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## **Advice-implicative interrogatives: building 'client-centered' support in a children's helpline**

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## **Advice Implicative Interrogatives: Building ‘client centred’ support in a children’s helpline.\***

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## **Advice Implicative Interrogatives: Building client centred support in a children's helpline.**

### **Abstract**

Interactional research on advice giving has described advice as being normative and asymmetric. In this paper we examine how these dimensions of advice are softened by counsellors on a helpline for children and young people through the use of questions. Through what we term 'advice implicative interrogatives', counsellors ask clients about the relevance or applicability of a possible future course of action. The allusion to this possible action by the counsellor identifies it as normatively relevant, and displays the counsellor's epistemic authority in relation to dealing with client's problems. However, the interrogative format mitigates the normative and asymmetric dimensions typical of advice sequences by orienting to the client's epistemic authority in relation to their own lives, and delivering advice in a way that is contingent upon the client's accounts of their experiences, capacities and understandings. The demonstration of the use of questions in advice sequences offers an interactional specification of the 'client-centred' support that is characteristic of prevailing counselling practice. More specifically, it shows how the values of *empowerment* and *child-centred practice*, which underpin services such as Kids Helpline, are embodied in specific interactional devices. Detailed descriptions of this specific interactional practice offers fresh insights into the use of questions in counselling contexts, and provides practitioners with new ways of thinking about, and discussing, their current practices.

## **Advice Implicative Interrogatives: Building client centred support in a children's helpline.**

### **Introduction**

In many service organisations, advice giving is a fundamental component of what is provided. Clients seek or receive suggestions from a professional as to how to deal with a situation or problem, and that professional typically has the expertise and mandate to offer such advice. It has been widely noted, however, that advice delivery and receipt can be interactionally problematic (e.g. Jefferson and Lee 1992; Heritage and Sefi 1992). Problems arise where advice is offered when it is not sought or not welcomed by the recipient. In such cases, there are problems of advice resistance and rejection. As noted by Hepburn and Potter (forthcoming), the organisation of advice delivery can be complicated in certain institutional contexts in which there are guidelines around whether advice, or specific types of advice, can be given to clients (see for example, Butler et al 2009; Vehviläinen 2001, 2003). In such contexts, participants face a practical dilemma in the sense that while the client presents a problem (and may seek suggestions as to how to manage it), the professionals do not have the institutional mandate to straightforwardly deliver advice. As Pilnick and Coleman (2003) argue, 'effective advice giving can only be addressed in the context of the management of the interactional and practical constraints on professional practice' (p 143).

One setting in which professionals work from a perspective that constrains advice delivery is in counselling (Couture and Sutherland 2006; Emmison and Danby 2007a; Vehviläinen 2003). Many counselling practices are built around philosophies of empowerment for the client, promoting self-directiveness so that the client can identify their abilities to come up with a solution to a problem, rather than the counsellor proposing what the client might do, or should do. As Vehviläinen (2001) notes, this model seems somewhat contradictory in the sense that while the aim is to privilege the client's knowledge, experience and agency, the counsellor is, nevertheless, in a position of authority and has some expertise in terms of helping clients deal with the sorts of problems they present (see also Silverman 1997).

In this paper we consider advice in one institutional context in which there is an injunction against giving advice – Kids Helpline, a telephone and web-based counselling service for children and young people. At the same time, many Kids Helpline counselling interactions are built around a 'problem' for which the client is seeking some help and this remains an incipient issue throughout the calls. We examine some practices by which counsellors and clients work toward resolution of a problem and build client centred support while operating within the institutional mandate of 'not giving advice'.<sup>1</sup> The focus is on how aspects of question design manage an 'epistemic landscape' (Heritage and Raymond forthcoming) in the production of an action that both reflects and generates epistemic asymmetry – giving advice.

### **Asymmetry and normativity in advice giving**

Within interactional literature on advice giving, Heritage and Sefi's (1992) paper on health visitors' interactions with new mothers was the first to identify and describe fundamental aspects of advice and advice delivery. They described advice as when the health visitor 'describes, recommends or otherwise forwards a preferred course of future action' (p 368). This is a deliberately broad description which, as Pilnick (1999) emphasises, allows for the issue of what counts as advice to be treated as an empirical matter. Accordingly, there is a growing body of conversation analytic research examining how the sequential positioning, packaging, and receipt of advice demonstrates members' orientations to advice as a practical accomplishment - in health and medical contexts (e.g. Butler et al. 2009; Kinnell and Maynard 1996; Pilnick 1999; Silverman 1997), helplines (e.g. Hepburn and Potter forthcoming; Pudlinski 1998, 2002); and counselling interactions (e.g. Vehviläinen 2001, 2003; Waring 2005, 2007).

Building on Heritage and Sefi's (1992) paper, researchers have emphasised two core dimensions as fundamental to advice delivery and receipt – normativity and asymmetry. Advice – as distinct from information – is non-factual, and is normative in that it forwards a 'preferred' course of future action that the recipient *should* undertake. In this respect advice carries both a prescriptive and a moral element (Heritage and Sefi 1992; Pilnick 1999).

Advice delivery also 'assumes or establishes an asymmetry between the participants' (Hutchby 1995, p221), in that the advice-giver is positioned as more knowledgeable than the advice recipient. While institutional interaction is characteristically asymmetrical in that professionals have authority and expertise in relation to the issue around which the service encounter is focused (Drew and Heritage 1992), advice giving is one activity in which these asymmetries are particularly salient. By offering solutions for a problem presented by the client, professionals draw on and display their access to specialised knowledge and expertise. At the same time, clients may work to display their own epistemic authority with respect to their life and experiences, with implications for how advice is delivered and received. For instance, Heritage and Sefi (1992) noted that health visitors' advice to new mothers regularly resulted in a competence struggle, whereby the mothers resisted advice by describing their existing knowledge and expertise in relation to the course of action proposed by the health visitors. Asymmetry is therefore something that is regularly negotiated in the course of advice sequences, rather than merely being the basis on which advice is sought or delivered (Heritage and Sefi 1992; Vehviläinen 2001; Waring 2007).

As noted by Hepburn and Potter (forthcoming), the nature and relevance of the asymmetry between professionals and clients varies across institutional contexts. Most previous research on advice-giving has looked at medical and health-related interactions in which the professionals' advice can, to some extent, be considered objective and delivered from a position of greater knowledge and authority. When it comes to counselling, however, the epistemic gradient (Heritage and Raymond forthcoming) is potentially less steep. The widely used counselling technique of 'client-centred therapy'

(Rogers 1951) involves recognition of, and emphasis on, the client's expertise in relation to their own 'life world' (Schutz and Luckmann 1973; see also Mishler 1984). So, while counsellors have expertise in the domain of issues facing clients and methods for addressing these issues, clients are treated as having expertise in the specifics of their own situation and in determining the fit or relevancy of any proposed solution to their problem.

While interactional research has demonstrated that normativity and asymmetry are characteristic of advice delivery and reception, there has been little systematic examination of how these dimensions are displayed and made interactionally relevant in the course of specific service encounters. One broad aim of the current paper is to focus on the way that these dimensions of advice are played out over the course of advice sequences. The paper points to how client-professional asymmetry and epistemic authority are made relevant in ways that are both reflective of, and constitutive of, particular institutional settings. As noted earlier, Kids Helpline operates within an institutional mandate to not offer advice. However there are instances where counsellors 'forward a course of future action' through the use of questions<sup>2</sup>. The analysis focuses on the use of these interrogatives<sup>3</sup> and examines how they can soften normativity in relation to the course of action forwarded, and orient to and reduce the epistemic asymmetry between counsellor and client. The paper thus considers how advice is implicated through interrogative forms, how the dimensions of normativity and asymmetry are managed in advice sequences, and how a course of future action is forwarded by counsellors in ways that display the unique 'institutional fingerprint' (Drew and Heritage 1992) of the Kids Helpline counselling service.

