, which largely focus on intra-individual aspects. For an elaborated discussion of the problem with a cognitivistic view of categories see Edwards (1997). The alternative approach advocated here is to stress the dialogic nature of identity and to understand social identities as locally situated phenomena, indexed, occasioned and made relevant in and through the unfolding interaction (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998b; Aronsson, 1998).

As popular as interviews have been both in constructive approaches and in mainstream social sciences, they are often seen as thoroughly problematic within ethnomethodologically informed approaches to social conduct such as discursive psychology (Edwards and Potter, 1992) and conversation analysis. Within these analytical strands, there is a strong emphasis on studies of naturally occurring talk, or talk that is not merely produced in order to generate research data. Within the social sciences, the notion of the research interview as a site for interaction has previously been either overlooked or merely treated as a methodological rather than theoretical problem. For some years now, various ways of dealing with the “interaction problem” have been subject

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to substantial critique (Baker, 1983; Mishler, 1986; Silverman, 1993). It has been shown how the fixed format in traditional survey interviewing violates participants’ own understanding of the task and consequently jeopardizes the validity of the results (Houtkoop-Steenstra & Antaki, 1997; Suchman & Jordan, 1990). Treating research interviews as arenas of social interaction instead allows for an understanding of both the interviewer’s and the interviewee’s analytical resources as they enter a situation of joint construction of meaning (Baker, 1997; Hester & Francis, 1994; Roulston, 2000; Silverman, 1993).

Aims

Within this framework, interview talk can be seen as one way of accounting for membership versus non-membership (Baker, 1997; Edwards, 1998; Widdicombe, 1998), and as a way of coordinating claims for distinct social identities. Accordingly, the present study aims to highlight the use of category contrasts for the projection of “normality” in interview interaction. In what ways can normality and ordinariness be exploited and specified during a research interview in a Swedish Detention Home setting? According to Hester (1998), “Category contrasts are “occasioned” devices for describing deviance in that they are constructed for the local situation at hand, to make just this point” (p. 136). In this way, participants’ use of category contrasts can serve to specify issues of normality and deviance as relevant for this particular context.1

Setting, Subjects and Analytical Perspectives

The paper is part of a larger project on how girls and young women in Youth detention homes (Swe: “Särskilda Ungdomshem” or “Section 12 homes”, Söderholm Carpelan, 1996) manage to participate in the discursive practices taking place there. The
total corpus of data consists of nearly 60 hours of audiorecorded talk collected during participant observation at three institutions, two assessment homes and one treatment home. The participants were informed about the project both orally (by the staff at the homes or the researcher) and in writing (by the researcher). Furthermore, it was made clear that participation was voluntary and could be terminated at any time. The present paper reports on the interview part of the project carried out by the author. It is based on ten individual interviews with girls and young women (aged 13–17 years), that had been admitted to a home. The interviews varied in length from about 30 minutes to about an hour and a half. The average interview lasted around 45 minutes, making a total of seven and a half hours of audiotaped interview talk. All participants were interviewed at the detention homes, either in their own rooms or in a counseling room, depending on their own preferences.

The interviews can be characterized as thematized but unstructured (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). A quite detailed interview guide was brought to each interview, but it turned out not to be very useful. In effect the major themes were largely covered, but not the specific questions. When listening to the tapes it was discovered that the interactive work involved in constructing membership categorizations was central to all interviews. Hence, to follow the common practice in interview studies those focuses on the interviewee’s contributions exclusively, seemed to distort the analysis in a systematic yet unnecessary way. A more fruitful enterprise was therefore to take the organization of talk itself as the topic of investigation (cf. Baker, 1983, Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995). The transcriptions follow CA conventions, with some slight modifications.²

The present analyses draws extensively on Sacks’ (1972, 1992 Vol. I) notion of a Membership Categorization Device (henceforth MCD). According to this work, the MCD constitutes a collection of commonsense categories and added rules about how to apply them. Furthermore, the categories invoked by members reflexively create the context for shared understanding of actions by indexing the relevant conceptions of the world. Through such

More importantly for the present purposes through the MCD, members may construe identities by invoking sets of shared categories. In Coulters’ (1999, p.178) words: “persons (speakers/hearers) are construed as assemblies of occasioned features, contingent upon how local cohorts’ practices constitute them”. On this view, membership categorization is to be seen as a cultural, methodical activity, which has meaning in specific contexts. Hence, categories are “cultural resources, public, shared and transparent” (Watson, quoted in Silverman, 1998, p. 129).

Recently, conversation analysts have shown a renewed interest in membership categorization. For example Psathas (1999) views membership categorization as a “complex, on-going, interactive achievement” (p. 139), “accomplished in the talk and interaction of the parties” (p. 139). An entire volume of Studies in Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis, edited by Hester and Eglin (1997), is devoted to issues related to MCD. Hester and Eglin distinguish between ethnomethodological membership categorization and a “decontextualized” MCD, which is drawn upon in, for example, cognitive anthropology (Tyler, 1969), where categorizations are seen as the outward reflections of mental representations. An ultimate example of the renewed interest may be the publication of the first introductory guide in “how to do MCD”, by Lepper (2000).

**Being Ordinary as a Practical Accomplishment**

In line with ethnomethodological reasoning, social identities can be seen as joint practical achievements that can not be separated from the particular methods employed to create them. Importantly, culturally shared collections of categories provide members with such resources in constructing social identities. The ex-
examples below will show the participants doing categorization work that deals with such categories as “normality”, “ordinariness” and “deviance” defined here in terms of their locally emergent use.

Planning on Becoming Ordinary: The Future Lists

In the first example, normality is invoked and used quite explicitly in the unfolding talk. It is glossed as “a normal life” and specified through the formulation of definite plans for the future. Activities associated for instance with independence and a temperate life-style are bound to it.

Example 1 /CA1130/ H: Hanna, I: Interviewer.

1 I but what will happen in the year 2000, men va händer då år 2000 va e de som

2 what’ll happen then. tell me! händer då. berätta!

3 H what’ll happen? va som händer?

4 I uh huh then you leave this place and mm då flyttar du härifrån och då flyttar

5 then you’ll move to= du i stället till=

6 H =back to my mom’s place first and °then° hem till min mamma först å °sen så° ja,

7 well, I’m gonna go to school ja ska gå i skolan

8 (1) (1)

9 I’m gonna (. ) have an apartment of my ja ska (. ) ha en egen lägenhet (. ) å

10 own (. ) and behave no I’m gonna live a sköta mej nå ja ska leva ett

11 (1) (1)
What do you think of as a normal life? Va e de som du tänker e ett normalt liv?

Living in a good way. ‘N’ave good pals Leva på ett bra sätt. Å ha bra kompislar

have friends(.) that you can trust. Who ha vänner(.) som man kan lita på. som

don’t take advantage of you (..) ännte utnyttjar en (..) >till<<e:mpel

>for<<e:mple. yeah. trusting each other ja. man kan lita på varandra: “såna

°stuff like that° grejer°

The question in line 1 functions as a pre-sequence to the interviewer’s request for a narration: “tell me!” a common technique within qualitative interviewing (Kvale, 1996). Hanna however asks for a clarification in line 3, and the interviewer offers a more focused question by introducing a storyline “uh huh then you leave this place and move to”. Note that the way in which Hanna orients her narration toward a shared notion of normality is provided for by the interviewers’ formulation which can indirectly be seen as categorizing Hanna’s current location (“this place”) as deviant. It is also formulated as an invitation for a very definite future plan, a format Hanna picks up. Notably Hanna completes the interviewer’s utterance, presenting an extended turn with several narrative features. Let us look at this in some detail.
Drawing on examples from ordinary mundane conversations, Jefferson (1990) found that three-parted list-constructions, are recurrent phenomena in mundane conversation. Despite this being an interview situation, the same three-part phenomenon seems to be operating here (cf. Roulston, 2000), except that they are several lists following upon each other. The interviewer initiates the first list’s first item (and consequently the list format itself):

“leave this place” (line 4), but then Hanna continues with a second “back to my mom’s place first” (line 6) and a third one: “well, I’m gonna go to school” (line 7).

