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Ascribing Problems and Positionings in Talking Student Teenage Parent¹

(A) person understands themselves as historically continuous and unitary. The experiencing of contradictory positions as problematic, as something to be reconciled or remedied, stems from this general feature of the way being a person is done in our society (Davies & Harré, 1999, pp. 36–37).

(T)o act rationally, those contradictions we are immediately aware of must be remedied, transcended, resolved or ignored (Davies & Harré, 1999, p. 49).

These two passages from Davies and Harré (1999) capture a phenomena to be examined here—the notion of “contradictory positions as problematic.” Ascribing contradictory positions of another person can work to raise or formulate a problem for that person. Especially important for the present study is that one can position oneself, or one can be positioned by others, in jointly produced accounts. The focus here will be on *how problems get interactionally formulated by the actor and interlocutors*, and *how participants position themselves in relation to these problems*. To approach these questions, we examine the *conversational practices* interlocutors use in formulating, ascribing, and accounting for problems.

Student Teenage Parents

Within contemporary Western society, being a student teenage parent is a problematic position to be in. As a recent policy review puts it, “Teenage pregnancy and parenting are among the nation’s greatest tragedies because of the burdens they impose on future generations . . . (A)n especially strong link has emerged between teenage

parenthood, long-term welfare dependence, and poor outcomes for children” (Maynard, 1997, p. 89). Teenage parenthood is considered as a kind of “irrational behavior” in that teenagers do not intend to get pregnant and have families at an early age, and doing so conflicts with their own stated values (Maynard, 1997, p. 89–90). Other reviews of research make similar kinds of dire reports. “Teen mothers are less likely to complete high school than their classmates . . . Adolescent parenting results in a loss of human potential” (Card, 1999, pp. 257–258). The prospects for teenage parents do not seem promising.

While these trends present a portrait of major difficulties for the student teenage parent, our interest here is in how this positioning is taken at the local level. That is, how do participants in two different kinds of situations make sense of, orient to, and talk about being a student teenage parent?

Data

This study examines two conversations that involve discussion of being a student, teen parent. The two conversations are taken from Frederick Wiseman’s documentary film, *High School II* (1994). The first is among four high school peers conversing at lunch break in which one of the participant’s being a father becomes discussed. The second data segment is taken from a meeting among a returning high school student with her baby and her mother and brother meeting with the school’s codirectors, a social worker, and the homeroom advisor. The two segments (12 minutes and 14 seconds, and 11 minutes and 8 seconds in length respectively) were adopted from the 3 hour and 40 minute documentary. A reviewer described Wiseman’s approach to documentary, “There is no narration, no identification of characters. His camera simply settles in and eavesdrops” (James, July 6, 1994). Given this more naturalistic approach to filming, we adopt these segments as data, or talk-in-interaction.² Wiseman’s documentaries have been used as source of data in other discourse studies (Buttny & Campbell, 1990; Mehan, 1990; Philipsen, 1990/91; Sanders, 1995; LaGrande & Milburn, in press).

Four Peers Conversation

Conflicting Category Predicates as Joint Achievement

In the following excerpt, four high school peers are having a conversation during a lunchtime break. The conversation touches on var-

ious topics, among them a story about leaving an infant alone in the back of a car, while the mother goes to work. While discussing this topic, one of the participants, BH, is asked about *his* child. Consider how BH's positioning, or membership category, as a parent becomes oriented to by participants.

Excerpt 1. Four peers.

(Note: pseudonyms are used to identify the participants.)

