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Identity navigation, story evaluation and recipient identification in *The Graham Norton Show*'s "Red Chair stories"

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Abstract: For the evaluation of a story, story recipients rely on a narrator's identity work. Uniquely, these related processes of identity work and story evaluation unfold explicitly in the Red Chair segment of *The Graham Norton Show*, where "bad" stories are rejected by flipping the narrator out of a red chair, and narrators of "good" stories may walk away from the chair. We collected every Red Chair story broadcast in 2013 and analyzed these by drawing on Bamberg (2011, Narrative practice and identity navigation. In James A. Holstein & Jaber F. Gubrium [eds.], *Varieties of narrative analysis*, 99–124. London: Sage)'s three main dimensions of identity navigation, namely, agency, sameness/difference, and constancy/change. The analyses reveal diverging tendencies, which we bring together by means of the concept of identification, viz. (i) the story recipient's affiliation with the protagonist of the story and/or with the narrator, or (ii) the recipient's vicarious experience of the events. We propose that a story recipient's evaluation can be related to the extent to which identification is elicited. This identification is not only based on the navigational dimension of sameness/difference, as often proposed, but it is, among others, a result of the narrator's unique identity navigation along the three closely interwoven dimensions, thus also including agency and constancy/change.

Keywords: The Graham Norton Show, identity navigation, tellability, narrative analysis, identification, story evaluation

1 Introduction

In this article, we analyze the Red Chair stories of *The Graham Norton Show* from a discourse analytical perspective. We focus specifically on the narrators' identity construction and draw on Bamberg's (2011) model of identity navigation,

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involving the three dimensions agency, sameness/difference, and constancy/change, to show how the navigation along these dimensions may elicit identification in the story recipient. As the story recipient in our data is the same person (viz. Graham Norton) and as the latter evaluated each story very explicitly, this thus provides us with a unique situation which allowed us to tap into the – usually quite oblique – relation between the narrator's identity navigation, story evaluation and recipient identification.

Our research aim is twofold. After presenting our literature review and describing the data, we first draw on Bamberg's (2011) identity navigational dimensions to analyze the Red Chair stories which are situated in a unique quasi-laboratory setting (see details below) in order to find some concrete tendencies for why stories may be evaluated either positively or negatively. This then builds up to our second aim, viz. to bring these findings together in the discussion section, where we attempt to account for the relation between the narrator's identity navigation and a story recipient's evaluation by means of the concept of identification.

2 Literature review

Evaluation is essential for storytelling. Drawing on Goffman (1959), Capps defines a narrative "as a socially organized conventional telling of temporally ordered events in one's life from a particular evaluative perspective" (Capps 1999: 87). Not only is this perspective visible through the *evaluation section*, a typical element of the structure of a canonical narrative, but narrators may also reveal their attitude towards their narratives by many other means that may be scattered over the story (Labov and Waletzky 1966: 34–37). Such an evaluation is causally related to the social function of stories, as a narrative "is always involved in the question of whether an action (and hence an actor) is expected or unexpected, proper or incorrect" (Linde 1993: 121). Hence, story evaluation draws on wider, culturally shared beliefs – or *master narratives* – thus linking the micro-level of storytelling to macro-social processes (De Fina 2008) and the narrators to the story recipients, e.g. as members of the same social group. As such, every story not only *does* evaluation, it *is* also evaluated by its recipients in terms of the way its content aligns with these *master narratives*, viz. whether the content is deemed "appropriate" vis-à-vis these culturally shared beliefs, thus respecting a balanced credibility/tellability ratio (Labov 2006).

Moreover, as the analytical interest has shifted from viewing narratives as texts to scrutinizing them as social practices (De Fina and Georgakopoulou

2008), this has led to an increased focus on how people actually *use* stories and how they do identity work through them. Identity is perceived here in an anti-essentialist way, namely as constituted through discursive practices as the ever-changing result of locally situated and interactionally negotiated processes (cf. De Fina et al. 2006). Scrutinizing such stories in everyday life and the identities that are talked into being through them, has, among others, uncovered how these narrators and their stories get evaluated by the other interlocutors, who are usually not exactly "a passive, nonjudgmental, receptive audience" (Moissinac 2007: 230). Of course, there is a plethora of potential evaluation criteria: story recipients can be found to judge stories' relevance and function in the local storytelling context (e.g. Georgakopoulou 2006: 92) or their newsworthiness (e.g. Theobald and Reynolds 2015) to name but a few. Such recipient evaluations often surface through implicit or explicit challenges during and after storytelling, but they are rarely systematically uttered. Yet the data we analyze here, viz. the Red Chair stories from *The Graham Norton Show*, present a unique case of systematic and highly explicit evaluation, as we discuss in detail below.

To scrutinize these stories and their relation to recipient evaluation, we first of all draw on Bamberg's (2011: 177–178) model of identity navigation, which revolves around the following three *dilemmas*:

- *agency/control* relates to how narrators agentively (or not) position themselves vis-à-vis existing master narratives in society;
- *difference/sameness* refers to narrators' positioning with regard to others;
- *constancy/change* involves the way narrators relate to themselves within the story, portraying events in their life as continuous or discontinuous.