All three are located in the nearest future and can be said to belong to a category of a normal schoolgirl’s life-situation. After this, a pause follows upon the categorization and then follows another list, placed in a more distant future when Hanna has stopped being a schoolgirl and has started to live a more adult life. In this life she’s going to:

“have an apartment of my own”, (line 9–10)
“behave”, (line 10) glossed as:
“no I’m gonna live a (1) normal life” (line 10–12)

Both lists are produced in a very decided fashion but formulated in general terms. They have another feature in common as well. Neither leaves space for any lapse for the right part; they are ideal or perfect futures. This may explain the following disclaimers / qualifiers: “sure I’ll party a few times now and then but not too much (.) I am not gonna (do drugs)” (line 13–15). It should be interesting to note that by employing the list format with its general claims in combination with the specific qualifiers Hanna manages to set up a very clear contrast between categorizations of a perfect or at least normal versus a deviant life-situation.

Casting Drug Use as an Ordinary Affair

The second example shows how issues of deviance and normality may in fact permeate a seemingly open question. More specifically, when answering the interviewer’s question about her placement, Bea introduced the issue of her using drugs. While
drug use may be associated with relatively deviant teenage behavior,⁶ Bea herself talked about her drug use as unproblematic or even insignificant ("merely tried it").

Example 2 /AB322/ B: Bea I: Interviewer.

1 I when you were admitted (.) what made you när du kom in (.) vad var de som gjorde
2 you be sent to the detention home now? att du kom till utredningshemmet nu?
3 (1)
4 (1)
5 B u::h (.) at-at school they claimed ä:: (.) dom-dom i skolan påstod att
6 that I was high at school on dru:gs jag vatt påverkad i skolan av kna:k
7 >´n stuff< (.) å >sånt< (.)
8 I uh huh mm
9 B then I thought if I’m ho:nest now maybe I så tänkte ja om ja e årlig nu så kanske
10 won’t have (.) ya know to go to ( ) and jag slipper (.) alltså komma till ( ) å
11 all. so I told ´m how it was. så där. så ja berätta hur de va.
12 (1)
13 (1)
14 then yeah (.) I end up in [( )]
   sen ja (.) hamna jag i [( )]
15 [how how] how’s [hur hur] hur å:
16 that? what happened? (.) ´cause you said de? hur va de? (.) för du sa du var
17 you were honest an told how things were= årlig å berättade hur de va=
Accomplishing a “Normal” Identity in a “Deviant” Setting

16  B  =yeah right, I told them (.I said I
       =ja asså ja berättade (. ja sa att jag

17  had tried I said (.
       har provat sa ja (.

18  I  mm
       uh huh

19  B  yeah, so I thought
       ja, så tyckte ja

20  (1.5) (1.5)

21  B  it wasn’t such a big (deal) there are
den var änte så (farlit) de finns mer

22  lots of kids that (try) that you can’t
ungdomar som (provar) än man kan räkna

23  count as abusers. so I thought they’d
som missbrukare. så tänkte ja dom skulle

24  count me with them (. but it didn’t
räkna in mej där (. men så blev de änte

25  turn out that way
   så

26  (2) (2)

27  I  so your strategy didn’t work so
   så de var en taktik som inte funkade så

28  well=
   bra=

29  B  =yeah right you can’t be that honest
   =nå precis man kan änte va årlig så

30  (. but sure you can be honest
   (. men visst kan man va årlig så

31  but=
   men=

32  I  =so you regret it now do you?
   =så du ångrar dej nu eller?

33  B  well I might as well have said not how
   ja, ja tycker ja lika gärna kunde ha
After the interviewer has posed her question, a one-second pause follows, before Bea starts to formulate a response. Her “uh” could be seen as a way of showing an unwillingness to answer the question, but as it is embedded between pauses and followed by re-starts – a kind of word search (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1986) – it is more plausible that the token belongs to the first part of the search. This is followed by an utterance holding the staff at school accountable for her presence at the home, as she claims they said she had appeared to be affected by drugs. Thereafter Bea reports on her strategic truth telling and its failed outcome. The interviewer does not pick up the floor after the narration, and Bea
Accomplishing a “Normal” Identity in a “Deviant” Setting

starts to continue her story after a full second’s pause. The interviewer’s clarification request seems construed to make Bea disclose information about her drug use, which she indeed does in line 16. Yet, she only admitted to the staff that she had “tried” (line 17). Following upon the resolution of the clarification sequence, Bea takes up a new line of narration (line 19–25) in which she explicates the previous statement on her “failed strategy”.

Note that Bea introduces two categories of drug users: the “abusers” and “those who try”. By admitting to the school staff that she has indeed tried drugs, Bea hoped that she would be included in the latter category. As it was, however, she was immediately categorized as an abuser, which in turn led to her admittance in the institution. Clearly then, Bea produces a very explicit account of having been (mis) categorized as a deviant teenager. Having made that point, Bea’s narration seems to have reached an end, and on lines 27–28, the interviewer provides an explication of Bea’s point that the strategy of truth telling misfired. Bea immediately confirms this, suggesting that it is impossible to “be honest” if you wish to succeed. In response to the direct questions from the interviewer asking if Bea now regrets her honesty (line 32), she reports that she might as well not said anything. The interviewer proffers the interpretation that lying would have spared her her placement in the detention home, which Bea readily confirms, as “they couldn’t prove anything” (lines 41–42). Lines 27–42 display how the interviewer and Bea thus collaboratively discard “honesty” as a useful strategy. In their attempt to avoid construing Bea as deviant, the interviewer and Bea in fact, co-construe honesty as something to regret.

Before moving on to the final turns, let us first consider the contingent nature of the present exchange. It begins with a request for an account of the reasons for Bea’s presence at the home. But why does Bea talk about things never explicitly requested? What kind of common sense reasoning may motivate such an extended account? I would suggest that what seems to be taken for granted here is the notion that a normal teenager does not belong in an institution. This is a shared assumption, (in the interview) and Bea orients to this by trying to distance herself from the detention
home, making it clear that she has been mistakenly categorized as deviant, i.e. as a drug abuser. Because the category of a normal teenager does not match the category of an institutionalized one, an identity of a dislocated teenager, someone who does not belong there is locally constructed for Bea. This interpretation was suggested already in lines 4–6, in her distancing herself from the staff’s presumed claims. It may now be noted that both lines 16–17 and 21–25 support it, and that this interpretation is due to the jointly established implicit fact that Bea is not a drug abuser. Bea’s final validation of her self-categorization as a non-abuser in the last lines (44–45) is a direct response to the interviewer’s preceding question. However Bea also spontaneously supplies a qualifying statement – she does it with her friends, only during weekends. Implicitly, this state of affair can be contrasted to non-normal teenagers “abusers”, who take drugs on a daily basis, and/or who take drugs on their own.