(Discussing leaving children alone in a car and BH's child's recent illness)

- 13 OW: >How old is he?<
- 14 BH: He's one (.) ↑how many months?
- 15 fourteen months, ↑something like that.
- 16 WH: Fourteen that's
- 17 OW: A month and two- a year and two m[onths
- 18 BH: [A year
- 19 and two months, °something like that°
- 20 WH: ()
- 21 OW: ()
- 22 WH: >How old are you BH<
- 23 BH: I'm eighteen.
- 24 (1.1)
- 25 WH: °Damn°
- 26 BH: I'm eighteen and two months=no::: h[hh
- 27 OW: [hhhhhhh
- 28 BH: I'm eighteen and (.) ↓I don't know
- 29 I'm about to be nineteen soon.
- 30 (1.9)
- 31 WH: () being a father (dude)
- 32 BH: °That's- that's one thing !:, ° ↑[I never imagined=
- 33 NH: [\$And I remember you\$
- 34 BH: = myself be[ing a father

By way of background, this conversation shifts from discussing a news story (not shown in this excerpt) about a child being left in a car all day to WH's own child. This is the first point during the conversation in which BH's membership category as parent becomes mentioned. The topic of BH's child is not brought up by BH, but by an interlocutor, WH, by asking how the child is doing (not shown in this excerpt). BH tells about his child's recent illness, and then OW asks the child's age (line 13). A few moments later, WH asks BH how old he is (line 22). After BH tells his age, WH responds with "Damn^o" (lines 23–25). WH's, "Damn^o," can be heard as responsive to BH's age as a father, that is, to these "conflicting category predicates" (Hester, 1998) of BH being a father and being eighteen years old. In this sense, WH's "Damn^o," implicates a possible critical assessment or evaluation of BH. WH's assessment, "Damn^o," is mitigated somewhat by being momentarily withheld [the 1.1 second gap (line 24)] and being uttered somewhat quietly.

BH does not immediately address head-on the implicated assessment of WH's "Damn^o". Instead, he shifts footings and jokingly answers the question again about his age. BH uses a humorous child-like format by stating his age in years and months, which occasions laughter (lines 26–27). BH then restates his age, this time without irony, but corrected to almost nineteen (lines 28–29). This repetition of stating his age, corrected to almost nineteen, can be heard as responsive to WH's implicated assessment.

In response, WH explicitly raises the membership category of BH's "being a father" (line 31). The fact that BH is a father is already known by the participants. So WH's identifying BH as a father can be heard as "noticing" it (Schegloff, 1988) or drawing attention to it. WH's utterance, "() being a father (dude)," can be heard as juxtaposed to BH's prior self-description, being almost nineteen (lines 29–31). This is more than a juxtaposition of descriptive facts; it underscores these contradictory positions or conflicting category predicates. Citing these conflicting category predicates is a way of formulating a problem.

BH's response (lines 32–34) displays that he takes these conflicting category predicates as raising a problem. While only a portion of WH's comment (line 31) is understandable from the videotape, BH's response goes along with WH's assessment. As BH avows, "I never imagined myself being a father" (lines 32–34), seemingly conceding to this problematic positioning of being a too-young father.

Before BH can further explain this avowal, NH comes in overlapping BH. BH and NH overlap for a moment, but BH drops out and

lets NH continue before telling his side. Consider NH's story about BH (lines 35–41) and then BH's version of the story (lines 53–57).

Excerpt 2. Four peers

(Continuation of excerpt 1.)

- 32 BH: °That's- that's one thing !:,° ↑[I never imagined =
- 33 NH: [\$And I remember you\$
- 34 BH: = myself be[ing a father
- 35 NH: [\$No I remember you, (.)
- 36 we used to hang out with Alvin? at his house
- 37 and he goes ↓hell:: no I'll never get a girl pregnant
- 38 and boom >he was the first one to get a girl pregnant
- 39 I remember that< (.) remember we used to be like
- 40 remember when BH used to say this.
- 41 ↓I'm like yep.\$
- 42 BH: Always talk about people.
- 43 NH: We'd stay at Alvin's house ...
- ((skip nine lines))
- 53 BH: I used to always talk about-
- 54 I used to see young girls having babies
- 55 I used to be like >damn< (.)
- 56 < what the hell they doin' man:: >
- 57 (.) and then it happened to me?