### **Questioning: epistemics and preference**

Within counselling literature, questions tend to be discussed in relation to their use as a means of obtaining information from a child. Child counsellors are advised to use questions sparingly – particularly closed questions, which are seen to limit the child's response (Geldard and Geldard 2008). Problems identified with asking questions relate to social pressures for children to produce the 'right answer', and for the use of questions to involve the counsellor having too much control over the direction of the counselling session – both of which are at odds with the client-centred and empowerment perspectives characteristic of much counselling, and child counselling in particular. Such understandings about the role and implications of asking questions forms part of the counselling 'stocks of interactional knowledge' (SIKs, Peräkylä and Vehviläinen 2003).

While there is discussion of the possible interactional implications of various types of questions within counselling SIKs, there is little acknowledgement or discussion of the range of social actions accomplished by questions other than information gathering. Conversation analytic research has demonstrated that questions rarely just seek information, and can be an effective resource for accomplishing a wide range of social actions. As Steensig and Drew (2008, p 6) write, "whilst an utterance may be formed

interrogatively, and indeed may ‘question’ the recipient, the utterance simultaneously does or ‘performs’ another action. ‘Question’ is therefore only a minimal characterization of an utterance, interactionally.” As we show here, questions can be used to forward suggestions that may help counselling clients develop options for changing aspects of their situation, and do so in a way that is both client-centred and empowering. The analysis focuses on two particular domains of questioning that have been central to conversation analytic work on the use of interrogatives. First there is the matter of epistemics – how questions invoke and make relevant the social distribution of knowledge between participants (Heritage and Raymond forthcoming). Second is the notion of preference organisation – the idea that questions are designed to expect or favour a particular kind of answer (Pomerantz 1984; Schegloff 2007).

Recent research showing how epistemics are implicated in questioning sequences, and the particularities of question and answer turn design (e.g. Heritage, forthcoming; Heritage and Raymond forthcoming), offers a valuable tool for examining the interactional organisation of authority and asymmetry in institutional contexts. Questioning invokes an epistemic gradient between questioner and answerer whereby, typically, the answerer is treated as having access to information that the questioner does not have. The design of a question manages the depth of the epistemic gradient between questioner and addressee, and this gradient can be subsequently managed by the question recipient in their response (Heritage and Raymond forthcoming). In this paper we show how the use of interrogatives in both revealing and shaping epistemic asymmetries is central to the institutional work of offering advice.

A second dimension of questioning of particular relevance to this paper is that of preference organisation (see Pomerantz 1984; Schegloff 2007), and the way in which questions can favour or expect a particular type of response (Heritage forthcoming). Responses, in turn, are designed in ways that demonstrate the speaker’s understanding of their answer as being a preferred or dispreferred one. Preference operates in relation to both grammatical form (for example, a polar question prefers a yes/no answer (Raymond 2003)) and in terms of the action implemented by the question. For example, generally, invitations prefer acceptances and assessments prefer agreement (see Pomerantz 1984).

In some cases, a turn may involve multiple preferences whereby utterances function ‘both as actions in their own right and as vehicles or formats for other actions’ (Schegloff 2007, p. 73). Such utterances make relevant a response that addresses the ‘double implications’ of the turn (Mazeland 2004), and the multiple preferences activated. The combination of format and action implementation in a single turn can lead to congruent or cross-cutting preferences (Schegloff 2007). With cross-cutting preferences the format of a question might set into play a preference for a specific type of response (for example a yes/no answer), but the action agenda of the question (Clayman and Heritage 1992) might activate a different preference structure (for example accept/decline). Mazeland (2004) has shown how cross-cutting preferences are

implicated in the use of questions by telemarketers that invite a potential customer to assess whether a particular product sounds good. While the question is set up for a yes response, the action of such a question as a proposal, or pre-proposal, means that the potential customer has to manage the telemarketer's action of proposing in the formulation of their response.

## **Kids Helpline**

Kids Helpline is a nationwide Australian 24-hour service (based in Brisbane, Queensland) that offers counselling for children and young people up to the age of 25. In 2008, there were 492,327 attempts to contact the service, with 60% of these contacts responded to by Kids Helpline counsellors (Kids Helpline 2008). All counsellors are paid and tertiary educated, and take part in ongoing accredited training at Kids Helpline. The data used in this paper were collected as part of a broader study examining the impact of technological modalities on Kids Helpline's counselling interactions across telephone calls, emails, and web counselling. This paper focuses on a collection of 50 telephone calls. All callers to the service hear a wait message advising that the call may be recorded for training purposes and to improve the service. Six counsellors took part in the first round of data collection, recording many of the calls that they answered over a four month period. Towards the conclusion of each call, the counsellor explained that the call had been recorded and asked the client if they consented to have the call used in a study being conducted by university researchers. Privacy and confidentiality issues were discussed and the client was encouraged to ask questions about the study. If the client consented, the call was passed on as a digital file to the researchers – if not, the call was deleted. Prior to the removal of the data from the Kids Helpline site, all names and other identifying information were deleted from the sound files. Calls were transcribed using Jeffersonian conventions (Jefferson, 2004), with pseudonyms assigned to the clients and counsellors.

The two guiding beliefs and values underpinning Kids Helpline practice are *empowerment* and *child-centred practice*. The values are described on the Kids Helpline website ([www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)) in terms of practices such as 'helping the client identify his/her own resources' (empowerment), and 'seeing the child as an individual person as well as a member of a class or group' (child-centred practice) (the full list of practices are shown in Appendix A). In line with these values, one practice guideline that Kids Helpline counsellors follow involves not giving advice to clients. Instead they aim to help children and young people to identify and evaluate the options available to them for dealing with a particular situation. This paper is part of a broader examination of the how Kids Helpline philosophies are enacted in practice (Danby, Baker and Emmison 2005; Danby, Butler and Emmison 2009; Danby and Emmison in press), with a focus on the ways that Kids Helpline counsellors might be seen to avoid giving advice (Emmison and Danby 2007b). We examine one recurring method found in sequences where advice seeking or delivery is potentially relevant - the use of interrogatives that make a reference or allusion to a particular course of future action. Conversation Analysis is

used to examine the sequences in which these interrogatives are found, and to describe how normativity and asymmetry are managed through the use of advice implicative interrogatives.

## **Analysis**

The sequences examined in this paper could be glossed as elements of a 'problem management' phase found in some counselling sessions, in which the main task is discussing ways of dealing with a client's problem. Typically these sequences follow the presentation of a problem and/or reason for the call by the client in the opening phase (Danby, Baker and Emmison 2005; Emmison and Danby 2007b), and a phase in which the counsellor has asked further questions about the client and/or the problem.<sup>4</sup> A distinction between questions asked in the earlier phases and those that focus on problem management is that questions in the latter stage are action-oriented rather than problem-oriented. That is, they focus on actions the client has – or could in the future – undertake, as part of managing or resolving the problem presented. While questions are found throughout these phases, questions which contain a specific reference to a particular course of action related to the management or resolution of the client's problem are the focus here. Our interest lies in how such questions are used by counsellors as a means of offering suggestions<sup>5</sup> in a way that is consistent with, and constitutive of, the service's philosophies and practices.