Secondly, we aim to connect the narrator's identity navigation to the story recipient's evaluation by drawing on the concept of identification. Rooted in Freud's psychodynamics, identification has been described from various disciplinary angles, including media and communication studies (Cohen 2001; De Graaf et al. 2012) and literary studies (Oatley 1994; Oatley 1999). As Oatley states on fictional stories, "[i]n identification the reader takes on the protagonist's goals and plans. The reader then also experiences emotions when these plans go well or badly" (Oatley 1999: 445; cf. what Oatley calls *merging*). In media and communication studies, identification is researched to examine immersive, empathic and persuasive effects (e.g. narrative persuasion through identification [De Graaf et al. 2012; Hoeken et al. 2016]). In these studies, identification is often related to perceiving that (an attribute of) a character is similar to oneself, or to the vicarious experience of events in a story (cf. Cohen 2001: 249). From this perspective, identification *does* persuasion, and it thus has implications for story evaluation,

as through identificational processes, a story recipient can be persuaded to evaluate the story in either a positive or a negative way.

Recipients' identification with stories or story characters tends to be investigated by means of experimental, questionnaire-based research designs (e.g. De Graaf et al. 2012), but the concept rarely surfaces in discourse analytical studies. This is not surprising, as normally, recipients' identification with stories remains fairly implicit in everyday interaction. Given the anti-cognitivist lens that discourse analytical studies tend to apply to the data, interpretations regarding recipients' feelings and thoughts resulting from the telling of a story are usually refrained from. Alternatively, imposing one's own evaluation, as a researcher, would imply adopting an etic perspective, rather than the emic perspective that is prioritized in discourse analysis. However, in this article, we have selected a dataset in which the evaluation of the stories is performed very explicitly by one of the interactional participants. This thus offers an emic lens on evaluation, as such making it somewhat safer to open up this black box and draw on the concept of identification as a way to bridge the gap between the narrator's identity work and the story recipient's evaluation. Before going into the analyses, we first describe the data, the rationale for selecting these data, and our analytical approach.

3 Data selection, rationale and analytical approach

The data collected for our study consist of a collection of stories told during a weekly talk show, viz. *The Graham Norton Show*. This show is hosted by Irish-born comedian Graham Norton, who interviews international celebrities. As previous research has shown, talk shows "revolve around the performance of talk" (Tolson 2001: 3) in which the narrativization of lay experience has become central (Tolson 2001). These narratives are usually co-constructed by the narrator and the host (Thornborrow 1997) and they often occur within a fixed format (cf. the process of eliciting a narrative and subsequently problematizing and evaluating it, see Thornborrow 2007). By contrast, the narratives we focus on in our dataset are isolated from the talk show context's main frame (both in show-segmentation and content, since they do not contain issues raised within the talk show proper) and they are introduced in their own segment at the show's end, viz. the Red Chair segment. During this segment, individual audience members endeavor to tell an interesting story on any topic of their own choosing, unlike in "regular" talk show interaction. Each aspiring narrator is seated in

a red chair in a separate room backstage and appears on a screen next to Graham. Crucially, the red chair is wired to a lever beside Graham, which gives him the opportunity to flip over the chair at all times. The narrator is then (r)ejected and replaced by another until the show ends.

What makes these stories interesting from our particular research perspective is the fact that, on the one hand, these are naturally occurring data, in the sense that the storytelling action and the interaction with the story recipients is spontaneous. Of course, the stories are screened beforehand, and so they are more rehearsed than in day-to-day interaction, but that does not render the telling itself inauthentic. On the other hand, these Red Chair stories provide a quasi-laboratory context for story evaluation, as the presence of the lever invites explicit evaluation, usually both verbally and nonverbally (viz. pulling the lever). Importantly, this lever as well as other particular spatial constraints and affordances of the Red Chair set-up significantly alter the role of the talk show host, projecting the role of *story evaluator* upon him, rather than that of *interviewer*. Furthermore, the evaluation itself is usually executed by the same person (viz. Graham Norton) and, as it personally targets the narrator (who is flipped or not), it invites the evaluator to not only take the storytelling qualities, but also the narrator's identity work into account.[1] Finally, the storytellers do not know their audience in advance and are all faced with the challenge to tell such good stories that they get to finish them without being ejected from the chair. This explicitly evaluative and very particular format allows us to match the analysis of the narrators' identity navigation on the one hand, with the performance of evaluation by one of the story recipients on the other hand, and this enables us to address our research question, viz. how can we explain the relation between these two elements – a question we aim to answer by drawing on the concept of recipient identification in the discussion section of this article.

The data analyzed include every Red Chair segment of 2013 of *The Graham Norton Show* (i.e. the latter part of Season 12, and Season 13). These were collected from youtube.com and transcribed by drawing on CA conventions (Jefferson 1984), included in the appendix. Combined, the 21 segments cover slightly over one hour of footage and result in a corpus of more than 17,000 words, containing 44 aspiring narrators.

An initial exploration of the dataset demonstrated that reasons for ejecting narrators are extremely varied. These reasons range from quite circumstantial in cases of premature ejection (e.g. the narrator's looks or couch guests pulling the

1 Moreover, stories that are not told well are usually flipped prematurely, which further limits the possible "flipping" reasons for the completed stories on which we focus here.

lever for fun) to being related to story structure and performance. However, these were often unique cases and so no sufficiently large subset could be compiled for each kind of ejection. We thus decided to select only completed stories that were evaluated by Graham himself.

As such, 23 stories were retained, of which 14 narrators were allowed to walk, while 9 were not. In Tables 1 and 2, these stories are summarized briefly.