Looking at NH's brief narrative, he tells of a contrast between BH's words and actions (lines 37–38). NH uses direct speech attributed to BH, "he goes ↓hell:: no I'll never get a girl pregnant" (line 37). This reported speech is then immediately contrasted to the reported action of BH being the first to get a girl pregnant (line 38). Again we see an interlocutor juxtapose conflicting predicates about BH—in this case, between what he said and what he did.

BH goes along with NH's story, indeed, he adds to it (line 42). A moment later, BH tells his own story echoing NH's story (starting at

line 53). BH also begins by contrasting what he said and what he did. BH's telling (lines 55–57) is structurally similar to NH's version (lines 37–38): each underscores the conflict between words and actions—that events went contrary to what he originally said. One important difference between these two versions lies in how BH's reported action positions himself as unwilling agent, “then it happened to me” (line 56). NH's formulation positions BH as a more active agent, “and boom >he was the first one to get a girl pregnant” (line 38). How events and agency are portrayed in narratives constitutes how actors are positioned in terms of accountability, e.g., as an active/passive agent, as (ir)responsible, as (un)fortunate, and the like.

Positioning Within the Narrative

In the following excerpt BH tells his story of becoming a father. Notice how he positions himself with respect to the pregnancy and the other people involved.

Excerpt 3. Four peers

(Continued from excerpt 2.)

- 58 BH: But I- I didn't want to-
 59 we didn't want to keep the baby ↓at first.
 60 (1.5)
 61 But then:: we had to keep it.=
 62 WH: = Why?
 63 BH: It was too la:te to do anything ↑about it.
 64 OW: How do you feel no[w
 65 BH: [When we told our parents::
 66 ↓she was already six months.
 67 OW: Six months. ↑Damn they didn't notice::?
 68 BH: No:: she ain't show:::
 69 WH: Girls they- don't be showin' man::
 70 NH: Especially she be wearing baggy clothes.
 71 OW: Yup: (.) you get away with that.

- 72 BH: \$Yep she got away with it 'til she was like six months \$
 73 then after that::[(.) every::body: was shocked::
 74 WH: [So- so how your parents take it
 75 OW: Yeah.They got mad at y'all?
 76 BH: My parents ↓didn't get mad,
 77 ↑I mean they was ma:d yeah but
 78 (1.3)
 79 ↑what could they do about it?
 80 OW: °That's true°
 81 BH: But her- her parents was like
 82 they're going to have to get married
 83 (1.0)
 84 WH: °Right°
 85 BH: Not her parents but her gran:dmo:ther:: (.)
 86 ↑so we did.

A striking feature of the way this narrative is told is through BH's use of a rhetoric of necessity—what he “had” to do. There are two aspects of necessity discourse at work in this narrative: the physical necessity of being pregnant and the practical necessity arising from that for practical action. Initially he contrasts what he wanted (corrected to “we” wanted) (lines 58–59), to what they “had” to do (line 61). BH explains the necessity of the situation, of having to have the baby, “It was too late to do anything ↑about it . . . ↓she was already six months” (lines 63–66). The practical implication of her being six months pregnant is that any choice in deciding to have the baby or not is removed as an option.

This resource of necessity is drawn on again a moment latter. In describing his parents' reactions, BH contrasts their being somewhat “mad” to the formulaic expression, “↑what could they do about it?” (lines 77–79). Again we see that the physical necessity implied here is presented as constraining actions. This physical necessity is also taken as making certain actions practically necessary—getting married. This is evident from the reported speech attributed to her parents, corrected to her grandmother, “they're going to have to get

married” (line 82). And as he concludes, they followed this direction, “↑so we did” (line 86). His narrative of the physical necessity of the pregnancy is taken as creating an obligation, a practical necessity, which indeed they adhere to.