The interrogatives focus on three aspects of the relevance that a possible course of action has to a client and their situation. First, the course of action should not have been tried by the client in the past. Second, the course of action should be possible or within the capacity of the client. Lastly, the client should understand the course of action to be potentially worthwhile or useful in dealing with their situation. The delivery and/or acceptance of a suggestion may be contingent upon the client's responses to the questions, and in this sense can serve as preliminaries (Schegloff 2007). That is, counsellors can check out whether a further action (in this case a suggestion) will be successful. Further, preliminary actions can be treated as doing the action that they project. So, for example asking someone whether they have a pen is hearable as a request for a pen and can lead to the offer of a pen rather than simply a 'yes' response (Atkinson and Drew 1979; Levinson 1983). In the case of giving advice, questions regarding the client's past actions, capacities and evaluations of an action can be heard as alluding to or implementing a suggestion.

When advice is delivered as an assertion or assessment, presuppositions about the recipient's past actions, abilities and understandings may be invoked. Part of the asymmetrical nature of advice comes through in the way that advice delivery embodies these assumptions. However, all of these usually underlying aspects of advice deal with things that are within the epistemic realm of the recipient. In the data discussed here, through the use of interrogatives the counsellors directly attend to the client's authority to 'know' about the relevance and applicability of some course of action to their own

circumstances. So, while there is an allusion to the normativity of a specific course of action, this is softened through the orientation to the contingencies of the client's past experiences, capacities and understandings. As such, through the use of questions, counsellor's shape the epistemic gradient between counsellor and client in a way that attends to the authority of the client.

Within the collection of interrogatives, there is variation in terms of the extent to which they are hearable as 'doing suggesting' or giving advice. In some cases, the interrogative can be heard quite clearly as a vehicle for implementing a suggestion. In other cases the allusion to the course of action could imply a suggestion is being done, but a certain ambiguity in terms of the action the counsellor is implementing with the interrogative is retained. We have termed cases where a suggestion is made relevant but not necessarily being delivered by the counsellor advice-relevant interrogatives. We begin our analysis with examples of interrogatives that fall most clearly within the first group, as advice implementing interrogatives.

### **Advice implementing interrogatives**

The first two examples show interrogatives that enquire into the capacity of the client to undertake a particular course of future action, and can be heard as suggesting or proposing that the client undertakes this action. The course of action put forward is one that is fitted to the client's specific situation (as established through prior talk) and, through this, carries a normative dimension. The institutional context of the call, through which the counsellors' interrogatives can be understood as part of 'counselling work', both invokes and displays an asymmetrical relationship between client and counsellor. As we show, however, the normative and asymmetric dimensions of the suggestion are softened through the use of the interrogative format and in specific aspects of the turn design and sequential organisation.

The first extract involves a client who had been looking after an eyeliner for her friend, and had subsequently lost it through a hole in her bag. The friend was now threatening to 'bash' her (lines 5-6) unless the client gave her fifteen dollars. The interrogative we focus on (in lines 15-17) asks about the client's capacity to undertake a particular course of future action – replacing the eyeliner with one she can afford.

### **Extract 1**

9.1.1.8 Give me some advice (0:22 - 0:57)

1 Caller: >An er< s:sh:she reckons that <I owe her fifteen> dollar:s,  
2 because the eyeliner (0.4) costed (0.2) fifteen dollar:s,  
3 [ (1.0) ]  
4 Caller: [((Chewing noises))] and (1.4) uh:m (0.3) tk now she  
5 reckons tha' she's gunna put me in hospital?=like bash me  
6 up?  
7 (0.7)

8 Couns: Ao:h:.=o:ka:y,  
9 [ (1.0) ]  
10 Caller: [((Chewing noises))]  
11 Couns: HHhh e-She's really a:ngry isn't she.  
12 Caller: Yeh ah know. An ah don't know what to do.  
13 Couns: N:y:eah:..  
14 (0.2)  
15 Couns: .Hhh (0.7) Is there any way that- (0.7) dthat you can:  
16 uhm: maybe replace it with an eyeliner th't (.) you  
17 can affor:d?  
18 (0.7)  
19 Caller: I doh' have any money.  
20 (0.2)  
21 Couns: Don't ↑you?  
22 (0.2)  
23 Caller: Nao,  
24 (0.2)  
25 Couns: Mm:kay,=ye don' get pocket money?  
26 (0.6)  
27 Caller: Nup,  
28 (0.3)  
29 Couns: A:h:..

The client's claim that she does not 'know what to do' (line 12) works as an appeal for help from the counsellor as to how she might address her problem. The counsellor's subsequent interrogative (lines 15-17) can be heard sequentially, and substantively, as responsive to this request for help, as advice. With the interrogative, the counsellor forwards a particular course of action that the client might take to address her problem - replacing the eyeliner with one the client 'can afford'. A question that enquires about the client's capacities is thus used as a vehicle to propose a specific course of future action for the client and, in this respect, is 'doing a suggestion'.

The suggestion brings into play normative and asymmetric dimensions of advice. First, the interrogative follows the client's report of the problem and a claim to not know what to do, so sequentially the counsellor appears to be initiating problem resolution, and doing so as a professional who has been turned to for help. Second, the course of action proposed is one that could potentially neutralise the client's problem – the threat of being bashed because of being unable to replace the eyeliner. But, in important, ways normativity and asymmetry are softened through the use of the interrogative formulation and the particulars of the question design.

Rather than assert that the client 'could' replace the eyeliner, the interrogative package downgrades the potential prescriptiveness of the course of future action proposed. The client is invited to respond in terms of her understandings of her own capacities, which attends to her epistemic authority with regards to her lifeworld. The potential prescriptiveness of the reference to a course of future action is thus minimised through softening the asymmetry between counsellor and client. The delays and 'maybe' further mitigate the directiveness of the utterance.

The client's response, 'I doh' have any money', (line 12) demonstrates her orientation to the action project of the interrogative as advice implementing. This reveals the client's own analysis of the interrogative as *doing suggesting* rather than seeking information, and rejecting the course of action put forward by the counsellor. The suggestion is treated as problematic in that it is built on a presupposition that the client has *some* money with which to replace the eyeliner.

Over subsequent turns, the counsellor questions the client's account and, in so doing, further orients to the normativity of the action she has described. While the negative polarity item 'any' in the initial interrogative arguably sets up a preference for a 'no' response (Heritage forthcoming); when used as a vehicle for doing a suggestion - which prefers an acceptance - cross-cutting preferences are put into play (Schegloff 2007). The questioning repeat 'don't you?' (line 21) treats the client's response as a dispreferred one. While the repeat appears to seek confirmation of the client's claim and is designed to prefer an agreeing 'no', by virtue of its placement in third position it serves as a repair initiator (Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks 1977). The counsellor seems to seek a revision of the client's response, and pursues further discussion of the potential applicability of the course of action put forward. After the client simply confirms her initial response, the counsellor further pursues a revised answer with the declarative question 'you don't get pocket money?' While, once again, this questioning repeat is grammatically designed for a 'no' response (and thereby aligns with the preceding talk), its purpose appears to be to invite an alternative response from the client – one that keeps open the possibility of the course of action proposed (replacing the eyeliner with an affordable one). The counsellor's pursuit of a different response from the client, then, displays an orientation to the action project of her interrogative.