As these story overviews indicate, the majority of the stories include an embarrassing event, which gives some indication of the overall high entertainment value of the stories. With regard to the evaluation variable (i.e. allowed to walk away or flipped), many potential interrelated reasons for either a positive or a negative evaluation can be identified, but storytelling quality and the narrator's identity work come to mind in particular. As we only focus on fully completed stories here, this gives some indication of their similar quality, and as the "flipping" decision is very person-oriented (viz. to the narrator), it seems logical to focus particularly on how the narrator's identity work can account for Graham Norton's story evaluation.

Table 1: Narrators of 2013 who finished and walked away (n = 14).

Narrator	Episode	Story
Leigh	S12E12	During intercourse, he unknowingly phoned his mother. Afterwards, he found a message from his mother on his phone, saying "Are you all right? You sound like you're in pain".
Sasha	S12E13	During a sleepover as a child, she had to go to the toilet in the middle of the night. Silently and in the dark, she quickly sat down and started urinating, only to become aware that her friend's elderly grandmother was already sitting there and she had accidentally urinated on the woman.
Samantha	S12E15	Having undergone a sheer amount of pain during an intimate waxing session, she accidentally urinated at the end of it.
Sinead	S12E17	When massaging a large lady, a biscuit was revealed to be stuck between the lady's skin.
Kelly	S12E18	After accidentally setting her date's hair on fire and an unsuccessful attempt at putting it out (without him realizing), she panicked and ran away.
Paul	S12E19	Mistook the caretaker under his desk for his dog, Magic, and started stroking the person. Realizing it was not his dog, he apologized by saying "I thought you were M/magic under the desk", thereby unintentionally implying sexual promiscuity on the part of both persons. To make matters worse, he was on the phone when it happened.

(*continued*)

Table 1: (*continued*)

Narrator	Episode	Story
Anna	S13E02	Was at a restaurant and wanted to know how big a portion of potato skins was, so she asked a waitress if the dish came with two skins or four skins [= foreskins].
Owen	S13E03	When on a trip through Thailand, he and his friend had some trouble explaining what they desired from the waiters in a restaurant, only to be made aware later on (while having their meal) that the restaurant was in fact a private house.
George	S13E05	Upon seeing a man sitting still under water, he attempted to prompt the man to respond to interaction in order to see whether he was alright. When no response came, he took the man out of the ocean, thereby helping to save his life.
James	S13E07	Experienced a strange ride in a limo which pulled over when he thumbed a lift. James relates his thoughts on the interaction with the strange limo driver, which mirror themes of cautiousness, fear of the unknown and possible danger, only to relieve himself and his listeners at the end, by stating he reached his destination.
Caroline	S13E09	Was on a blind date that went downhill steadily due to some unfortunate mishaps. After falling asleep in the cinema, she went to freshen up, came back and decided to touch her date sexually in order to save their date. However, in coming back into the cinema, she had sat down again in the wrong seat, as such accidentally assaulting a person as a result.
Harriet	S13E10	Having tried to break up with her boyfriend for quite some time, she finally succeeded in getting him to meet her. However, before she could tell him, he received a phone call from his mother, telling him his father had just had a heart attack. It prompted a desperate Harriet to say, "Speaking of heartbreak … ".
Allison	S13E10	Had been flashed at six times by exhibitionists. Once though, she was sad to see an attractive flasher run away.
Paula	S13E12	Was thoroughly frustrated at being treated as a house slave by her lazy husband day in day out. When she was both vacuuming and looking after their four children on another hectic day, he was once again napping. Having reached her boiling point, she took her anger out on her husband by vacuuming his genitals.

We now move to the analyses, in which we adopt a discourse analytical approach that takes into account both the sequential and the discursive features of the stories, and we relate these to how the stories function and are emically evaluated in their storytelling context, thus investigating these stories as a form of social practice (cf. De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2008).

Table 2: Narrators of 2013 who finished, but were flipped (n = 9).

Narrator	Episode	Story
Adam	S12E11	Took his girlfriend to Paris for Valentine's day, but ended up giving her a terrible day.
Richard	S12E11	Working as a travel agent, he once mistook Rome in Italy (i.e. Roma) for Roma in Australia, subsequently sending off a man to the wrong destination.
Megan	S12E16	Wanted to impress some guys at the gym, but made an embarrassing stumble.
Mark	S12E19	As a fan of Judi Dench, he pretended to be a driver so he could get in the backstage area of a theatre in order to ask for an autograph.
Annabel	S12E19	Was making love to her fiancé one day and felt some warm drops on her neck. After a while, she realized it was her fiancé's snot she felt.
Christine	S13E01	The man she had been dating for some time was finally about to kiss her. It did not go as planned, as he fell off the bridge they were standing on.
Chris	S13E05	Went for a massage with his mother and ended up being massaged in an inappropriate place by the massage therapist.
Melissa	S13E05	Was waxing a man's lower back and behind when he suddenly farted.
Helen	S13E13	When her pet snake escaped, she decided to tell her neighbors only after quite some time had passed. The snake was found not much later in one of her neighbors' daughter's push chair.

4 Analyses

Upon close scrutiny of the stories in our dataset, we managed to identify a few flipping-decision tendencies in relation to the narrators' identity navigation along the three dimensions of Bamberg's (2011) model. The successive discussion of these three dimensions may look quite varied at first sight, but we will subsequently bring these findings together in this article's discussion section.