BH positions himself through the narrative as initially not wanting the pregnancy, but once it was too late to do anything, he went along with it. The “it” he went along with is his obligations to family. Note the important positioning of family (his parents, her parents, and her grandmother) in determining what must be done (lines 76–86). On one level, this narrative can be heard as a “sad tale” in that BH has to do something that he does not want to do, but on another level, this can be taken as a story that puts obligation to family before individual wants. This narrative makes understandable the conflicting positions in which BH finds himself.

While BH’s story makes understandable his having the child, a recipient’s assessment can make relevant a different aspect of the story. This device of conflicting category predicates is seen again in the following excerpt, this time with a humorous uptake.

Excerpt 4. Four peers

(Continued from excerpt 3.)

[BH’s narrative of why he got married and had the child]

- 87 NH: ()
- 88WH: Where’s the ring man?
- 89 BH: H[Hhhhhhh
- 90 OW: [Hahhhhhh
- 91 BH: It’s being repaired.
- 92 WH: Yeah rig[ht
- 93 BH: [Being made to my own- my size
- 94NH: \$That’s what you told me last year man! come on!
- 95 I remember you told me last ye[ar.\$
- 96 OW: [\$() off\$
- 97 NH: Take that shit off man (.) you down with O.P.P.
- 98 OW: Hhhhhh[h

99 BH: [Hhh[hhhhhhhh

100 NH [hhhhhhhh

Following BH's story of getting married and having the child, WH changes footings by asking, "Where's the ring man?" (line 88). The transcription of "Where's the ring man?" fails to adequately capture the noticeable prosodic shift to a kind of ironic tone. Other participants notice this shift as seen by their laughter. This can be heard as a teasing query, as noticing a kind of deviance. The tease turns on the conflicting category predicates of being married and not wearing a ring. Conventionally, of course, drawing attention to a married man not wearing a wedding ring can be heard as implicating a lack of serious commitment to marital fidelity.

BH's account (line 91, 93) is oriented to by the others as being facetious. Indeed the account gets explicitly dismissed through the use of a humorous frame. Both NH and OW use a smile voice in discounting the veracity of the account (lines 94–97), and NH facetiously attributes BH's involvement with a rap group (line 97). The participants then flood out into laughter (lines 99–100).

Repeated Problem Ascriptions and Positioning

The problematic positioning of being a too-young father becomes raised again by WH later in the conversation. The repetition of problem formulation can intensify that problem (Labov, 1984). Also, repetition implicates that prior accounts have not adequately answered or resolved the problem.

In the following excerpt, NH narrates how he heard about the pregnancy.

Excerpt 5. Four peers

(Continued from excerpt 4.)

101 NH: (I remember last year) ↓yo my girl's pregnant

102 I was like ↑who::

103 When he told me I was like

104 (0.7)

105 WH: Yo [() should be (.) | flipped

106 NH: [()

- 107 NH: >I remember he told me outside<
- 108 wha:::t::: you stu::pid:: about this:
- 109 (.)
- 110 BH: °That's something man.°
- 111 (2.9)
- 112 BH: At [first- I still can't believe that I'm a parent.
- 113 WH: [()]
- 114 WH: No 'cause you too young (dude) you eighteen

In his story NH tells of BH informing him about the pregnancy. NH reports his reaction to the news and what he said to BH, that he is being “stu::pid::” (line 108). While this brief story lacks situated details or reasons, it can be heard as a problem story in that it focuses on a complication that is not resolved (VanDijk, 1993). Also, the narrator’s evaluation of BH’s position is clearly critical (lines 107–108).

In response to this story about the news of the pregnancy, BH avows its impact with, “°That’s something man.°” (line 110). This indexical expression, “That’s something,” becomes clarified somewhat by the admission of the difficulty in fully believing his new identity as a parent (line 112). That is, BH concedes to the problematic position of a not yet fully realized change in status. BH’s response here is similar in format to his earlier response when his being an eighteen-year-old father initially came up (see excerpt 1, lines 31–34). In each, BH concedes to the interlocutor’s assessment and expresses disbelief in being a father.