A similar treatment of a counsellor's interrogatives as advice implementing is observed in the second example, which comes from a call in which the client has described being worried that her mother is depressed. Using an interrogative format, the counsellor suggests the client could talk to Gary, her mother's partner (lines 4-5).

## Extract 2

PC180608\_0805 Jen

(7:41 – 8:10)

1 Couns: .hhh The other thing I w's gonna say is  
2 talking of Gary is (0.3) .h ↑is ther:e-↑  
3 (.) what sort of relationship do you:  
4 guys have.=Could you talk to Gary  
5 a[bout your conce:rns.  
6 Caller: [(sniff))  
7 (0.5)

8 Caller: I could but he might tell mu:m.  
9 Couns: Yeah:.=  
10 Caller: He's a bit of a di:bber do:bber.  
11 Couns: Oh: oka(h)y h .HIH ↑do you think he'd have  
12 the sa:me concerns but if you're picking up  
13 on this and your frie:nds are picking up  
14 on ↑i:t?  
15 (0.2)  
16 Caller: Yeah, HHH  
17 Couns: And he's apparently this nice guy ↑<do you  
18 think he's got the sa:me conce:rns.  
19 Caller: I'm pretty sure he would b't-  
20 Couns: Yeah::;  
21 Caller: He- he wouldn't talk to me about it like  
22 [he-  
23 Couns: [Yea:h.  
24 (0.7)  
25 Caller: He'd- like we talk b't- (0.4)  
26 Couns: M[mh.  
27 Caller: [I w- I we wou:ldn't go into detail?

The counsellor's interrogative at lines 4-5 embodies a course of future action and implements a suggestion – 'talking to Gary'. In setting up the delivery of this particular interrogative, the counsellor first builds on the client's earlier reference to Gary and then starts a yes-no interrogative that is cut-off and repaired by the delivery of a wh-question regarding the client's relationship with Gary. While there is no slot left for the client to respond to the question before the interrogative-implemented suggestion is produced, the embedded question displays the counsellor's orientation to the authority of the client in terms of the contingencies and capacities relating to 'talking to Gary' as a course of future action. The proposed action is thus fitted to the client's problem and life circumstances, but, by positing this action as potentially an appropriate one, the interrogative projects normativity.

The interrogative format means that the proposed action is not strongly recommended or asserted, but addresses one prerequisite for acceptance of advice – that the action is a possible and within the client's capacities. The invitation for the client to report on her capacity to 'talk to Gary' displays the counsellor's lack of knowledge about the contingencies of the client's situation, and orients to the epistemic authority of the client. Because of this orientation to the client's authority regarding her life circumstances, and the softening of the normativity of the course of action, the question design minimises the potential disaffiliation that could be invoked through resistance to or rejection of the suggested future action.

The client initially responds with weak agreement through a repeat of the question frame, 'I could', which confirms the proposition in the counsellor's question but has a dispreferred structure (Pomerantz 1984). As Heritage and Raymond (forthcoming) note, turn initial repetition of a proposition in a polar question is one way respondents assert agency and their epistemic rights in relation to the information requested, by 'confirming rather than affirming the proposition' (p 15). Subsequent turn components

can be used to 'revise the initial position of the respondent in ways that break away from the terms of the question' (Heritage and Raymond, forthcoming, p 12). In this case, the client's continuation with 'but he might tell mum', and a description of Gary as a bit of a 'dibber-dobber'<sup>6</sup>, introduces a contingent problem that is used to reject the terms of the question and the suggestion itself. In so doing, the client aligns with the preference structure of the interrogative (which is designed to prefer a 'yes' response), but disaligns with the action for which the interrogative is a vehicle – a proposal. The way the client handles the cross-cutting preferences (Schegloff 2007) demonstrates her treatment of the question as not merely an enquiry into her relationship with Gary and capacity to talk to him, but as a suggestion. While the proposed action is possible, the client rejects the suggestion on the basis of her privileged understandings about Gary. The client thus resists the normativity embodied in the counsellor's interrogative by exerting her agency and epistemic authority with respect to her own life and situation.

The counsellor offers a weak acknowledgment of the client's base for rejecting the proposed course of action at line 9, and receipts the client's description of Gary as a 'dibber-dobber' as news with 'oh' (line 11). The sequence closing third, 'okay', acknowledges this as an adequate basis for the client's rejection of the suggested course of action. However, in her subsequent interrogative (lines 11-14), the counsellor pursues the potential of the suggested course of action by asking whether Gary might share her concerns – given that both she and her friends are 'picking up on it'. After the client acknowledges this (line 16), the counsellor continues, reformulating the client's earlier description of Gary as 'apparently this nice guy' before repeating the question – 'do you think he's got the same concerns?' While this pursuit frames the course of action put forward as normative, by drawing on the information the client had provided earlier in the call, the counsellor demonstrates an attention to the contingencies of the client's situation in terms of the applicability of 'talking to Gary'. This downplays the asymmetric and normative dimensions of the suggestion, and manages to keep the talk about this possible future action alive, without challenging the client's account and without even mentioning the course of action itself in this latter interrogative.

Once again, there are two preference structures implicated in the counsellor's question – one set up by the format of the question (designed for a 'yes'), and one in response to the action done by the question (a suggestion). The client responds in a similar way as before, by first giving a weak agreement to the counsellor's supposition – "I'm pretty sure he would" (line 19), with a cut off 'b't-' indicating a dispreferred response (Pomerantz 1984), followed by troubling of the initial agreement. The trouble is that, while he may have the same concerns, Gary 'wouldn't talk to' the client about it (lines 21-22). In the following turns, the client accounts for this and addresses the supposition referred to in the counsellor's question at lines 3-4 – the kind of relationship between the client and Gary. That is, they 'talk' but do not 'go into detail'. So, similar to the client's response in lines 8-10, there is a repeat of the question frame that asserts the client's agency and authoritative rights in relation to Gary's concerns followed by an extension that resists the terms of the question. As above, then, the client orients to

the suggestion delivered through the counsellor's question and departs from the constraints of the interrogative in a way that imparts her agency and authority in rejecting an allusion to a suggestion. In doing so, she can be seen to orient to (and resist) the normativity alluded to through the counsellor's questioning. Through her compound answer, the client also manages the double implication of the interrogative by addressing the enquiry about her capacities as well as the action implemented by the question (Mazeland 2004).

The counsellors' interrogatives in the first two extracts enquire about the clients' capacity to undertake a particular course of action, with the question operating as a vehicle for advice delivery and implementing suggestions. The use of an ability enquiry to implement a social action resonates with Levinson's (1983) discussion of such enquiries being used in request sequences in a way that invites the recipient to orient to the question as implementing a request (see also Merritt 1975). Through the interrogative packaging of the suggestions, and the ways in which these interrogatives are designed, we see a softening of the normativity and asymmetry that are brought into play by putting forward a particular course of action. The clients' responses demonstrate their treatment of the interrogatives as doing suggesting – that is, they responded primarily to the action implemented through the interrogative. There is an absence of type-conforming yes/no responses (Raymond 2003) in these examples, with accounts and weak agreements being used to deal with the advice implicativeness of the interrogatives, and in ways that resist the terms of the questions and assert the clients' agency and epistemic authority. In the following section we present interrogatives that, similar to those shown so far, reference a possible course of future action for the client. However, the extent to which these interrogatives can be heard to implement a suggestion is slightly more equivocal.