4.1 Agency

Agency navigation refers to the way narrators lean either "toward a person-to-world direction of fit," or a "fit from world-to-person" (Bamberg 2011: 106), thus indexing the narrator's positions to a society's master narratives. However, also without reference to such more globally oriented master narratives, narrators may construct themselves as "agentive self-constructers" (Bamberg 2011: 106). Intriguingly, this was also the case when the stories contained taboo content such as sex and bodily excretions. In everyday contexts, such stories typically cross the *upper boundary* of tellability (Norrick 2005). However, given the

amplified environment of the TV show and the relativity of reportability or tellability (Labov 2006: 38), one could assume that the "gradient dimension" of tellability (Norrick 2005: 339) is stretched so far that this is not the case here. Yet, even though Red Chair narrators are frequently allowed to finish such stories and many receive permission to walk away, some are flipped exactly because of the taboo content of their story. Upon further analysis, it turned out that the decision whether to flip the narrators depended on their in-story agency.

Surprisingly, the tendency we found was a little counter-intuitive. If the narrators positioned themselves as protagonists agentively, they were free to walk away, whereas the protagonists who underwent the events in their story tended to be flipped. For example, Sasha, who just explained how she, as a child, accidentally urinated on her friend's grandmother, is allowed to walk away, receiving the following comments on her story from Graham:

(1) Termination of Sasha's story, season 12, episode 13 (S = Sasha, Au = Audience, G = Graham; B = Bill Bailey; All = Audience and couch guests)

1	S:	I'd actually sat and wee:d on my friend's elderly na:n
2	Au:	((*laughter*))
3	S:	who was also £answering a call to nature£ (.)
4	G	hh o::h, she was [peeing as ↑we↓ll
5	S:	[((*nods*)) °yea::h°
6	Au:	((*laughter*))
7	G:	oh it's a double ↑decky:
8	All:	((*laughter*))
9	B:	o:::h
10	S:	I don't kno:w, (she was old)
11	G:	↑o: ↓h that is quite good

Sasha's story is mainly and repeatedly met with the news receipt marker "oh" (Heritage 1984) (lines 4, 7, 9 and 11) and Graham's other reactions are also oriented to ensuring a correct understanding of the events, such as the paraphrase functioning as an understanding check (line 4) and the reformulation (line 7), which actually forms a jocular contribution to the story. In none of these reactions, reference is made to upper-boundary story content. Furthermore, Graham calls the story "quite good" (line 11) and does not flip the narrator. So in spite of the scatological content and the protagonist's agentive role in the events, Sasha's story is evaluated surprisingly positively.[2]

2 Of course, there are some mitigating circumstances, such as the narrator being merely a child when the incident took place.

Intriguingly, when the narrators were victims of taboo events, they are rejected precisely because they crossed this upper boundary of tellability. The following extract shows how a victimized Annabel was flipped after revealing why she felt warm drops on her neck while she was making love to her fiancé.

(2) Termination of Annabel's story, season 12, episode 19 (G = Graham, A = Annabel, Au = Audience, O = Olly Murs, All = audience and couch guests)

1	A:	and then [after a ↓whi: ↑le£]
2	G:	[°loving it°]
3	A:	[((*laughter*))
4	Au:	[((*laughter*))
5	A:	in a bit of passion [I look up at his fa:ce
6		[((*eyes looking up*))
7		[and I think hhh '↓o:::h] (.) that's ↓why'
8		[((*eyes looking up*))]
9		a:nd I looked at his no:se
10		an he had [strea:ms of £snot£]
11		[((*draws her hands down her face*))]
12	A:	[£co[ming from his [fa(h)ce£
13	Au:	[o:: [::::w!
14	G:	[u:::h! [that's a disgusting story!
15	G:	[((*horrified look*)) [((*flips her*))
16	Au:	((*applause and laughter*))
17	O:	aw ( )
18	G:	I can only apologi::ze that Dame Judi Dench
19		was in a position (.) to hear any of that story
20	All:	((*laughter*))
21	G:	£I'm appalled£ ((*laughter*))

Annabel's story of having sex with her fiancé is initially received well (cf. Graham's positive evaluation in line 2). However, after Annabel signals the presence of "strea:ms of £snot£" (line 10) and mimics this nonverbally (line 11), Graham expresses his disgust through both his facial expression and the exclamation of "u:::h!" (line 14). He flips her almost instantaneously (line 15) and draws out his disgusted response to include an explicitly negative evaluation (line 14: "That's a disgusting story!"), and an apology to one of his couch guests, viz. Dame Judi Dench, through which he positions the story as

extra foul.[3] Finally, he ends his rant with another explicit expression of disgust (line 21: "I'm appalled"), underscoring the "above upper boundary" content of the presence of nasal phlegm during intercourse.

In sum, Graham explicitly accounts for flipping Annabel in terms of not complying to the appropriate norms of tellability. Sasha, however, whose story could be said to be equally vulgar considering both the scatological content and the victimization of an elderly woman, receives quite the opposite response from Graham. The main difference between these stories – as well as others from our data, not discussed here for reasons of space – lies in the degree of agency attributed to the protagonist. While Sasha as a protagonist is the agentive party who inflicts harm upon a third person, Annabel constructs herself as a "me-as-undergoer" (Bamberg et al. 2011) who is victimized by an agentive third person. So it seems that Graham's evaluation depends on whether the protagonist of these taboo stories is the agentive or the victimized party.