In response to BH’s avowal of disbelief, WH reasserts the conflicting aspects of BH’s membership category—being “too young” to be a father (line 114). In coming just after BH’s concession, WH’s ascription, “too young to be a father” (line 114), can be heard as an explanation for BH’s avowal of disbelief. Also, WH’s ascription of BH is a more explicit version of his prior problem ascription “() being a father (dude)” (excerpt 1, line 31). This ascription positions BH in a seemingly irresolvable problematic state.

Just as interlocutors can be critical as in ascribing problems, so can they be supportive in helping respond to problems. Interlocutors’ supportive, challenging, or humorous remarks make relevant a

range of responses that become part of how an account unfolds, gets told, and coconstructed. For instance, consider OW's response (lines 115–117) to WH's problem ascription (line 114).

Excerpt 6. Four peers

(Continuation of excerpt 5)

- 110 BH: °That's something man.°
- 111 (2.9)
- 112 BH: At [first- I still can't believe that I'm a parent.
- 113 WH: [()]
- 114 WH: No 'cause you too young (dude) you eighteen
- 115 OW: How you feel about it now?
- 116 like how do you feel about your baby and everything
- 117 (.) since at first you didn't want to keep it and all.
- 118 BH: I love: my kid:: and I'm- I'm proud that we uh you know
- 119 went through with it and we had the baby.
- 120 (1.8)
- 121 'cause: (.) I- >I don't know< it's hard to:
- 122 (1.4)
- 123 just::: (.) think about not having the baby around ↓so::
- 124 (1.2)
- 125 ((raise shoulders)) That's basically it =
- 126 = that's the reason- I don't know but
- 127 (1.6)
- 128 the ba:by: [is something.

As described above in the analysis of excerpt 5, WH makes explicit his ascription of the conflicting category predicates—being too young to be a father (line 114). WH's problem ascription here is not only rather explicit, but also repeated (cf. excerpt 1, line 31). The problem ascription projects an account, explanation, or response of some kind

from BH. Before BH can respond, OW intercedes and asks him about his feelings about the baby (lines 115–117). These questions, in effect, allow BH to change footings and reposition himself from the implications of being a too-young father to his feelings about the baby. For the membership category, father, there is nothing problematic about a father’s feelings about his child. Loving your child is part of the category-bound activities of being a father. In addressing OW’s questions, BH’s account positions himself more favorably—as loving the child and being “proud” that they “had the baby” (lines 118–128). Also, this change of footing allows BH a way to both avoid responding to WH’s ascribed problem and to obliquely answer it.

Problem Ascription through Formulating the Point of Another’s Story

Formulating the point of another’s story can be used as a resource to ascribe problems of another. For instance, consider WH’s ascription of BH’s motives (lines 129–130).

Excerpt 7. Four peers

(Continuation of excerpt 6.)

- 128 BH: the ba:by: [is something.
- 129 WH: [>It’s like if you could have done you would have<
- 130 but now that he’s here (yo)
- 131 BH: Yeah but (1.4) a baby is a life you know so that’s
- 132 WH: >Ain’t like a doll<
- 133 BH: I know:: (1.3) it ain’t like- (.) ↓ I don’t know it’s weird
- 134 (1.2) having a kid and ↑ then being there to see it be born.
- 135 that’s () ((narrative of being present at the birth))

As BH comes to a possible completion point, WH offers an account about BH’s motives vis-à-vis the pregnancy and the child (lines 129–130). WH’s account here formulates what is seemingly the point of BH’s own prior narrative of why they had the baby (see excerpt 3). However, BH resists WH’s formulation of his motives from that prior narrative. BH resists the ascription by adhering to a discourse consistent with the positioning of a father’s love for his child, rather than conflicting predicates of a too-young father (line 131). BH’s ac-

count resists WH's formulation by appealing to a higher principle. WH does not pursue the issue further; rather he responds to BH's account by a humorous remark seemingly making light of the issue (line 132).