In sum, the information that (i) she had merely tried (lines 16–17), (ii) that there are lots of kids that try without being abusers (lines 21–23), (iii) that she does it with friends (line 44), and (iv) that they only do it on weekends (line 45) are four distinct partial accounts crucial for a categorization of Bea as a “tryer” as opposed to an abuser. These are also instances of what Sacks (1992) has called “doing being ordinary” (Vol. II p, 216), the everyday work we do to accomplish ourselves. By presenting her drug habits as ordinary, Bea casts herself as belonging to a category of sensible normal teenagers, without drug problems. Notably, this supports her rejection of the actions taken by the school, and ultimately her very presence at the home.

**Relocating the Non-Ordinary**

In the previous example, it was shown how Bea (rhetorically) exploited the notion of normality and ordinariness to account for her drug habits. By presenting her drug use as an specifically unremarkable affair, she was able to cast herself as an ordinary teenager, dismissing, by the same token, the school’s as well as the institution’s categorization of her as a teenager in trouble.
However, the interview sessions also involved other ways of dealing with institutional ascriptions of non-normality. The next example shows that while such ascriptions may be principally ratified by a participant, the elements of non-normality may be relocated from her own person to the social circumstances in which she found herself prior to intake at the detention home.

Example 3 /AA120/ A: Anita I: Interviewer

1 I what do you think was the most urgent vad är din uppfattning om vilket som var

2 reason that you came here? den akuta orsaken till att du kom hit?

3 (.) what happened just (.) vad var det som hade hänt precis

4 before that led to (.) you getting innan och som gjorde att (.) du fick det

5 this LVU¹ on you, huh? här LVU:t på dej å::h?

6 A that was just’cause they thought that det var bara för att dom tyckte att e:h

7 u:h (.) the father of the baby wasn’t what (.) pappan till barnet inte var som han

8 he(.) should be (.) (. ) skulle va (.)

9 ya know if you put it that way (.) asså om man säger så (.)

10 then he isn’t either ya now but= å det är han änte heller ju men=

11 I =so it had more to do with the father =så det hade mer med pappan att göra än

12 than with you? med dig?

13 A yeah (.) still if I am to get a good ja ( . ) samtidigt för att jag ska kunna

14 start in life now (.) ’cause I’ve been få en bra start i livet nu ( . ) på grund
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15 hanging around the wrong people. just av att jag har umgåtts med fel personer.

16 plain (kept) the wrong company (vistats) i fel kretsar helt enkelt.

17 and uh ya know, they were men eh alltså, dom höll ju på med

18 doing drugs but I don’t do narkotika men jag håller ju inte på med

19 drugs see. but then I narkotika va. men det var så att jag

20 met a guy that I fell madly träffade en kille då som jag blev

21 in love with< and that I was with a jättekär i< och som jag var tillsammans

22 really long time=
med jättelång tid=

23 I =uh huh=
=mm=

24 A =I was so in love I couldn’t see his =jag blev så kär så ja kunde inte see

25 faults ya know (.) when you’re really hans misstag va. (.) när man är riktigt

26 in love you can’t see the person’s kär så kan man inte se den personens

27 mistakes and so (.5) then I got pregnant misstag och så (.5) jag blev gravid då

28 by him (.5)
med han (.5)

29 I uh huh
mm

30 A a:nd we:ll then they thought I’d å: ja: sen tyckte dom att det var

31 really messed that up they väldigt slarvtigt gjort av mej som
In brief outline, the interviewer’s first set of questions (lines 1 through 5) relates to the events immediately preceding Anita’s intake at the detention home, resulting in her getting an LVU. The upshot of this line of questioning is that of highlighting Anita’s recognizably non-ordinary condition: being placed at a detention home is certainly not a commonplace experience. In response, Anita accounts for her situation by suggesting that the reason for her being there has to do with the father of her yet unborn child (lines 7–8). This understanding of Anita’s account is displayed in the interviewer’s summary in lines 11–12.

Upon this summary, Anita qualifies her previous answer, suggesting in lines 13 through 16 that the detention will enable her to get a new start in life, as she has previously been socializing with “the wrong people”. Now, in terms of culturally shared commonsense categories, being a young woman in wrong company is associated with a whole range of non-ordinary, and from a societal point of view, generally undesirable activities. Arguably, it is in terms of this implication that we should view the continuation of Anita’s narration, in which she unpacks the gloss “keeping the wrong company”, admitting that drugs were involved. Here, she employs a contrastive format (cf. Dickerson, 2000) by stressing that while the others were doing drugs, Anita in fact was not: “they were doing drugs but I don’t do drugs, see” (lines 17–19).
telling that she had fallen “madly in love” (lines 20–21) and that they were together for a really long time (lines 21–22) she is accounting for keeping the wrong company, and for which follows later, becoming pregnant. The “state” of “being in love”, is in fact used by Anita as a disclaimer for not realizing she even was in wrong company. In lines 30–31, after the elaborated account for her behavior, Anita returns to the original question about her intake at the detention home, that she had been acting carelessly. In line 32 she agrees with the social services assessment that “it’s just carelessness right”, and then she finishes by stating she will have to face the consequences in order to be able to deal with the future. In conclusion: these non-ordinary circumstances non-withstanding, Anita is highlighting the reasonableness of her actions. Note that by this way of accounting for her behavior, she is in fact orienting to a commonsensical categorization of her as a deviant teenager. Therefore, through her accounting work, she is artfully claiming an identity of a perfectly ordinary teenager who found herself in abnormal circumstances.

“Rastas” and “Pentas”: Opposing the Non-Ordinary Category Ascription

The last section concerns the work involved in making explicit oppositions of what is here referred to as undesired and deviant categories (as they are used here). How do the respondents accomplish being “not that kind”? Is it possible to require some attributes or activities associated with the category but still strongly oppose full membership? Prior to the transcript below, the interviewer and Anita have been discussing the multiparty meeting at the home last week. Immediately after that meeting, Anita complained about the inadequate questions that were posed there. The interviewer asked Anita about her current opinions about the questions posed by her social workers.
Example 4 /AA120/ A: Anita; I: Interviewer.

1 I were there some that like- that you now var det några av dom liks- som du nu så
2 af- afterward think that (. ) yeah maybe här i ef- efteråt tänker att (. ) ja de
3 they are (. ) good to check out or does där kanske är (. ) bra å kolla eller
4 it feel like- liksom känns det-
5 A uh huh mm
6 I (. ) does it still feel stupid? (. ) (. ) känns de fortfarande dumt? (. )
7 A yeah of course it feels stupid but also det är klart att det känns dumt va
8 (. ) that bit about that I met men alltså (. ) det där med att jag
9 the wrong guy and °( )° and all hittade fel kille och °( )° och sånt
10 I know that was stupid but the stuff det vet jag det är dumt men det där med
11 about Rasta culture and drugs and all rastakulturen och droger allt
12 that that doesn’t make sense ya know de där det stämmer inte va för
13 ‘cause I don’t have no damn cultures. jag har inte några jävla kulturer.
14 I have my Swedish culture and that’s all jag har min svenska kultur och den är
15 hell it’s not like the goddamned ones allt vård fan inte några jävla såna som
16 in America in the ghetto right finns i Amerika i ghettot va
17 I eeh aeh
The Studies

18 A hehh and everything they talkhehe about hehh och allt vad dom snackarhehe om ja

19 I mean that was [heheh]=
menar det där va [heheh]=

20 I [hehei]
[hehei]

21 A =that, that was just too much.
det det var för mycket det där.

22 ((omitted to avoid identification))
((borttsaget av sekretessskäl))

23 A the only thing I know about my de enda jag känner till om mina

24 cultures is 'du gamla du fria' and kulturer de är 'du gamla du fria' och

25 I don't know what they (mean) those jag vet inte allt va (som menas) dom där

26 cultures, I don’t know what they're kulturena, jag vet inte vad dom snicker

27 talking about. Jesus I mean (. ) what do om bara. herregu jag menar (. ) de jag

28 I know about Rasta culture, it's those känner till om rastakulturen, de e dom

29 long dreadlocks and wearing red, yellow, där långa flätorna och gå med röda,

30 green clothes heheh the kind that have, gula, gröna kläder heheh såna som står

31 a:: no Jesus (. ) no: it's not med, a:: nå herregu (. ) nå: de är inte

32 my style (. ) all that. min stil (. ) de där.