### **Advice-relevant interrogatives**

The advice implicativeness of the interrogatives in this section is more opaque than the advice implementing interrogatives. Whereas the questions described in the previous section focused on the client's capacities, the advice relevant interrogatives presented below focus on whether the client has tried a particular course of action in the past. As such they address a further precondition upon which advice acceptance may be conditional. Whilst delivered using a 'history-taking' design, the interactional and sequential context in which such questions are asked allow for their hearability as making a proposal. The implied upshot of the question is that, if the client has not undertaken the course of action asked about, then it may be a possible future course of action they could take to address their problem.

Just prior to the segment shown in extract 3 below, the client described feeling paranoid about death and having panic attacks. Our focus is on the question at lines 11-12, 'have you ever talked to anyone about this?', which manages a transition into a problem resolution phase by initiating a sequence where courses of action are discussed.

### Extract 3

PC140408\_2241 Amelie

(6:23 – 7:19)

1 Couns: Yeah aka:yç ↑So: (0.5) .hh (0.3) .h  
2 ↑how often does that ↑happen?  
3 (1.6)  
4 Caller: nghO:h:: (0.5) Basically when I thi:nk  
5 about it b't- that's basi'lly when I'm  
6 just thi:inking. Hihm .hhh J's' sitting there  
7 thi:inking it always: (.)just comes up.  
8 (0.2)  
9 Couns: ↑Ok↓a:y;  
10 (0.6)  
11 Couns: ↑Have you ever talked to anyone about  
12 that st↑uff?  
13 (0.8)  
14 Caller: No.  
15 (0.3)  
16 Couns: ↑No?  
17 (0.5)  
18 Couns: .h You: >go tah< s: high school you  
19 were ↑saying?  
20 (0.4)  
21 Caller: ↑Yip.  
22 Couns: >↑Yeah?< .hh Do you have a counsellor or  
23 guidance officer at school?  
24 (0.6)  
25 Caller: Yeah see one of my friends goes (and see  
26 him) but we hh they only get to see him:-  
27 (.) once every fortnight.  
28 (0.2)  
29 Couns: k.h Okay? .hh <I'm- (.) just wondering  
30 I'm- (.) obviously still happy to  
31 keep talking to you no:w b't .hhh whether  
32 that's the sort'v thing you think you:'d  
33 li:ke tih talk to a ↑guidance officer or  
34 school cou:nsellor about.  
35 (0.6)  
36 Caller: .h tk .h .h ↓Yeah.  
37 (0.2)  
38 Caller: Unless I (prob'ly) need student assistance  
39 it's: u:m (0.3) tch just where they help  
40 you with your assignments and that  
41 because .hhh I don't care (if I was)  
42 (I mean >I've already failed two< of  
43 my subjects,  
44 (0.2)  
45 Caller: .sh[ih

46 Couns: [°Okay.°  
 47 (0.2)  
 48 Couns: Mokay.=.H ↑So it sounds like there's  
 49 a lo:t going on for you right now¿

The use of an interrogative to ask whether the client has 'ever talked to anyone about that stuff' (lines 11-12), establishes this action as potentially relevant and appropriate in relation to the client's problem and, in this respect, projects normativity. However, the interrogative design and the historical framing of the question do not directly present this as a possible *future* action, so the normativity of the proposed action is strongly attenuated. Instead the question has the potential to be heard as initiating a pre-sequence (Schegloff 1980) - it is on its way to putting forward the suggestion that the client talk to someone, depending on how the client responds. If the client reports not having talked to anybody, this might serve as a 'go-ahead' allowing for the further discussion of this course of action as something the client may try in the future (i.e. it heads towards a suggestion). On the other hand, a 'yes' response could block this potential trajectory.

The client's negative response gives the counsellor a 'go-ahead' (Schegloff 1980) – that is, it allows for further discussion of the action of 'talking to someone'. While both the question design (with the negative polarity item 'ever' (Heritage forthcoming)) and action project of the question (i.e. heading towards a suggestion) could be argued to set up a preference for a 'no' response; the counsellor's questioning repeat 'no?' in third position invites the client to redo their answer in some way (see Schegloff 1984). The repeat serves as a prompt for an elaboration from the client, and/or pursues a stronger uptake of 'talking to someone' as a possible future action<sup>7</sup>. Thus, while the stage is set for a suggestion to be made, through the questioning repeat the counsellor provides a space for the client to initiate progression towards a suggestion. In this way, the counsellor further manages the normativity and asymmetry involved in offering a suggestion.

When no elaboration is provided, the counsellor seeks and receives confirmation that the client goes to high school. This enquiry seeks background information that is used to calibrate the forthcoming suggestion (Baker, Emmison and Firth, 2005), with the affirming response establishing the basis for the delivery of the next interrogative – 'do you have a counsellor or guidance officer at school?' (lines 22-23). By invoking the relevance of a counsellor or guidance officer as someone to 'talk to', the question alludes to the normativity of this as a course of future action. However, the interrogative itself does not implement a suggestion but serves as a preliminary (Schegloff 1980) that projects a forthcoming suggestion, with this incipient action contingent on the response of the client. The client responds initially with 'yeah' and then extends her turn with a report about how often her friend gets to see the counsellor. In this subsequent unit, the client moves beyond the propositional content of the question by offering a qualification as to the limited availability of the school

counsellor, which identifies a contingent problem which could block the projected suggestion. Through the account, then, the client orients to the incipency of the suggestion embedded in the counsellor's question.

After receipting and accepting the client's response, the counsellor then asks whether the problem is something the client would 'like to talk to a counsellor about' (lines 29-34). This question, similar to the ones presented in the first section, does the work of implementing a suggestion – talking to a (school) counsellor is put forward as a course of action for the client to consider undertaking. By presenting the option as something she is 'just wondering' about, the counsellor displays an awareness of the contingencies of the suggestion and the client's entitlement to accept or reject it (Curl and Drew 2008). Furthermore, the turn in which the question is delivered has a dispreferred structure in that it is marked with pauses and restarts and an inserted repair. The trouble in beginning this turn addresses the delicacy involved in suggesting the client talk to someone else (particularly to another counsellor), in that this could be heard as the counsellor being unwilling to continue to talk to the client and simply passing her on to another source of help.

The client gives an affirmative response, but it is a weak agreement mitigated through the preceding in-breaths, the 'tk', and the low pitch of the 'Yeah'. The client then identifies another sort of help she needs from the school – help with assignments, which deflects attention on to another 'problem' and appears to resist the suggestion that the client would talk to a school counsellor.

The use of the interrogative format in both initiating the sequence and moving stepwise through to the eventual explicit formulation of a future action is one way normativity is downplayed in this extract. The question 'have you ever talked to anybody about this' makes relevant the referred to action as a possible suggestion, and the preliminary 'do you have a counsellor or guidance officer at school' projects the delivery of a suggestion. But, at no point, does the counsellor directly propose or suggest that the client should 'talk to a school counsellor'. The closest she comes is by 'wondering' whether the problem is 'the sort of thing' the client thinks she'd 'like to talk to a guidance officer or school counsellor about' – a strongly mitigated production heavily oriented to the contingencies of the client's response. With this interrogative-implemented suggestion, the counsellor asks about a further contingent issue that is a prerequisite for advice acceptance – that the client is possibly willing to undertake the suggested action. So, while the course of future action is identified as a possible and relevant way for the client to help manage her situation, the design of the counsellor's turns work to soften the normative or prescriptive aspects of advice.