4.2 Sameness/difference

Moving on to the second dimension of identity navigation, sameness/difference points at the discursive devices that narrators can rally to mark affiliations with social groups in terms of proximity or distance and as such construct themselves as belonging to particular communities (Bamberg 2011: 104–105). This ingroup membership is typically interactionally negotiated with the other interlocutors through the construction of in situ groups. However, due to the largely monologic nature of the data under study, this dimension remains fairly under the radar here. There is actually only one tendency that could be discerned here, namely that membership of the Irish community (which includes Graham) is repeatedly made explicitly relevant in the interactions, e.g. by initiating this topic in the introductory chit chat ("And er- you're from Ireland, I'm guessing", season 13, episode 3). As such, Graham demonstrates his affiliation with this ingroup through his ability to recognize his fellow-Irishmen on the basis of accent or name (e.g. Sinead, season 12, episode 17) and by demonstrating his geographical and climatological knowledge (e.g. in season 13, episode 3, Graham comments on the weather in North Kerry). Unfortunately, of 44 aspiring narrators in our data, there are only four with Irish roots. Interestingly, they are all allowed to finish their story, even in spite of the dissident actions of some of

3 The presence of a Dame, however, is not the decisive factor to frame some content as "above upper boundary," as there were other instances in which a similar evaluation was made in the co-presence of non-noble couch guests.

the couch guests.[4] Of these four narrators, only one is flipped. Of course, this subset is too small to draw definitive conclusions from regarding the extent to which this ingroup membership is a factor that influences the decision to flip the narrator. We thus now move on to the third dimension of identity navigation.

4.3 Constancy/change

The final dimension of identity navigation, namely constancy and change, focuses on the narrators' "construction of a diachronic continuity and discontinuity for identity purposes" (Bamberg 2011: 103). This turned out to be a crucial dimension in our analyses of the data, as we found that narrators who show no signs of reflexive distance (e.g. repentance) were typically rejected, whereas others who had reflected on their previous actions – however severe they were – could typically walk away. We now zoom in on two stories that clearly illustrate this tendency. The first story is narrated by Helen, who gets flipped at the end.

(3) Helen's story, season 13, episode 13 (G = Graham, H = Helen, S = Samuel L. Jackson, N = Nick Frost, Au = Audience)

1 G: off you go with your story
2 H: okay, I own erm exotic pets
3 S: °oh dear°
4 H: and erm my snake got loose
5 G: ((*surprised and horrified look*))
6 H: and it'd been missing for about three months and
7 we live in a block of [three flats
8 [((*hands indicating levels*))
9 G: ye:s
10 H: and we thought we'd better tell our neighbours
11 after ab [out two months
12 [((*shaky hand gesture*))
13 Au: [((*laughter*))
14 G: [((*laughter*))
15 S?: I like this
16 H: and I told my neighbours and about a week after I told my
17 neighbour [above me
18 [((*hand gesture upwards*))

4 In season 12, episode 16, Mark Wahlberg flips the Irish narrator, but Graham orders to bring her back and this cycle is repeated three times.

19		she'd actually come running down er and said
20		['Helen, your snake is in my (.) [push chair'.
21		[((*waving hands*)) [((*forward gesture*))
22		and she just took her daughter out of it, so
23		I'm not sure how it got [up to the-
24		[((*pointing gesture up*))
25		to the flat above us
26	G:	it's a snake ((*points finger upwards*))
27	Au:	((*laughter*))
28	G:	I mean I'm not a vet, but I think they do
29	H:	it's a
30	G:	yes
31	H:	it's a corn snake a [four foot corn snake
32		[((*hands indicating size*))
33	N:	oh it's alright then
34	G:	↓yes
35	Au:	((*laughter*))
36	G:	although you've finished your story
37	H:	yeah
38	G:	I'm still going to flip you ((*flips her*))
39	Au:	((*laughter*))
40	G:	er
41	S:	aw
42	G:	er it's a sequel, snakes in a pram
43	S:	( )
44	G:	snakes in a pram, you could be in that

After Graham's bid for a story in line 1, Helen launches into the spectacular part of her story's orientation phase (line 2: owning exotic pets) and the initial part of the complicating action (line 4: "my snake got loose"). When telling the rest of the complicating action, she further complements her story with less sensational "orientation type" information necessary for understanding the story (line 7: living in a block of three flats). She thus orients to the storytelling norm of setting the scene prior to the story climax. However, by mixing the unremarkable orientation phase elements with the complicating action, she also orients to the constant threat to losing the floor and being flipped. Thus, Helen demonstrates she is skilled at entertaining her audience and as such, she maintains the highly competitive floor holding position.

Then the complicating action further unfolds in line 10 (viz. telling the neighbors) and up until this point, the evaluation of the protagonist as

responsible/irresponsible is still a vague matter as no details regarding the snake's escape are provided. However, this changes from line 11 onwards, as Helen explains *when* she deemed it necessary to tell the neighbors. This is treated as a laughable by the listeners, which emically indicates that this is a surprising fact. Importantly, this information contributes to gradually qualifying the protagonist as irresponsible.

When the laughter ends, Helen continues the story's complicating action and its resolution. Crucially, the potential gravity of the matter becomes even more obvious now, as the antagonist found the snake in a "push chair" (line 20) from which she had just picked up her daughter (line 22), thus implying the child's young age. As the imminent danger of snakes in the co-presence of infants is self-evident and no mitigating accounts (e.g. the potentially harmless type of snake) are provided, the audience now becomes aware of the life-threatening nature of the events.