33 I okay (. ) reggae’s not for you then?= nå hâ (. ) de: ingen reggae för dig då?=

34 A =no
=nu

35 I but you like music anyway? tycker du om musik annars?
7 • Accomplishing a “Normal” Identity in a “Deviant” Setting

36 A yeah ↑ yeah (.)
ja ↑ ja (.)

37 I what’s u:h your favorite then?
vad e:h gillar du mest då?

38 A well actually *reggae* [ih I hhlikheh
det e faktiskt *reggae* [ih ja tycker

39 heh I ] must
hehom jag] måste få lov att

40 I [hihihieheh [hihihieh

41 huh okay]
hehmm okej]

42 A admitheh* that ((coughing and laughing))
erkännaheh* det ((hostar och skrattar))

43 but see it’s not my style, if you know
men alltså det är inte min stil, om du

44 what I mean.
förstår vad jag menar.

45 I sure I can see that
nå men det ser jag

46 A right you can see that I have a pair of
nå men det ser du jag har ett par

47 regular decent sweatpants on and
vanliga hederliga gympabraller och

48 a gray shirt. I don’t have
en grå tröja. ja går inte med ett par

49 dreadlocks and all those reds and
rostaflätor i håret och alla

50 yellows and greens
röda och gula och gröna färger

Anita’s first account (line 7) starts with a confirmation of the interviewer’s question, that it still feels stupid. But she also partially confirms that it was indeed stupid of her to have such a boyfriend (referring to former week’s multiparty meeting, but then
she moves on to an “extreme case formulation” (Pomerantz, 1986) in line 13, “I don’t have no damn cultures”. This formulation not only allows Anita to assess (and devaluate) “talk about culture” but also to display her own stance (Edwards, 2000) as it sets up a contrast between Anita and “rastas”. In her next sentence, she stresses the discrepancy even more by contrasting her Swedish culture against the “American ghetto culture”. The interviewer then provides minimal acknowledgement (“eeh”, in line 17), which may be why Anita changes her opposition into something to laugh about. She diminishes the importance of the social worker’s question and makes the target of her critique less specific by transforming it to talk that is just too much:

“hehh and everything they talkhehe about I mean that was [heheh]=”, “=that that was just too much.” (lines 18–19 and 21). Her ignorance about “her cultures” is further specified in lines 23–32, and she seems to close the topic by claiming that its not her style “ no: it’s not my style(.) all that.”

Thus far in the example, Anita has implicitly categorized herself as an ordinary Swedish girl, ignorant about culture(s), who happened to fall in love with the wrong boy. Importantly, she strongly opposes being categorized as Rasta. The interviewer introduces the issue of musical preference, which often has close connections to style. As it turns out, Anita admits that her favorite music is reggae. But how does she go about telling this without disqualifying her previous statements? Now, note that in describing her previous statements Anita starts to laugh, embedding her statement with “admitheh* that” (line 42). Evidently, that is of great importance here, meaning that she likes reggae music but that this taste in music does not categorize her sufficiently as a rasta. Her use of the word “admit” also indicates that she felt accused by the previously discussed ascription. I would like to suggest that the shape of the participants turns in lines 38–42 orients toward the mutual recognition that Anita’s preference for reggae music may be heard as a disqualification, or at least a contradiction, of her previous self-description. Thus Anita can be seen working at a distinct categorization of herself, where her musical taste should not be generalized to her entire lifestyle. Note that in
line 43, Anita stresses once more that one can listen to reggae without being a *Rasta* by repeating that, “it’s not her style”, this time with the tag “if you know what I mean”, soliciting alignment with her self-presentation. The interviewer confirms that she indeed understands “Sure, I can see that” (line 45). By this she introduces a shift of (topical) focus from “style” to “appearance”. Anita format ties to the interviewer, ratifying the new focus, “right you can see that” (line 46). She also uses the new focus upon appearance by describing her clothing (Widdicombe, 1998), “regular decent sweatpants” (line 47) to elaborate her non-affiliation to the category of “Rasta”.

In the next example, similar strategies are used but for a different purpose. The interviewer and Petra are talking about her future. Petra believes she will move to a treatment home after the assessment but wonders whether she will fit in. Her worry concerns a special category of female teenagers, namely “Pentas”, a kind of people Petra explicitly says she does not belong to.

Example 5a /APe928/ P: Petra, I: Interviewer.

1 P Yeah: (.) but it’s gonna be hard’
   Ja: (.) men de kommer å bli jobbit

2 cause (.) I’m not used to being
   eftersom (.) jag äe änte van vid å

3 around gals all the time (.) like
   va omgiven av tjejer hela tiden (.)

4 they’re gonna ya know like I’m
   liksom så de kommer väl asså ja

5 gonna feel ashamed when I get
   kommer å skämmas den första tiden när ja

6 there at first
   kommer dit där ja kommer å

7 I’m gonna feel stupid like and all (.)
   känna mej dum liksom å sånt (.) men ja

8 but I think it will be okay later
   tror nog att de går bra sedan
In the first lines, Petra expresses a fear that she will have a hard time in the new place, as she is not used to being surrounded by
“gals”. But she also expresses mild optimism – it is going to be okay later (line 8). After the interviewer’s request for specification as to why Petra believes she will feel awkward, she moves on to describe a category she definitely does not want to be associated with – “Pentas” (line 19). But at first, she does not verbalize this feeling. She hesitates in line 11 and restarts twice, before saying “those gals they’re like real different than me like”. Yet, from an institutional perspective they may all count as belonging to the category; “girls and young women in need of special institutional care”. Notably Petra ratifies this categorization by admitting that “we all have problems but u::h” (line 14–15). However her “u::h” seems to work as an introductory device for saying that this categorization is not very relevant from her point of view. She then states in line 18–19 that “like I don’t hang around with Pentas and such”, followed by alternative labels “rough ones”, “cool types”, and an explanation of what such girls may do; they stick together. This implies that not only does Petra disassociate herself with these girls, but that they may actually exclude her too. Somewhat later in the same episode, the interviewer asks for an explanation about “Pentas” and Petra then delivers an elaborated description of this category.

Example 5b /APE928/ P: Petra; I: Interviewer.