The interrogatives accomplish the softening of normativity by the way they invoke and manage the epistemic asymmetry between client and counsellor. The counsellor – as a professional with expertise in the domain of 'young people's problems' – has some authority in terms of how such problems can be addressed. However, the counsellor

defers to the client's authority to know about her own situation, and her right to assess the appropriateness of this action as a future one for her to undertake. The client asserts her agency and authority with respect to her situation through the way that preferred responses (affirmations) are followed by accounts that both pre-empt and resist the implication that if she could, then she *should*, talk to a school counsellor or guidance officer. In this way, we see the client's own treatment of the interrogatives as leading up to, or implementing, advice.

The following extract involves a similar case where a 'history-taking' format is used to introduce a possible course of future action, which is then followed by an interrogative implemented suggestion. The client has called about being excluded by her friends, after one friend told the others 'things that weren't true'.

#### Extract 4

PC160508\_1835 (3:30 – 4:54) Zamira

1 Couns: ..That doesn't sound fun at a:ll.  
2 (0.3)  
3 Caller: Mhh  
4 (1.2)  
5 Couns: n.hhhh t.hh ↑Have you talked↑ to any  
6 of the people that- (.) that you used  
7 to hang ou:t with:.  
8 (0.9)  
9 Caller: Um: m: no;  
10 (0.3)  
11 Couns: No:?  
12 (1.7)  
13 Couns: D'you think it would be worth try:ing  
14 having a talk to: them.  
15 (1.2)  
16 Caller: Um:h (0.3) ye:ah.  
17 (0.3)  
18 Couns: Yeah?  
19 (0.3)  
20 Caller: Yeh.

The yes-no interrogative at line 5, similar to the question in extract three (lines 11-12), is a past orientated question in that it asks about a specific action that the client may have already done, and implicates the potential relevance and appropriateness of this action to the client's problem. After nearly a second of silence and the delaying devices 'hm' and 'um', the client answers 'noh;'. This minimal response effectively gives a go-ahead to the projected next action; however the answer is receipted by the counsellor with a questioning repeat 'no?' (line 11). As we saw in extracts 1 and 3, the repeat is a repair initiator or a 'redo invitation' (Schegloff 1984) that can be understood here to invite the client to explain why she has not talked to her friends, or to assess the suitability of this

as a future course of action. The prompt also offers the client the space to attend to the action implemented by the interrogative, as not merely an enquiry but as putting a possible solution on the table.

Following a 1.7 second gap in which the client does not redo or expand her response, the counsellor asks the client if she 'think(s) it would be worth trying having a talk to them' (lines 13-14). The action referred to in lines 5-7 as a possible past action is now re-packaged with a future orientation, with the interrogative inviting the client to assess the potential value of this course of action. As such, this interrogative can be heard as implementing a suggestion, contingent on the client's willingness. Although the mention of this as something the client could do invokes a normative dimension (in that the action is fitted to the client's situation), the client is accorded the authority to evaluate the proposed action. The potential for the counsellor to be heard as prescribing this action is further softened by inviting an assessment of '*trying* to have a talk to them'. By asking the client to assess an attempt to undertake this action, rather than the action itself, the counsellor downgrades the normativity of the future action and maximises the opportunity for a 'yes' response to be given.

The client's response aligns with the preference for a 'yes' response, but is minimal and displays little active uptake of the suggestion. The client attends to the form of the interrogative, but not the action it implements (compare this with the responses to the advice implementing interrogatives in extracts 1 and 2). Evidence that this minimal response is potentially inadequate is reflected in the counsellor's questioning repeat at line 18 which, like the repeat at line 11, seems to pursue more of an uptake from the client. However, the client merely confirms her response. These allusions to an expected or 'preferred' type of response through the questioning repeats display the counsellor's orientation to the advice-relevance of the interrogatives and, conversely, the client's responses display her minimal engagement with the action project of the questions.

In examples 3 and 4, the counsellors' interrogatives serve the purpose of putting forward a certain course of action that the clients could take to address the reported problem. In both cases, the initial interrogatives take the form of a history-taking question that asks whether the client has undertaken some action in the past. The interrogatives bring a particular course of action into play and, as such, are advice-relevant, but they are much less direct than the interrogatives discussed in extracts 1 and 2 – which are heard to be doing suggestions. Similar to the pre-sequences observed in telling 'news', by which speakers initially enquire into the recipient's existing knowledge of an event (Maynard 2003; Schegloff 2007; Terasaki 2004); here the counsellors orient to the contingency of a suggestion upon the client's past actions, that is, they should not recommend what has already been done. If an action has not yet been undertaken by the client, this opens up further discussion around the client's capacities and resources, and their assessment of the implicated suggestion., which may account for why the action has not been tried in the past.

By designing questions in a way that implicates a suggestion but does not clearly implement it, the counsellors further soften the normativity and asymmetry of the proposed course of action. While a 'no' response in both cases enables further discussion of the possible course of action, the third position questioning repeats of the responses prompt the clients to pursue this action with an elaboration of their response or stronger uptake of the implicated suggestion. Through this, the counsellors can be seen to further encourage exploration of a possible course of action in way that is non-prescriptive.

The advice relevant interrogatives, when compared to the advice implementing interrogatives, are more ambiguous in terms of what action agenda is being initiated by the questioning. In extracts 3 and 4, the clients gave minimal responses that provided the information sought by the counsellor but did not engage with the action project of the question. The question and response formed part of a pre-sequence whereby the client's response provided a 'go-ahead' (Schegloff 1980) for the eventual production of an advice implementing interrogative. The redo-invitations (Schegloff 1984) serve to prompt the client to engage with the action implicated by the question – forwarding a possible course of future action. In the following example, an advice relevant interrogative is clearly understood by the client as not simply seeking information. The client has reported being bullied by her workmates.

### Extract 5

PC040408\_1957 Sophia  
(12:15 - 12:54)

1 Couns: n.hh >But I'm< also hearing that- (0.3) it's  
2 really hard for you to asse:rt yourself becau:se  
3 .hh your <natural wa:y> of >dealing with these  
4 people who are-< (0.4) bei:ng absolute bullies,  
5 [.hh is that you go q<sup>o</sup>ui:et and you: just=  
6 Caller: [Mm:.  
7 Couns: = try and pull your head in and you try  
8 and do your work<sup>o</sup>.hh (0.4) but that didn't  
9 work di:d it;  
10 (0.5)  
11 Caller: N:o.  
12 Couns: .hhh So:: (1.0) have you ever told somebody  
13 (0.3) ↑you know what↑ I don't like the way you're  
14 speaking to me? and if you spoke to me  
15 poli:tely you'd get a much better response in  
16 work from me?  
17 (0.8)  
18 Caller: nYea:h. <No: I haven't said that cos ↑no one's  
19 .hh (0.4) like- (.) t- t- the other time when  
20 the girl was really nasty to me, .h[h (.)]  
21 Couns: [°Mhm\_°]  
22 Caller: >It pretty mu==I-< (0.3) like for a  
23 week I (.) didn't say anything back...

The interrogative beginning at line 12 refers to a specific course of action delivered with a script proposal (see Emmison, Butler & Danby in preparation). The question has a known answer in that the specific reaction to the bullying by the client's workmates contrasts with how the client has reported she usually responds (as indicated by the counsellor's formulation). As such, the counsellor is heard to ask the question as a vehicle for proposing a possible future action. The client responds initially with the lax token 'nyeah' with falling terminal pitch, which may indicate that 'the answer is obvious' (Jefferson 1978, p 136), and works as more of an acknowledgment than a yes/no response. By acknowledging the 'gist' of the counsellor's question, the client displays her recognition of the question as doing the work of a proposal. It is only after this acknowledgement that she goes on to answer the 'question' and then begins another extended narrative (not shown here).