Interestingly, the narrator refrains from topicalizing this danger and simply relates the story's resolution without mentioning whether the infant was unharmed. Also, the evaluation phase (line 22), where the story's actual point is discussed, only focuses on the snake's upward movement to "the flat above us" (line 25), which is framed as *the* surprising story element. This is also shown throughout the story performance by the many hand gestures indicating different levels (line 8) and upward movements (lines 18, 24).

In the subsequent line, Graham challenges Helen's story evaluation by simply categorizing the animal explicitly (line 26: "it's a snake"). He thus draws on general knowledge about this membership categorization (Sacks 1972), especially as he uses the indefinite article here (Stokoe 2009: 77). As there is no reaction from Helen, he continues by explicitly denying category entitlement (Potter 1996: 133) (line 28: "I mean I'm not a vet") and contrastingly states his opinion on the matter (line 28: "but I think they do"). This explicit invocation of category membership and the subsequent denial of category entitlement both frame the snake's ability to move upwards as general knowledge.

Helen then responds to this in lines 29 and 31 by specifying the snake's particular category membership (line 31: "it's a corn snake"). Thereby, she neither retorts that snakes can move upwards nor refutes her moral obligation to know this as a snake-owner. She then elaborates on the corn snake categorization by specifying and mimicking the snake's size (line 31: "a four foot corn snake"). However, this elaboration neither addresses Graham's challenges, nor explicitly refutes the potential danger of this situation, especially for an infant.[5]

5 Corn snakes are generally believed to be harmless for humans and, as it is a constrictor snake, its relatively short size adds to its innocuous nature. However, this is not common

Instead, the indication of the snake's – quite average – size actually makes matters worse, as it adds to the construction of the narrator as irresponsible and unwitting of danger vis-à-vis infants.

This is also shown emically, as in line 33 one of the guests, Nick Frost, ironically downplays the problematic nature of a snake on the loose by mock-qualifying Helen's preceding turn as an account that sufficiently refutes the danger of the situation. Graham aligns with this within this mock frame by voicing the affirmative particle with a falling intonation (line 34) and then he closes the interaction by flipping the chair. Finally, after Helen disappears from sight, Graham formulates a follow-up, asking one of the actors on the couch if he would star in a movie-sequel called "Snakes in a pram" (lines 42 and 44). He thus extracts the co-presence of snakes and infants as the story's main point and, as such, he again implicitly refutes Helen's evaluation of the story.

So in this story there is a clear mismatch in story evaluations between the narrator on the one hand and the story recipients on the other hand. From an etic perspective, this is clearly related to a difference in knowledge about the features of the escaped snake (see footnote 1). From the narrator's perspective, this story is not about a life-threatening situation. However, as Helen fails to provide this essential background knowledge about the snake, it is not surprising that the story recipients frame it as a danger-of-death story in which the narrator comes across as irresponsible. While Helen extrapolates the snake's upward movement as her story's point, Graham evaluates her story as one in which the protagonist's negligence caused danger for an infant. This negligence is twofold, but of a different level of seriousness. While letting a pet snake get away is careless, it is still understandable. However, not warning the neighbors about this – especially when they have toddlers – is quite a different ball game. Furthermore, Graham also explicitly projects this identity of irresponsible snake owner upon the narrator in lines 26 and 28, in which he, through category work, implicitly claims that certain snakes' features are common knowledge. Finally, the narrator's responses that should retort these challenges fail because Helen overestimates the recipients' knowledge about corn snakes. Hence, the overall identity projected upon the narrator from an emic perspective, is that she is still unwitting about the danger of the situation she caused and that her main interest lies in the snake's moving ability rather than in the well-being of her neighbors' daughter. As a result, there seems to be a complete lack of "diachronic identity navigation" (Bamberg 2011: 103) as the narrator comes across as not

knowledge and these facts are thus irrelevant as long as they are not explicitly mentioned by the narrator.

having learned anything from the events and thus as someone who has not "grown" into a more responsible person who acknowledges her past mistakes.

This is quite different in the following story, narrated by Caroline, who is allowed to walk away after narrating:

(4) Caroline's story, season 13, episode 9 (G = Graham, C = Caroline, D = David Mitchell, Au = Audience)

1	G:	er what's your name?
2	C:	Caroline
3	G:	Caroline, and where do you live, Caroline?
4	C:	I live in Middlesex
5	G:	oh right, and what do you do there?
6	C:	I'm a nanny:: but not for long maybe <on Monday after
7		this [story> ((*makes a movement with her mouth*))
8	G:	[((*horrified look*))
9	Au:	[((*laughter*))
10	G:	[< o:kay >
11	D:	[I don't think that's the sort of thing the BBC should be
12		broadcasting
13	Au:	((*laughter*))
14	G:	((*laughing*)) £er okay, off you£ go with your story
15	C:	erm long time ago <I went on a: blind da:te>
16		erm (it) didn't start very well
17		I got pooped on by a <pigeon> at the train station
18	Au:	((*laughter*))
19	C:	I drank far too much wi::ne
20		and he decided it would be a really good idea
21		to go see a late-night movie:: in Leicester Squa::re
22		.h so: <having> fallen asleep in the cinema::
23		I thought 'go to the loo', get myself togethe:r, come ba::ck
24		I thought 'I'm losing this guy here' so I sat do:wn and
25		((*fingers moving*)) started having a little fumble in his lap
26	G:	[((*makes a face*))
27	Au:	[((*laughter*))
28	C:	and this girl leaned forward and said erm
29		['excuse me, what are you doing with my boyfriend?'
30		[((*leans forward and looks accusative*))
31	Au:	((*laughter*))
32	C:	[I'm feeling up] the wrong [gu:y
33		[((*pointing at herself*))]