Formulating the point of another's prior narrative can be used to articulate a problem for another. We see this practice again in the following excerpt, as an interlocutor formulates an upshot of BH's story (lines 1–2).

Excerpt 8. Four peers

((Narrative of being present at the birth))

- 01 WH: That shit must've changed your life completely
 02 around ↓man, ↑right?
 03 BH: ((nods head)) °I [can't believe it°
 04 WH: [You still be hangin' out with your
 05 friends °though°?
 06 (1.3)
 07 BH: Nah everything's changed=my whole life has changed
 08 (1.4)
 09 I don't act like it sometimes (.) when I'm in school
 10 but outta school I gotta act like ((nods head))
 11 OW: You gotta be more responsible
 12 BH: Yeah:: I'm responsible and (I'm)
 13 NH: Yeah you're still bummin' man h[hhhh
 14 OW: [hhh[h
 15 BH: [Everything changes
 16 OW: At least- at least you are re[sponsible about because there's =
 17 WH: [>How do you support your kid man<
 18 OW: = a lot a guys out there that wouldn't care

WH formulates the upshot of BH's narrative of being at the birth of his child (not shown here), that BH's life must have "changed," to

which BH concurs (lines 1–3). While the descriptive term, “changed,” can be taken as positive, neutral, or negative, as the talk ensues “changed” takes on more of a problematic hue. As BH explains why he does not hang out with his friends, he draws on WH’s prior term “changed” in avowing, “Nah everything’s changed=my whole life has changed” (line 7). In using another’s descriptive term, “changed,” BH can be heard as coconstructing his account to articulate his positioning.

Another coconstruction practice is seen, as BH is explaining this change and is seemingly searching for a word (line 10), and OW co-completes the utterance with “more responsible” (line 11). BH emphatically agrees and uses her term in his avowal “I’m responsible” (line 12). Given BH’s acceptance of her term, a moment later OW adds, “at least you are responsible” in comparing him to other young fathers (line 16 and 18). Using another’s term in the course of explaining oneself shows a coconstruction practice in accounting.

In sum, we have seen the various problem formulation practices work to project a response from BH to confirm, deny, or account for these problems. BH responds in different ways—by avoiding the issue, by conceding and avowing the problem, by telling a narrative to explain it, and by justifying himself. Through these responses, BH positions himself in two main ways: by what he had to do given the physical necessity of the pregnancy and the practical necessity arising from this. A second kind of positioning BH avows is a father’s love for his child. Interestingly, this latter positioning taken on by BH arose in response to an interlocutor’s supportive questioning in an accounts slot. Changing footings to the positioning of a father’s love for his child allows BH to resist the problematic implications of his own prior, unwanted pregnancy story. Different kinds of positionings are ascribed and taken up as regards being a student teen parent.

School-Family Meeting

Consider another case of the discursive uses of student teen parenthood as problematic. This instance occurs in the course of a meeting in a high school. A high school student, newly a mother, returns to school after being away for the pregnancy. The meeting with the codirectors, her homeroom advisor, and a social worker along with her family members—mother, brother (also a high school student), and infant child. The school representatives are observably White and the family members are observably Latino.

Formulating the Student-Mother's Problem

In the following excerpt the codirector raises some of the problematic aspects of being a teen parent.

Excerpt 8. School-family meeting

(Participants: CD1 = codirector, CD2 = codirector 2, SW = social worker, HRT = home room teacher, MO = student mother, GM = grandmother, BRO = brother of the student mother).