Compared with the other advice relevant interrogatives presented, this example is clearly heard to be doing a suggestion because of the sequential lead-up to it, the specificity of the course of action asked about, and the fact that the answer is demonstrably already known by the counsellor. While a questioning format is used, there is little 'interrogation' being accomplished, and given the detail of the proposed script, it is clear that this question is not pre-sequential to a suggestion, but implementing a proposal for action. Although the suggestion might be heard as very direct in this sense, the use of an interrogative to accomplish the action being done (forwarding an alternative course of action) minimises the suggestive force of the utterance. The client can – and does - acknowledge the delivery of a suggestion, but there is little interactional pressure on her to offer an accept/reject response. While the client's turn-initial acknowledgement response demonstrates her understanding of the action being done through the question, her continuation with a negative answer and narrative demonstrates how the interrogative design minimises the normative force of this action. This work is accomplished, in part, by the way the question focuses on the 'teller' (Jefferson and Lee 1992) and her experiences, rather than by highlighting the asked about action as a solution.

## **Discussion**

Counselling is a kind of hybrid form of service encounter in that standard practice maintains a focus on the 'teller and their experiences', even though much counselling involves clients talking about a 'problem and its properties' (cf Jefferson and Lee 1992). Managing these competing relevancies is thus a practical dilemma for counsellors. How do they orient to the client's problem while maintaining a focus on the teller? Furthermore, how do counsellors turn 'generic' solutions into solutions fitted to the unique circumstances of the clients' lives? This paper has shown that advice implicative interrogatives are one way counsellors on Kids Helpline manage these dilemmas. The questions asked of the clients focus on them and their experiences, capacities, understandings and the like, while clearly being oriented to the relevance of some

action for dealing with the reported problem and its properties. Kids Helpline's values of empowering clients and offering child centred practices are embodied in the use of advice implicative interrogatives – a practice through which the philosophy of not giving advice is interactionally realised. Through these practices, we find what may amount to a technical, interactional specification of 'client-centred support'.

We have shown how Kids Helpline counsellors use interrogatives to implicate and implement advice, while softening the normative constraints and epistemic asymmetry that is characteristic of advice giving. While these normative and asymmetric dimensions are softened, they are not absent from the practice of putting forward a proposal using an interrogative form. First, the questions ask about a particular action that is built as relevant to the problem reported by the client. Second, by building the client's capacities into the interrogative the counsellor alludes to the appropriateness of the action as a future one. Third, the questions are designed to prefer agreeing or confirming responses that progress the sequence toward the projected 'suggestion'. Fourth, the counsellors often pursue the course of action embodied in the interrogative following a dispreferred or minimal response by the client. Lastly, the clients often treat the interrogative as a suggestion for action rather than an enquiry by offering accounts as to why the course of action put forward is, or would be, inappropriate or ineffective.

The normative dimension invoked in these sequences is, at least in part, attributable to the counsellors' authority and expertise in relation to the sorts of problems faced by children and young people, and the sorts of actions clients might take in order to address or resolve their problems. However, this authority is tempered by the institutional and professional practices of the counsellors, which soften the epistemic asymmetry between counsellor and client. Through the use of advice implicative interrogatives, we see counsellors orienting to the limits of their epistemic entitlements and privileging the clients' authority in these matters.

The interrogatives minimise the prescriptiveness of the embodied course of action in that the relevance or appropriateness of this action is contingent upon the client's response to the question. While the proposed courses of action are possibly relevant and appropriate to the client's circumstances, the *actual* relevance and appropriateness of the action is contingent on the client's understandings of their own capacities and situation. By asking the client whether they have tried a particular course of action in the past, whether they are able to try a particular course of action, or whether they think that action might be worthwhile, counsellors address the presuppositions that tend to underlie more direct advice-giving by explicitly treating such matters as being within the epistemic realm of the client. In this way, the counsellors' use of interrogatives shift the epistemic gradient within a domain of social action (giving advice) and institutional context (professional-client) that not only tends to invoke an epistemic asymmetry between participants, but is regularly generative of such asymmetry.

As noted earlier, while there are some conversation analytic studies of advice-giving in adult counselling (Pudlinski 1998, 2002; Vehviläinen 2003), the bulk of past interactional research on advice-giving is based on medical and healthcare interactions, and the sequences examined here differ in a number of ways from those examined in these contexts. We focus on three key points of difference. First, the interrogatives used by Kids Helpline counsellors differ from the kind of questioning observed in other advice sequences. For instance, questions used as part of a stepwise movement into advice delivery (e.g. Heritage and Sefi 1992; Vehviläinen 2001), are aimed at identifying specific aspects of a problem in order to deliver advice that is fitted to the problem. In contrast, the interrogatives described in this paper are action-focusing questions. In part, this is because in Kids Helpline calls, clients have already presented a problem and the questions are focused on identifying a possible solution to a problem. The work of solving a problem is thus an incipient and underlying task in Kids Helpline interactions, whereas for health visitors, nurses, AIDS/HIV counsellors and the like, it is not.

Second, in the Kids Helpline calls there appears to be little focus on securing acknowledgement from the clients that a particular course of action will be undertaken. Instead, the aim seems to be to secure recognition from the client of the possibility of some as-yet-untried, but potentially within their capacity and positively assessed, course of future action, irrespective of whether the action is deemed appropriate by the client. The advice implicative interrogatives seem ideally suited to serve this purpose. In contrast, the delivery of advice in other contexts appears to be set up in such a way that it seeks either an accept/reject response, or some acknowledgement to indicate receipt of the advice. In the bulk of the literature, advice is observed to be rejected or resisted but rarely explicitly – instead being embodied in the types of responses offered by the advice recipient, for example with unmarked acknowledgments (such as ‘mhm’) or assertions of competence (Heritage and Sefi 1992; Silverman 1997). The use of advice implicative interrogatives makes these common displays of advice resistance unnecessary and, in some instances, impossible. The use of an interrogative rather than declarative format means that an ‘answer’ is conditionally relevant. Furthermore, while the questions can be seen as vehicles for proffering a suggestion, the answers effectively reject or accept the base on which a suggestion is made (i.e. the client’s capacities, willingness, past experiences, assessment of the proposed action and so on) rather than the counsellor’s act of proposing. As such, the normative dimension of advice is minimised, and what might be viewed as ‘rejections’ are done as accounts by virtue of the sequential environment in which they occur.

Third, and most crucially, whereas in other contexts advice is offered on the basis of the authority of the advice-giver (i.e. as health visitor, medical professional and so on), advice implicative interrogatives are specifically designed to soften the epistemic gradient between counsellor and client. A proposal for action is done by focusing on the client’s authority over their own lives. This aspect of the interrogatives is reflected in the two previous differences noted. Questioning does not simply occur in gathering information about the client’s problem before the delivery of advice, it is used in the

course of – and is integral to – sequences where proposals for action are forwarded. There is not the ‘handing over’ of authority to the professional at the point of advice delivery, as noted in other contexts. Also, by minimising the normative dimension of advice through the use of interrogatives, the client is given a ticket – and perhaps encouraged – to reject a proposed course of action by virtue of their own understanding of their capacities and situation.