34	G:	[((*chuckles*))
35	C:	my date [is <five rows behi:nd>
36		[((*points to the back*))
37	Au:	((*laughter*))
38	C:	so I had to <apologi:ze> wit[hout getting punched in the face
39		[((*hand gesture*))
40		and [then stagger back up the stairs
41		[((*hand gestures upwards and behind*))
42		to my guy who just looked at me like ((*displeased look*))
43		'no I don't think so'
44	Au:	((*laughter*))
45	C:	((*bows with opening hand gestures*)) °and that's my story°=
46	G:	=YOU can walk!
47	C:	YEAH!
48	G:	aw you can walk, good story, good story

In the initial lines, we see the usual introductory chit chat, focusing, among others, on the aspiring narrator's profession. In reply to this question, Caroline categorizes herself as "a nanny" (line 6). This job category entails, as a category-bound feature, being a responsible and morally sound person. It is interesting, however, that in this small talk sequence Caroline adds an increment to this self-categorization and actually recompletes her turn by adding "but not for long maybe <on Monday after this story>" (lines 6 and 7). As such, she ironically self-repairs her answer regarding her profession and constructs herself as someone who does not have the expected characteristics required of nanny-category incumbents. She thus assumes moral accountability for the past events to be related and projects an irresponsible and morally doubtful identity upon herself. Both Graham, with his horrified look (line 8) and doubtfully uttered "o:kay" (line 10), and one of his couch guests, who implicitly refers to the BBC's high moral norms (lines 11 and 12), contribute to this identity construction and to framing the upcoming story as morally problematic. Then, once the laughter fades away, Graham utters his formulaic bid for a story (line 14).

Caroline then launches into her story by underlining the temporal distance between the storytelling and the storyworld time (line 15: "long time ago"). As such, she distances herself from the protagonist as a younger version of herself. She then sets the scene by categorizing the activity as a "blind date" (line 15), which invokes a number of expected characteristics and goals, such as making a good first impression. This is then immediately refuted explicitly (line 16: "it didn't start very well") and implicitly by providing details of what went wrong. These details are of various types, as one victimizes the protagonist (line 17:

getting "pooped on by a < pigeon > "), another is agentive on the part of the protagonist (line 19: "I drank far too much wi::ne") and the last one on the part of the antagonist (lines 20 and 21: "he decided [...] to go see a late-night movie"). All these details make the story highly vivid and they also do not downplay the story characters' agentive involvement in the dramatic course of events. On the contrary, Caroline ironically questions her date's decision to attend a late-night movie and she underlines her own mistake of drinking too much by stressing the amount of wine prosodically as well as by the booster "far" (line 19: "far too much wi::ne").

In the rest of her story, Caroline does not make any attempts to save her face either. For example, in lines 23 and 24, leading up to the story climax, she dryly lists her thoughts alternating with the subsequent events without any mitigation, nor does she frame the upcoming inappropriate behavior as a result of, e.g., panic. Instead, she factually describes the climax of this sequence (line 25: "little fumble") which she also mimics nonverbally.

However, unexpectedly, it turns out Caroline was touching another man and she subsequently risks getting into a fight with his girlfriend (lines 28–30). In lines 32–35, she sidesteps briefly to explain the situation and then formulates the resolution (line 38 ff.). In this resolution, Caroline does a lot of self-deprecation, describing herself inelegantly as "staggering" (line 40) and making explicit her date's fairly blunt rejection by mimicking his thoughts (lines 42–43). She then explicitly closes her turn (line 45), on which Graham latches his permission to walk away and evaluates Caroline's story positively (line 48: "Good story, good story").

Overall, Caroline presents herself in an unflattering way. She not only intended to publicly perform unwanted sexual activities to a date who is not even presented as *really* worth it, but, having performed these activities on the wrong man, she did so clumsily and carelessly. Thereby, she constructs herself as a morally questionable and unsuccessful seductress. Intriguingly, though she distanced herself from her story in temporal terms by explicitly discerning "the two temporal planes of storytelling" (Deppermann 2015: 379) (line 15: "long time ago"), her way of narrating is not face saving at all as it contains very little mitigation or accounting for her actions. Furthermore, her initial claim of possibly losing her job as a nanny after telling this story (lines 6 and 7), implies that she assumes moral accountability for her in-story actions. Of course, these words are uttered in a jocular frame, but within this frame, Caroline evaluates herself negatively. Hence, she does a "self-reflexive activity" as she "explicitly take[s] a stance towards past events and their past self [...] from the present point of view" (Deppermann 2013: 7). Thus, unlike Helen in the previous story,

Caroline talks into being diachronic discontinuity (Bamberg 2011: 103) and gradually constructs a reflexive distance and biographical change.