(Discussion of whether participants wanted a boy or girl baby)

- 1 CD1: You turned out okay John
 2 >Alright< so now:: the dilemma is,
 3 there's a lot of issues
 4 (1.4)
 5 It's very hard (1.2) to go back to school
 6 when you have >a little baby< ↑right
 7 (1.5)
 8 I mean there's a lot of complications in your life
 9 >ya know< how much slee::p you're gonna ge::t:
 10 how you're going to do the studying on the sj::de
 11 your own (.) friends::

The co-director moves the discussion from an amiable recollection of newborn babies and their gender to seemingly the point for the meeting—the student's potential difficulties in returning to school. She initiates this topic by identifying the student's situation as a "dilemma" (line 2). This is the initial point during the meeting in which the codirector turns to "the problem." The codirector articulates the problem by noting the difficulty or conflicting positions of being a student and having a "little baby" (lines 5–6). She proceeds by using the extreme case formulation, "a lot of complications in your life" (line 8) (Pomerantz, 1986; Edwards, 2000). This problem formulation then gets unpacked by the codirector listing the conflicting category predicates: problems with sleep, studying, friends (lines 8–11). In uttering this list of problems, she prosodically stretches the final word of each of the three complication statements (lines 9–11).

This word stretching works to emphasize and underscore the sense of these complications.

The codirector's ascriptions of the teen mother's positioning is recognized as a problem as seen by the grandmother's account (beginning at line 14).

Excerpt 9. School-family meeting

(Continuation of excerpt 8.)

- 11 CDI: your own (.) friends:: and,
 12 (1.2)
 13 and: [all your
 14 GM [The () baby is going to stay with (.) me
 15 in the room in the bassinet
 16 (1.3)
 17 so she could sleep.
 18 CDI So she could sleep ([)
 19 GM [Right (.) this way
 20 when she comes out of school she'll go home,
 21 do her homework,
 22 then:: she'll be with the baby.
 23 (1.7)
 24 CDI But she is trying to live two lives right?
 25 GM ((rolls her eyes))

While the codirector's ascription of problems is seemingly addressed to the student mother, the grandmother intercedes and speaks for the family. The grandmother overlaps, as the codirector's listing of conflicting category predicates moves on to a fourth point (lines 11–14). The grandmother's account offers a kind of solution (lines 14–22) to the codirector's ascribed problem. In other words, the grandmother does not contest the codirector's problem formulation, but presents a candidate solution to it.

The codirector's response avoids addressing this candidate solution offered in the grandmother's account (line 24). Instead, after a

1.7 second gap, the codirector formulates her version of the problem, “But she is trying to live two lives right?” (line 24). That is, the codirector articulates the upshot of her prior list of conflicting category predicates, clearly hearable as contradictory positionings.

How is the codirector’s response to the grandmother’s remedy taken? In the next turn, the grandmother rolls her eyes (line 25). Such a nonverbal behavior could be interpreted as a display of exasperation with the codirector for not agreeing. Given the timing of this eye roll, it seems instead to be occasioned by the codirector’s prior tag question, “right?” (line 24). So the grandmother’s rolling of eyes seems to display agreement with codirector’s problem formulation. At any event, the grandmother says nothing further to the codirector’s lack of response to her account.

The codirector proceeds to further articulate the problem, again using this device of conflicting category predicates to formulate and justify her ascription.

Excerpt 10. School-family meeting

(Continued from excerpt 9.)

- 24 CD1 But she is trying to live two lives right?
- 25 GM ((rolls her eyes))
- 26 CD1 To be- how old are you?
- 27 (0.6)
- 28 MO Fifteen
- 29 CD1 To be a fifteen year old
- 30 (.)
- 31 and to be a mother?
- 32 (1.9)
- 33 So that’s complicated.
- 34 CD2 And a st[↑]udent.
- 35 CD1 And a student,
- 36 so she’s gonna be a [↑]fifteen year: old::
- 37 (1.4)
- 38 with friendships and

- 39 (2.5)
 40 and then she's a [↑]daughter
 41 and then she's a sis::ter
 42 and then she's a mother::
 43 and (.) there's a lot of- and

In this excerpt the codirector formulates the teen mother's problem as "she is trying to live two lives" (line 24). As she specifies in support of this formulation, "To be a fifteen year old (.) and to be a *mother*?" (lines 29–31). The juxtaposition of these conflicting category predicates is oriented to as a problem (also as seen in excerpt 8). The codirector repeats her summation, "So that's complicated" (line 33); compare "I mean there's a lot of complications in your life" (excerpt 8, line 8).