The privileging of the epistemic authority of the client is a fundamental aspect of the unique institutional fingerprint of Kids Helpline counselling. The use of advice implicative interrogatives serves as a method for addressing the gap between the ideological underpinnings of the service with the practical matter of helping the young clients. However, policies and guidelines aside, within this particular context, and in contrast to many other institutional contexts, professional expertise (in this case, access to a range of solutions for the types of problems faced by clients) is ultimately restrained by the fact that generic solutions can not be proposed to individual clients. The access the clients have to their own lifeworlds is paramount. The expertise of the counsellor, then, is in encouraging the clients to consider and evaluate their own circumstances in light of the generic solutions that are proposed. The fact that the counsellors essentially do not know whether any advice they could offer is relevant and appropriate to an individual client is at least as crucial as the institutional guidelines by which the service operates. So, whilst non-directive and client-centred counselling approaches are grounded in theories and ideologies about empowerment and self-directedness, at the heart of the matter is the very practical and mundane reality that clients know more about their lives than their counsellors.

### **Conclusions**

This paper has a number of implications for those working with children and young people in counselling settings. In the first instance, it has demonstrated a specific practice through which child counsellors encourage young people to display authority with regard to their own life situations, and to actively engage in the work needed to develop options for changing their situation<sup>8</sup>. As such, the paper identifies a particular interactional strategy that professionals could use in building child-centred (and client-centred) care. More broadly, the paper contributes to a dialogue between conversation analytic research and the ‘stocks of interactional knowledge’ with which counsellors work (Peräkylä and Vehviläinen 2003). The practice guidelines used in training counsellors are generally very light on the interactional bases and enactments of various ways of talking. For example, Geldard and Geldard (2008) advise that child counsellors minimise their use of questions, and use open rather than closed questions. There is little discussion of the range of social actions (rather than ‘information seeking’) that questions can be used to perform. The use of conversation analysis to examine actual instances of questioning used to help children and young people develop options for change reveals aspects of professional practices that are otherwise dealt with through quite abstract accounts of institutional philosophies (i.e. empowerment) and counselling skills (i.e. ‘using questions’).

Through a detailed consideration of how grammatical form and social action intersect in the interactional organisation of counselling interactions, this paper demonstrates how questions are used to accomplish much more than seeking information. Furthermore, it has shown how closed questions (here, those designed for a yes/no response) are used as a tool for assisting clients develop options for changing their situations. These findings challenge the counselling 'stocks of interactional knowledge' (Peräkylä and Vehviläinen 2003) which suggests that closed questions can constrain clients' responses, and shows instead that questions can be used in ways that support and encourage displays of authority and agency from children and young people<sup>9</sup>. As such, the analysis demonstrates how, in actual counselling interaction, counsellors integrate their operational philosophies with their (professional) interactional knowledge, in ways that belies the more abstract and generalised suggestions found in training guidelines.

The paper thus offers professionals new ways of looking at and understanding general counselling strategies and practice. First, the paper reveals the benefit of studying detailed transcripts of actual counselling interactions (alongside close and repeated listening to the interactions themselves) to develop a sense of *when* and *how* particular types of questions are used by counsellors and how they are responded to by their young clients. This close attention to the details of counselling interaction could serve as a valuable training and development resource to complement, extend, and even challenge the suggestions offered in training manuals. Second, the analysis provides a basis for further reflection on standard child counselling practices. It has demonstrated that a basic interactional device (asking questions) can be modified to accomplish specific kinds of counselling work. In this way, the paper offers the possibility of a different technology of counselling, one grounded in the actual interactional practices of counsellors and the array of social actions they perform through specific and recurring grammatical and syntactic practices.

Whilst our discussion has focused on the interplay of institutional guidelines, practical realities and interactional organisation within a specific type of service encounter, the practices described here transcend contextual boundaries. Advice is dilemmatic not only in institutional encounters, but also in everyday conversation (cf Jefferson and Lee 1992). The use of interrogatives as a means of managing the normative and asymmetric dimensions of advice may not necessarily be unique to this setting, or to institutional settings more generally. Further research might investigate whether and how these dimensions are managed in other contexts, and the role of interrogatives in accomplishing this work. On a broader level, this paper also highlights issues around the complex relationships between turn design and social action and, in particular, how people might be seen to minimise the visibility of an action being done, or to soften the force with which an action is delivered. The constraints and dilemmas involved in institutional interactions are not too dissimilar from those faced in everyday life, where relationships, identities, epistemics, and the like are managed on a turn-by-turn basis and are intimately tied to the performance of social action. The paper thus contributes

to, and raises further empirical questions about, the interplay of form and function as a generic feature of talk-in-interaction.

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## APPENDIX A

### Kids Helpline values:

#### *Counselling from an empowerment perspective involves:*

Assisting clients to develop options for change;  
Assisting clients to understand the consequences of particular actions;  
Helping the client identify her/his own resources;  
Informing the client about resources;  
Supporting the client in developing a sense of control in her/his own life;  
Working with strengths rather than weaknesses.

#### *Providing a child-centred practice involves:*

Listening to and respecting what children have to say;  
Focusing on their needs;  
Seeing the world from their perspective;  
Acknowledging and believing that the child is the primary client;  
Seeing the child as an individual person as well as a member of a class or group;  
Respecting the child.

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<sup>1</sup> As discussed on pages 7-8 and shown in Appendix A, the values that guide Kids Helpline counseling practice are based on child empowerment and child-centered practice. According to Kids Helpline management, 'not giving advice' is one way these values are met (Marlies Puentener, personal communication). When explicitly asked for advice, counselors at times invoke this institutional mandate, for example, "My job as a counsellor isn't to give advice or to give suggestions it's (to) help you facilitate and look for your solutions" (PC160408\_1433).

<sup>2</sup> These questions are similar to those identified by Pudlinski (2003) as putting forward 'an option within a query'.

<sup>3</sup> Following Raymond (2003) the term interrogative is used as a description of the grammatical form of the turns we examine, while the term question is used to refer to the action being done by the interrogative. We have described the phenomena of interest as 'advice implicative interrogatives' as a means of focusing on the grammatical form through which counsellors implicate (and enact) advice. These interrogatives vary in the extent to which they can be seen to be 'doing questioning'.

<sup>4</sup> This questioning phase bears some similarities to what has been described in medical interactions as a data-gathering phase (Robinson 2003). However, the term 'data-gathering' is perhaps too crude a characterization of the counselling work that is accomplished in these phases. Furthermore the structural organization of Kids Helpline counselling interactions is markedly different from that of medical encounters, and appear to be much less linear than the general model of medical interaction. It should be noted, then, that our account of phases within the counselling interactions are an initial gloss at this stage, and are subject to further analysis.

<sup>5</sup> We have used the terms 'suggestion', 'advice' and 'proposals' somewhat interchangeably throughout this paper. While there may well be finer distinctions to be made between these terms, doing so is beyond the scope of this paper and remains something requiring further systematic investigation.

<sup>6</sup> An Australian term for someone who 'dobs', or 'tells tales' on other people.

<sup>7</sup> Schegloff (1984) describes such questioning repeats as 're-do invitations' in which 'a reanalysis of what would be an adequate answer is invited.' (p 41). Also see Muntigl and Zapara (2008) for a discussion of

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how a counsellor's questioning repeat of a client's 'no' response can be heard to treat the answer as an expandable response.

<sup>8</sup> See also Hutchby (2007) for a conversation analytic discussion of the interactional organization of child counseling, with a particular focus on the 'dynamics of interactional power and resistance' (p 123).

<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Ruusovouri (2000) showed that closed questions in medical interactions did not constrain patients' responses in the way that formal accounts of the SIK of 'patient-centered care' suggested.