1 I =You’ll have to tell me what a pentabrud
   =Du måste berätta för mej va en

2 is cause that’s something I’ve
   pentabrud e för de e sånt som jag bara

3 seen in (.) postis in Sydsvenskan only
   har sett i (.) postis i Sydsvenskan å ja

4 and I don’t really know what it means
   vet inte va de e riktit

5 P heheh
   hehe

6 I heheheh
   hehehe

7 P Well, that’s ya know it’s the kind who
   Ja de e typ såna som sminkar sej
According to Petra, they wear overly heavy make up, believe they are someone, wear short short skirts, extremely tight clothes and believe that they rule the world. In talking about the “over-heavy makeup” and “extremely tight clothes” that Pentas reportedly wear, Petra is orienting to their non-ordinariness or even extremeness. In Petra’s use of the term, Pentas is a category for a select group of young persons, as opposed to overall labels such as teenagers, which is a category available also for non-members. As such it could be compared with Sacks’ work on “hotrodders” (1979, 1992 Vol. I Part II) with the difference that hotrodders speak of themselves as hotrodders, as such it is a self-labeling category, which is what makes it revolutionary in Sacks terms, and importantly in stark
contrast to the outside (adult) world. The category is set up and used by kids themselves and for themselves. A category as “Pentas” on the other hand, seems to be used here as a contrasting device by non-“pentas”, in order to label others.

Normality as a Joint Accomplishment

This paper has approached the research interview as an instance of talk-in-interaction. The negotiation of meaning in such talk is treated as a joint practical accomplishment. Categorizations are seen as practical features of interaction. They are used in order to “make distinctions in the world, to define membership, in ways that are relevant to the accountability of actions” (Edwards, 1997, p 243). The present analyses foreground the analytical procedure underpinning the categorizations. In contrast to traditional research interviewing then, the findings are firmly grounded in the very research practice through which they are generated.

In the interviews, an orientation toward issues of normality and deviance seemed to be operating between the participants, as well as a shared understanding that being institutionalized is associated with deviance. One of Sacks’ initial observations was that in everyday language, doing being ordinary has to do with the non-production of stories. But as we have seen here, normality is very much an issue in the interviews, often made explicit in the course of talk. One reason for this may be found in the interview procedure, where the questions asked by the interviewer often seemed to induce storytelling episodes.

Another explanation deals with what the parties to the interview oriented to as taken for granted, stereotypic assumptions concerning the interviewees’ situation, namely that their very presence at the institution granted the categorization of them as deviant. After all, the interviews took place in Youth detention homes, with which most young people in Sweden have had no contact. To talk about how one is “doing being ordinary” is thus locally motivated for several reasons. One being a possibility to
create stories about why one does not “belong” in a detention home, and consequently create a distance between oneself and the home as well as against fellow teenagers in detention. Whatever reasons the participants actually had for claiming identities associated with ordinariness and normality, what is of greatest interest here is how this was accomplished. What are their means of doing ordinariness in a situation like this?

It was demonstrated that this can be accomplished by planning for future actions associated with the category “ordinary teenagers” (example 1). When focusing upon language use rather than the individual-group distinction (Widdicombe & Wooffitt (1995), it becomes possible to see how a lot more work gets done than simply/merely opposing ascribed categories. Accordingly, “normality” or “ordinariness” was accomplished through complex categorizational work that indexed various issues not just as “normal” or “deviant”. Often issues were cast as not belonging to a certain deviant category despite its face value of doing just that. So a lot of effort was put into re-organizing and nuancing the categories themselves. This is done when the ordinariness in merely testing drugs as opposed to being a drug-abuser is put forward by Bea in (example 2). In example 3 Anita’s “deviance” was relocated from within herself to surrounding circumstances such as an abusing boyfriend and other “bad company”.

Example 4 discusses the possibility of listening to reggae without being rasta and examples 5a and 5b display the problematic issue of having different kinds of problems than the other residents while at the same time acknowledging that you are a teenager in trouble. What the last examples do is that they display explicit questioning of social categorizations while at the same time acknowledging affiliation with specific characteristics often associated with those categories. As in the categorizations of “abusers” in the first examples, specific groups, here “Rastas” and “Pentas”, are cast as extreme cases, contrasted to “regular decent” categories of ordinary teenagers. In these cases, the contrasts operate between something extreme or very deviant and something normal or reasonably normal.

Thus the interviews involve sets of category contrasts ranging
from (i) ideal versus deviant to (ii) ordinary/normal versus deviant and finally to (iii) (reasonably) normal versus extremely deviant. Interestingly, although Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) collected their material in very different settings, the results show some notable similarities. For instance, they too found young people claiming ordinariness, among other things by downplaying the correspondence between appearance and group affiliation. However, their primary aims were to address the biographical level of subcultural analysis and to contribute to issues concerning the relationship between individuals and social groups. The present analyses have a more narrow focus concerning the use of various means for purposes of managing institutional categorizations and identities. To put it shortly, the participants to the two studies engage in very different interactional projects.

Notes

2 * * indicates croaky or changed pronunciation and /A2031/ refers to the researcher’s transcript library source.
3 In Sweden, selling, buying, possessing and being under influence of other drugs than alcohol is criminalized.
5 First line of the Swedish National Anthem.
6 Colloquial expression, typical for southern Sweden for a category of female teenagers. See example 5b for an explanation.
7 Postis is a column for young people in Sydvenska Dagbladet, a Southern Sweden newspaper.
Part III

Conclusions
Summary and Concluding Discussion

The discussion in this concluding chapter is threefold. First I wish to briefly outline the research landscape concerning Youth Detention Homes. Then follows a summary of the four empirical studies, including discussions of the ways in which they depart from earlier research. The last part deals with the implications of this thesis and the way in which it contributes to a deeper understanding of the practice of doing assessment talk as well as to the study of talk in institutional settings as such.

What is the Problem?

Lately, there has been considerable research mapping and categorizing the groups of youth that enter Youth Detention Homes in Sweden. Their background has been thoroughly examined in terms of a number of factors, and researchers have noted that these groups of youth and their families belong to the most disadvantaged groups in Swedish society.

Compared to average Swedish families, these families are described as poorer, less educated, more criminally burdened and as having more marked problems including different forms of
abuse. These families have also been described as more dysfunctional and the young persons themselves have been characterized as often suffering from individual personality disorders, sometimes in combination with a low degree of psychological well-being. In brief, they have been categorized as having severe problems of various kinds (Armelius, Bengtzon, Rydelius, Sarnecki & Söderholm Carpelan, 1996). And vice versa, if a young person has such severe social problems and experiences a crisis s/he may be admitted to a Youth Detention Home.

In a historical perspective, outcomes of treatment have not proven very successful in the sense that the young persons treated at the homes have become less “deviant” (see for example Levin, 1997; Wiberg, 1976). Research originating in different theoretical positions has accounted for this shortcoming in basically two ways (Sallnäs, 2000). One position is that the institutions primarily have another function; they are to be seen as symbols of the State’s need to identify and organize various forms of delinquent behavior and as such they have proven very efficient, which would also account for their capacity to survive. For one example see Levin (1998). Another position argues for a professionalization of Youth Detention Homes, that is, the recipe is to further educate and qualify the staff in order to improve the results (Armelius et al., 1996) an as already mentioned, several development program’s, aiming to develop the work at the Youth Detention Homes as well as the staffs’ professionality have been initiated during the last years (Statens Institutionsstyrelse, 2001b; Uggla, 1999).

However, the emphasis upon mapping background factors and evaluating treatment outcomes has not yet been matched by a similar emphasis upon the very practices that construe the “organization’s work” (Watson, 1986), that is, the ordinary interaction that comprises institutional life. In an attempt to fill this gap, the present thesis focuses on the mundane practices of *doing* assessment talk and *doing* evaluation. It describes the local practices in which participants engage during multiparty meetings focused on arriving at a definition of the “problem”.