The other codirector adds another conflicting predicate, "And a st[↑]udent." The codirector builds off of this by repeating it, repeating her age, and then listing her membership category predicates: friendships, daughter, sister, and mother (lines 35–43). Other than the teen mother's exact age, these category predicates were already known by the participants. The codirector's listing of these category predicates is a way of noticing them, drawing attention to them. Given that these predicates are heard as conflicting, works to formulate and underscore the problem.

Possible Institutional Consequences

Having ascribed these problems, the codirector moves on to some possible consequences for her schooling.

Excerpt 11. School-family meeting

(Continuation of excerpt 10.)

- 43 CD1 and (.) there's a lot of- and
 44 (1.2)
 45 and [↑]you want to graduate .hh
 46 MO ((nods head))
 47 CD1 Are you determined to do °that°?
 48 MO Yes ((nods head))

- 49 (1.2)
- 50 CDI At the moment you're hoping to do it ↑here
- 51 MO Yes ((nods heads))
- 52 (2.1)
- 53 CDI Are you- the- >the reason I say that at all< is that
- 54 (0.8)
- 55 ↑I would love: it to work out that way
- 56 (0.7)
- 57 >I really ↓wo[u]ld<
- 58 MO [Yeah I want it[to
- 59 CDI [Some other schools:::
- 60 where it's also possible to bring your child with you
- 61 to school have some ad↑van:tages.
- 62 (1.4)
- 63 So: just keep that in mind
- 64 >I mean< it's not a defeat if you decide at some point
- 65 that you want to be somewhere
- 66 (0.9)
- 67 where the (.) baby can come to school with you

First of all, the codirector asks the student mother if she wants to graduate (line 45). This query comes after the listing of contradictory positionings in formulating the problem (excerpt 10, lines 35–42). Also, this query comes instead of the prior, self-corrected, seeming summation statement, “there’s a lot of-” (line 43). This uncompleted formulation is similar in structure to her earlier formulation, “there’s a lot of complications in your life” (excerpt 8, line 8).

In any case, the codirector asking her if she wants to graduate can be heard to implicate a potential problem given that graduation is a conventional goal of the membership category, student. To put this another way, the codirector would not be asking her if she wanted to graduate if there was not some fairly strong likelihood

of this not occurring. This implication of problems graduating is further heightened by the codirector's follow-up queries (lines 47 and 50). The codirector's third-turn response "Are you determined to do °that°?" (line 47) suggests some possible difficulty in achieving graduation, that it will take extra determination. Following the student's affirmative answer to this query, the codirector responds with, "At the moment you're hoping to do it ↑here" (line 50). This inference-rich query, again throws into some doubt the student's prior answer. In this query the codirector's choice of descriptive terms seems particularly revealing: the student is ascribed as "at the moment . . . hoping" to graduate, rather than, say, realistically expecting to graduate. Also, graduating "here"—the student's current school—may be difficult, in contrast to an implied somewhere else.

After these three strongly implicative queries (lines 45, 47, 50), the codirector makes explicit what she is getting at (lines 53–61). The codirector explains the option that another school, where the student mother can bring her baby with her, may be better suited for her. In short, the codirector raises the idea of the student mother going to another school as a possible solution to some of the problems that she has raised.

As the codirector discusses the possible institutional consequences arising from these ascribed problems, the grandmother recognizes this as seen by her account beginning with, "That's no problem" (lines 70–72).

Excerpt 12. School-family meeting

(Continuation of excerpt 11.)

- 64 CD1 >I mean< it's not a defeat if you decide at some point
 65 that you want to be somewhere
 66 (0.9)
 67 where the (.) baby can come to school with you
 68 (1.4)
 69 ca[use
 70 GM [That's no problem because I can take care of him.
 71 (0.9)
 72 I don't work ↑so:
 73 CD1 ((nods head)) (4.1)