Originally, the present project started with an interest in the
girls’/young women’s possibilities to make their voices heard in an institutional setting where much was at stake for themselves, and their families. It soon became clear that, in order to study the means for “making oneself heard” in a multiparty setting, it is necessary to study multiparty interaction in depth. In other words, the investigation came to focus on a detailed sequential analysis of interaction as accomplished through talk. This interest crystallized into four empirical studies that will be briefly summarized below.

Summaries of the Studies

Chapter 4: Achieving Institutionality. Producing Formality and Informality in Multiparty Assessment Talk

Chapter 4 illustrates how members engage in different practices we may sometimes gloss as “institutional”. It is important to note that if formality had been taken for granted, rather than examined, as is frequently the case in studies of discourse taking place in institutions, the procedures whereby formality accomplished would never have been noted, let alone analyzed for their institutional features.

Generally, previous empirical studies of institutionality have dealt with the production of formality, and its discursive constraints. Similarly, the present study highlights some formalizing devices that attune the interaction to particular organizational goals, as when the chair allocated turns very explicitly (example 1). The present analysis of the situated production of formality revealed that the production of informality might equally serve the organization in performing its stated goals. It shows that informality work was initiated by the chairman, as in the coffee drinking practices (example 6). Clearly, a set of expectations as to the proper forms of conduct was operating in this setting. This is perhaps most evident when the expectations were violated, for instance when a father took the initiative to demand a cigarette break (example 7), and we have seen that such a change in the agenda called for elaborate negotiations. Such a “deviant case
analysis” (Heritage, 1988; Schegloff, 1968) is important in ethno-
methodologically informed research, as it reveals what is other-
wise unnoticed and taken for granted.

The detailed analyses of the methods through which a sense of
institutionality was accomplished at the Detention Home reveal a
rather formal and strict taken-for-granted procedure with specific
turn allocation orchestrated by the chairman, a situation where
even informal talk is turn allocated and scheduled by the chair as a
part of the agenda. It also reveals that this procedure could be set
aside but other participants, but that such a project required exten-
sive effort on the part of the initiator. In the network meetings
studied, the main negotiating actors were found to be the chair
and the social workers representing the welfare agencies. Many of
the girls/young women and their families were seldom ad-
dressed and they were rather quiet during the meetings. This con-
firms what earlier researchers have reported about lay members’
participation in formal settings. In spite of the production of infor-
mality (coffee talk), on a more general level, the participants were
found to orient to these meetings as basically formal occasions.
This was analytically demonstrated in terms of their ways of par-
ticipating in the flow of talk. An important aspect of this was
found in the participants’ orientation to the chairperson’s orches-
tration of the interaction in accordance with a meeting agenda,
rather than towards a turn-taking machinery prototypical of
mundane interaction (Sacks et al., 1974).

Thus, what seems to be at work here is a particular type of pref-
erence structure related to the type of event initiated by the chair-
person. For instance, in the cozy-coffee event, the preferred form
of interaction seems to follow the lines of mundane social encoun-
ters, as evidenced by the participants’ ways of accounting for So-
fia’s rejection of the cake and her minimal involvement in the in-
teraction. In other words, a bracketing of the institutional setting
seemed to be crucial. In contrast, during the part of the meetings
devoted to problem formulation and questioning, participation
was organized by the chairpersons’ different ways of allocating
turns, including their ways of using the whiteboard to formulate
and document questions. As we have seen (example 7), devia-
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...tions from this norm generated elaborate negotiation, involving an array of accounting and repair moves, thus strengthening the notion of a specific preference structure.

In conclusion, the analysis revealed an array of methods for the production of institutional talk with the help of both formalizing, and in-formalizing devices. In the present case, institutional talk resulted in a product, a document consisting of several questions that were to guide the young person’s further assessment. Importantly this document was co-produced by the participants attending the network conference. These conferences took place at a crossroad for different institutions, as well as the girl/young woman and her family, and other lay representatives. Together the participants defined and re-construed the young person’s problems and strived to agree upon what needed to be done. It was argued that such a co-production of a regulating document constitutes a specifically institutional (and institutionalized) practice. Thus, the forms of interaction through which the assessment questions were formulated turned these conference meetings into specifically institutional encounters. The analytical description of “institutionality” claimed here is therefore ultimately grounded in members’ tailoring of actions and the orientation of these actions toward the norms and expectations regarding the organization’s business proper.

Chapter 5: Assessment Narratives and the Editing of “Social Facts”.

Narrative Tense and Voice in Contrasting Versions of a Social Work Case

Chapter 5 is a case study focusing especially upon problem formulation practices. It was found that these took on the form of contrastive narratives when the person undergoing assessment, in this case a 15-year-old, Sofia, had her problematic life-situation examined. An important aspect of the manufacturing of assessment talk is for institutional representatives to construct descriptions that will withstand the critical scrutiny of other parties concerned. This study examines how lexicon, tense, and grammatical voice were re-worked in two contrasting account versions,
altering the facts about Sofia’s past actions and projecting different institutional identities.

To construe assessments, locating or relocating interactional trouble is the delicate business of a number of societal institutions, for instance, marital counseling (Buttny, 1993; Edwards, 1995, 1997) and school conferences (Mehan, 1993). In several studies of therapy talk, part of the therapy involves the negotiation and renegotiation of “what is the problem” (Aronsson & Cederborg, 1996; Peyrot, 1987). Within such discussions, assessments and other descriptions of persons are consequential for the parties at hand. Similarly, school conferences involve negotiations about social descriptions that are potentially important for the parties as such (Mehan, 1993).

In the present case it was possible to identify two distinct parties who were formulating contrasting narratives, on the one hand, the referral staff (that is the representatives of the local Social Welfare Agencies), and, on the other, the Detention Home staff (were the chair was the main actor in the sequences analyzed). The questions concerning Sofia’s assessment posed by the Social Welfare Agencies focused upon her problem background and were subject to rather elaborate editing work by the chair. The main result of this editing work was that it located actions in a different manner, which also changed matters of accountability in that Sofia was cast as being less accountable for her life-situation. She was seen as someone to whom things had happened, rather than someone who had “let” things happen. The chair’s edited narrative instead focused on matters that needed to be dealt with if Sofia’s life situation was to improve. In the two contrasting narratives about Sofia’s past actions, grammatical mode (active/passive) and verb tense (ongoing actions/past actions) were thus strategically edited.

Chapter 6: On laughter and disagreement in multiparty Assessment talk

In the multiparty network conferences laughter was found to have several interactional upshots. The analysis focused on the
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pre-laughter interactions, the laughing event proper, and the upshots of laughter with reference to the interactional goals participants could be seen to pursue. The findings show that laughter often emerged out of interaction to which the participants oriented as in some way tense or awkward, the most typical example being an argumentative episode. Laughter was then found to point the interaction in another direction. Laughter or the demonstrable absence of laughter was also a useful tool for an analysis of utterances to which the participants oriented as either “in its place” or “out of place” (Hester, 1996) for the meeting (see example 4). Laughter occurred at specific instances, often when it seemed difficult to continue the interaction along the lines of current disagreement. Moreover, in relation to laughter, the analysis accentuates other salient features of interaction. For instance, laughter is shown to be an efficient tool for the structuring of interaction, as it provided both lay and professional participants opportunities to participate meaningfully in the flow of talk without actually expressing much through words.

An important feature of the present study is that it takes on the issue of laughter as a multiparty phenomenon. While in the present data laughter occurs when two parties are engaged in adversative interaction, it need not be any of these parties that produce the laughter. That is to say, the initiation of laughter by the other participants is part of the multiparty aspects of these exchanges. Hence, laughter may be a means of participating in adversative interaction, without taking an accountable stand with respect to the subject matter of the dispute. In focusing on the multiparty nature of exchanges, the present analysis contributes some new insights to previous research on laughter in institutional encounters (Buttny, 2001; Haakana, 2001). In conclusion, the examples have demonstrated that laughter does not occur in an interactional vacuum. Moreover, the analysis points to several ways in which laughter shapes interaction, providing for the very complexity of multiparty oppositional exchanges.
Chapter 7: “I Don’t Have No Damn Cultures”: Accomplishing a Normal” Identity in a Deviant” Setting

The last empirical chapter deals with ten individual interviews, originally conducted with the aim of analyzing them in accordance with a life-history approach. As it turned out, a more fruitful way of analyzing the data was to treat the interviews as an instance of conversational interaction and as a site for investigating the joint production of social identities. Both participants in the research interview were found to orient towards the interview as a site for the investigation of “normality” and “deviance”. As noted by Sacks (1992), a basic way for people to interpret themselves and their place in the world is through the sort of work he describes as “doing being ordinary”. The orientation to the interviews as a site for investigating either “normality” or “deviance” could then be seen as an expression of a specific taken-for-granted situation being at play, such that doing interviewing in a Detention Home implies an underlying notion of deviance (rather than ordinariness).

All interviewees could be seen to produce descriptions of themselves as “normal” despite their “un-normal” life circumstances. In-depth analyses of interaction showed that normality or ordinariness served as a tool for making plans for the future. Furthermore, the notion of normality was exploited when presenting presumably deviant behavior as an ordinary affair. Also, it served to relocate the notion of deviance from the subject to her social circumstances. Finally, the notion of normality was used to form explicit opposition to a presumed institutional categorization.

In order to manage this, the girls/young women made use of category contrasts that operated along a continuum between (i) ideal versus deviant to (ii) ordinary/normal versus deviant and finally to (iii) (reasonably) normal versus extremely deviant. In sum, the study highlights various devices used to manage institutional categorizations and identities based on notions of normality and ordinariness. The findings are finally discussed in terms of the relevance of the present interactional approach to interview-based social science research.
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Some Reflections on Relevance

By dealing with the network conference practices as instances of organizational work being done at the Youth Detention Home, this study makes a unique contribution to research on institutional care for youth in Sweden.

It is the first to investigate the situated practices of problem-formulating in Swedish Detention Homes. Already in this respect it helps to broaden the understanding of these institutions and the work they accomplish. The data used in this thesis (with the exception of one of the interviews) all come from one assessment home. I take it, however, that the reader will wonder whether this study can say anything about other similar practices. What could be generalized from these very situated practices described here – practices that I have even claimed derive their strength exactly because they are situated? Very little, in terms of a traditional approach to generalizability, characteristic of nomothetic research methods. According to this orientation, the prevailing idea is that a sample (in this case the Detention Home) should reflect the “total reality” as well as possible. The better the sample matches the population, the better the reflection, the more valid the data. But the issue of generalization, as proposed by Peräkylä (1997), could also be approached from a different angle. He suggests that studies of situated practice, such as the present one, point to possibilities of interaction. They are examples of how interaction in a setting like this one can proceed.

The reader may also wonder why issues of class, ethnicity and gender are not being focused in this study as in much other research concerning this group of young persons in Detention homes and related circumstances. One reason is that the present study deals with conversational features rather than with individuals or groups of persons. Furthermore, we need to be cautious as to when in the analytical procedure such categorizations (e.g. class, gender) are made, as there is a risk that such categorical presuppositions will obscure a clear focus upon what actually gets done and what seemed to be important for the participants themselves during the interaction. In other words, the analyst is at risk of impos-
ing her/his own categories on the material, instead of conducting an analytical search for the participant’s own categorizations.

There are of course exceptions to this. Berglund (1998) is an example of a study in which gender becomes an important category during the analytical procedure. I wish to point out that I have a strong interest in issues surrounding class, gender and ethnicity, but only in as far as they are made relevant by the participants themselves. That this does happen sometimes is shown, for example, in chapter 7 (example 4), when Anita and the interviewer discuss issues concerning being/not being a rasta.

Other discussions in the meetings may very well concern issues relevant to a discussion of the construction of gendered identities such as becoming a mother (chapter 6, example 4), being a “penta” (chapter 8, example 5), or the choice of inappropriate boyfriends (chapter 5, example 2), and I look forward to addressing such issues in future reports.

It is well recognized that local approaches to talk have been criticized for ignoring macro level aspects of social structure. Still, I would like to point out again that, with respect to the studies at hand, it is precisely through the local anchoring of talk that we may learn about people’s understandings of the world. That is to say, by the help of the approach advocated here, we are able to describe how the structural aspects that traditional research tends to take for granted (as opposed to investigating) are in fact interactively invoked and consequential for the identities constructed in and through the work of “doing assessment talk”.

On Institutionality and Identity

The key concepts that have been drawn upon in the present thesis are institutionality and identity. Let us here reflect upon the meaning of these concepts in the current investigation.

It could be presumed that the cause of admittance, whether the young persons had been admitted coercively or not, that is according to LVU or SoL (see table 2 in chapter 3), would affect the discursive practices of assessment. An interesting finding of the present analyses is that there seemed to be no clear differences in
the way of presenting, discussing or defining the problems which indicated that such a distinction was made relevant by the participants in the meetings. Rather, the assessment procedure was found to be a serious and often challenging situation for all the girls/young women undergoing assessment, regardless of their placement background (LVU/SoL).

In chapter 4 it was demonstrated how institutionality was achieved in situ. Especially important here were the different devices that were used to constrain, formalize and lead the interaction in particular ways. An important feature of the interaction were the introductory recurrent coffee drinking events, in-formalizing conversational practices that were introduced by the chair, and serving the institutional project very well as it were.

The next chapter (chapter 5) discusses the meetings as a crossroad, not only between a professional and a lay participant party, the point is here that at least two different groups of representatives from different institutions took part in the problem formulating narratives. These narratives were often contrastive versions of an event or a problem, versions that had different upshots in terms of identity ascription, and agency. Was the young person characterized as a victim of unfortunate circumstances or did she “let things happen” to her?

In chapter 6 it was shown what could be achieved by the help of laughter, and especially how laughter cut across the different groups of participants. By laughing together the participants could form different alignments, both within and between different groups of institutional representatives, as well as lay participants and the young person herself. Sometimes laughter alignments made a difference in term of the direction of the institutional project going on, as when Linda and her mother in their laughter aligned with the teacher at the detention home, supporting the teacher in the pedagogical debate with the principal (example 3).

The interview chapter (chapter 7) is the one most involved in practices of explicit identity ascription. All interviewees were considered by the social welfare agencies to have rather severe social problems, hence the referral to the institution. Yet, they themselves recurrently did not present the selves as institutional cases.
By presenting themselves as at least reasonably ordinary according to the circumstances, they were able to distance themselves from the institution they currently stayed in.

The multiparty aspects of the talk and the consequences of the multiparty interaction were pervasive in most analyses. One such aspect is that the meetings were found to be crossroads for different institutionalities, and divergent institutional projects and rationalities that presented themselves in the form of contrasting descriptions of the young person and her life-situation. The young person and her family were located in the middle of the crossroad, listening to different narratives with crucial implications for the construction of the young person’s identity.

Listening may become especially important in multiparty interactions, as the girls/young women listened to others more than they talked themselves. They were instead the ones talked about. This of course addresses the issue of what it means to be heard. Does this imply that you must say a thing yourself or may someone else represent your views correctly? It was found that the chair’s accomplishment of “doing chairing” involved a great deal of crucial work in which s/he acted as a moderator and sometimes even as a kind of ombudsman or spokesperson for the young person herself.

This special function of doing chairing was found to be very important in ensuring that the interaction did not degenerate into instances in which the young person would have to stand in a pillory, faced with 6-14 adults, talking about her “problems”. Some situations could have developed into multiparty attacks, but the chair most often managed to balance the situation and secure another direction. Laughter, for example, at times proved a way out of an argumentative impasse, both for the young person and others. Moreover, the chair was also the only person who could make use of two different semiotic systems during the meetings, talking and writing things down on the whiteboard. On some occasions, s/he exploited these double systems when redirecting the interaction. These particular ways of “doing chairing” can thus be seen as instances of the situated accomplishment of specifically institutional interaction. Representatives of the two types of institutions
Conclusions

(referral staff, detention home) could, at times, be seen to take “sides”. This seemed to be part of the very rationality of the network meetings, though, and in the present conferences the chairs often balanced such different versions in subtle and sophisticated ways. One applied conclusion of this study is that such sophisticated chairing is probably an important felicity condition for young persons’ participation is such multiparty conferences.

Quite naturally, a first exploration such as this one calls for as many novel questions as it presents answers. One of the starting points for the project was to find what is commonly called a formal situation and to proceed by investigating the very practices that warrant its description as formal. Beginning with the analysis of what goes on around the laughter in chapter 6 (example 4), when the meeting is discussing Anita’s future treatment and placement, it would be interesting to, with the help of the already collected data, further study the treatment practices conducted in a treatment home in the same detailed manner. What does environmental therapy look like as a situated practice? For example, what really gets done when a young person’s self-identity is “to be strengthened”? What are the other observable practices comprising “doing treatment” as a feature of everyday interaction?

Finally, and in conclusion, it is my hope that this study has given the reader insight into some of the fine-grained and delicate aspects that comprise social interaction at the juncture of distinct institutional projects. Lately, in Swedish discussions concerning future directions for social work, the virtues of joint ventures between different institutions, as well as the idea of involving members of the clients’ social network in the assessment and treatment work, are being highly praised. I hope my studies have shown that, in order for this to work as a practical face-to face interaction, the centrality of a chair who is able to monitor the meeting is hard to overestimate, especially as the girls/young women are present at the meetings, listening to all the different versions of ascribed problems and identities concerning themselves.

The girl/young woman was normally present at the meeting and she often displayed a sensitivity towards the organizational projects being pursued as shown, for example, in Sofia’s orienta-
tion to the coffee talk as being not just any coffee talk. In Heritage’s (1997) words they displayed an interactional know how, which perhaps was not always matched by an equal amount of institutional know how (p. 176). It was possible for the girl/young woman to make herself heard. But it took quite some effort to do this, especially as they were seldom officially addressed and it was not an easy task, with so many people present.

So then, would I advocate it would be better for them not to take part at all? No, because despite all difficulties, being present gave them a chance to prepare themselves for their nearest future. They were facing several weeks of psychological testing, interviewing and other forms of assessment, highly consequential for their future. Their participation in the network meetings allowed them to get a preliminary sense of what representatives of the institutions as well as their parents considered to be the problem. Had they not been present, they would neither have been able to display their alignments – and disalignments, nor would they have had any real insight into issues that most intimately concerned their present and future lives.
Interview Guide

The current assessment
What happened right before you came here?
What do you feel is the immediate cause of your coming for an assessment at this particular time?
What do you think about and hope for concerning your current stay at the youth home?
Have you read any documents about why you have come here at this particular time?
What do you think the reasons are for the youth home doing this assessment?

Similarities and differences
Do you feel you are similar to or different from others in your family?
In what ways?

Moves
In what different places have you lived?
For how long?
What were the reasons for the moves?
Who told you that you would be moving?
How did you find out about it?
What did you think about it?
Did you say what you thought?
To whom?
Tell about when you moved away from your family for the first time.

The family
Who are the members of your family today?
What kind of contact do you have with your family now?
What is your attitude toward your family and what kind of contact would you like to have?
Which family members can you talk to?
About what?
Is there someone you cannot talk to at all?
What would an ideal evening with your family be like?

Schooling
What importance does school and the people there have for you?
Schoolwork or relationships at school, which do you stress the most?
Was there anyone at school, for example a teacher, who you could talk to?
A friend? Someone you would have liked to talk more to but you didn’t dare?
How was your first day at school?
Who told you how it would be to go to school?
What is your best memory from school?
Can you tell about a time when you felt very successful at school?
Unsuccessful? Worst memory from school?

Memories
What are some important memories that you think have helped to make you the person you are?
Do you have any things, for example photos, that you would like to show that are representative in some way?
Bring some of them to the interview!
Who gave them to you?
Where is that person today?
Appendix A

Do you remember anything about yourself when you were very young?
Tell about your earliest memory.
What stories have you heard about what you were like when you were little?
How do you think these might have affected your view of yourself?
Who told these stories?

Efforts from society
Can you tell about a report or a description of you that you have read?
Who wrote it?
What did it say?
Did you understand what it meant? If not, do you understand now?
What other contacts do you remember?
How well do you think the statements and reports fit the way you really are?
Have you understood what was written?
Have you seen the documents?
Did you listen when they told about various decisions?
Why do you think they made the decisions they did?
Has any “professional” person been especially important?
What was special about this person?
What was it like to talk to this person?
Before the meeting (the enrollment meeting) – what did you think it would be like?

Interests and future
Who would you like to be like when you are an adult?
Is there anyone around you that you would like to be like?
What is this person like?
Do you have any dreams about who you would like to be?
How close are your dreams to the person you think you are now?
Do you have any special interests?
Are you involved in them now as well?
Dear Youth Home residents,

My name is Karin Osvaldsson and I am working on a research project dealing with young women at youth detention homes. I am interested in what the young women themselves think about the efforts and decisions made concerning youth placed in the homes. For instance, do the young women always understand why they must go through an assessment? I am also interested in how the young women make their own voices heard during the assessments and in other situations. For instance, do the young women usually tell about their own desires for the future – about what they hope the assessment will result in?

Your participation in this investigation would be appreciated, but is completely voluntary. I would like to interview you on one occasion. The interview should last approximately one hour. If you choose to participate, you can later drop out of the study at any time. In the interview we would primarily talk about how teenagers can make themselves understood among adults, but also among other young people.

I would also like to be present at one or two meetings, during your assessment period, in which both you and the staff are
involved. At such meetings I would only be sitting and listening. The third thing I would like to do is to read the assessment material that will be written after your visit at the Youth Home. I would very much like to record both the meetings and the interview on audiotape. Would this be all right? I would be the only person allowed to listen to the tapes; this allows me to get information I would miss if I only took notes. You should know that my research project is completely separate from the assessment. This means that the staff will not have access to any “special information”, for instance things that we discuss during the interview.

The staff, just like everyone else who is interested, will be referred to the final report. In this report, the participants’ anonymity will be protected (among other things, names will be changed). This anonymity protection applies to all information I obtain. During as well as after the period of investigation, all material will be stored at Linköping University in a locked cupboard. If you have any questions or would like a copy of the report, you are welcome to contact me at the university at 013-28 10 00 or 28 29 09.

Best regards,

Karin Osvaldsson


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