5 Discussion of the findings in relation to the concept of identification

In our analyses, we have taken advantage of the Red Chair's unique quasi-laboratory context to explore the relation between the narrators' identity work and the host's, viz. Graham Norton's subsequent evaluation by drawing on the three dimensions of Bamberg's (2011) model of identity navigation. We will now tease out this relation further and relate it to the concept of identification, but first we summarize our main findings. Firstly, we observed that in most stories that were completed, the protagonists were agentive self-constructors. Importantly, agency turned out to be a crucial criterion for the evaluation of stories that include taboo content. In particular, agentive protagonists (cf. Sasha) were allowed to walk, whereas victim-protagonists (cf. Annabel) were flipped for crossing the upper boundary of tellability (Norrick 2005). Secondly, we observed that the sameness/difference dimension was also a potential evaluation criterion (e.g. Irish narrators), but due to data scarcity, we could not verify this systematically. Thirdly, and crucially, a key factor to both finishing a story and walking away turned out to be a narrator's navigation on the dimension of constancy/change. If the narrators had distanced themselves from the story protagonists and as such proved to have reflected on their in-story actions and their outcome (cf. Caroline), they tended to receive permission to walk away. Alternatively, when they showed no reflexive distance or change (cf. Helen), they were flipped. This also demonstrated that the matter of being allowed to walk away is not so much about narrators talking into being a "good" identity in the sense of constructing themselves as a good person (cf. Linde 1993), as it is about being a "reflexive person," viz. narrators positioning themselves as repentant with a good degree of reflexive distance and change in relation to their former selves.

Of course, identity construction is a process that involves multiple layers and dimensions simultaneously and thus it would be misguided to treat the navigational dimensions of agency, sameness/difference and constancy/change as isolated features, as we have done for analytical purposes in the previous section. In particular, the Red Chair stories offer an opportunity for seeing the three dimensions interact, because this specific talk show segment incorporates

the explicit evaluation of stories as either good or bad. For the benefit of understanding the multi-dimensional interplay of the narrator's identity work and its subsequent evaluation by the talk show host, we draw on the concept of identification, as announced in the introduction. Importantly, this concept is related either to perceiving similarity with a story character or with the narrator, or to vicariously experiencing the events narrated in a story (cf. Cohen 2001). Thus, first of all, identification is closely related to the dimension of sameness/difference and group membership, in that identifying with a "similar" person highlights one's membership of a shared ingroup. This also surfaced in our data, as Irish narrators/protagonists tended to receive preferential treatment from the Irish-born host, Graham Norton.[6] However, as the subset of Irish protagonists was too small to allow systematic scrutiny, we scrutinized the other dimensions as well, which are less self-evident in terms of identification.

Second, concerning the dimension of constancy/change, we observed that narrators who evidenced reflexive distance vis-à-vis their former selves tended to elicit a sympathetic response from their recipient. In lay terms, narrators who changed because they had learned something from their experience were allowed to walk. This, one could argue, thus resulted in a form of identification with the narrator on the level of knowledge and/or morality. The recipients themselves may not have had the same experiences, but they may recognize specific modes of behavior or thought as similar to their own. In evaluating a reflexive, "changed" narrator as good, the recipients identify themselves as essentially part of an ingroup of people who orient towards the same values (cf. *liking*, Cohen 2001: 253–254).

Finally, we observed that the dimension of agency especially came into play when the story involved taboo content. In such stories, perpetrator-protagonists were allowed to walk, whereas victimized protagonists were flipped. This is quite logical from an identificational angle because story recipients are more likely to vicariously experience story events from the protagonist's perspective than from that of another character. Consequentially, vicariously experiencing vulgarity as a victim is perceived as more disgusting than when the story's third person, whom we identify with less, is the victim. In this sense, this dimension turns out to be related to the sameness/difference dimension as well. When recipients are disgusted by a story narrated by a victim of a particular taboo event, they essentially reject the possibility of identifying with this protagonist, thereby refusing the quality of sameness in order to avoid the vicarious experience.

6 Narrators and protagonists are self-evidently not the same (cf. our discussion of diachronic identity navigation), yet, in relation to the incumbency of the nationality category as discussed here, these can be conflated.

6 Conclusions

By deploying an identificational lens as a way to tap into the reasons behind story evaluation in this particular dataset, it becomes clear that Bamberg's navigational dimensions of agency, sameness/difference and constancy/change are not isolated features of identity work, but rather, that they are closely interwoven. In particular, we have demonstrated that, upon closer inspection, the dimension of sameness/difference can also be navigated through the other dimensions, thus showing how, in some respects, the dimensions feed off one another. This opens up the concept of identification in relation to the narrator's unique identity navigation along all three interwoven dimensions (thus including agency and constancy/change). Some of these dimensions may be navigated only minimally at certain times, while others receive more prominence, but at other times, this relation may just as well be reversed. Like on a DJ's mixing console, this results in ever-unique constellations of the three dimensions, which, in turn, elicit from the various story recipients equally quickly shifting degrees of identification with the story events, with its protagonists or with the (reflexively changed) narrators.

Moreover, what may sound like a harmonious mix to some story recipients, resulting in identification, may be perceived as a cacophony by others, leading to no identification at all. Regarding Helen's "snake on the loose" tale, for example, one could imagine fellow snake-loving story recipients to indeed identify with the storyteller because their sameness/difference dimension on the mixing console would be responsive to the maximum extent, while parent story recipients may identify with Helen's neighbor instead of with Helen. Additionally, a story recipient may carry memories that invoke certain forms of identification, e.g. former victims of taboo experiences may not easily identify with an agentive storyteller. In such a case, one's particular (non-)receptiveness could drown out the other dimensions, making them virtually irrelevant in the identificational process. Not only does this demonstrate that the three dimensions are closely interwoven, but it also brings the relational nature of identity construction to the fore, as storytellers may navigate their identity work, but its perception – and possible identification – is entirely up to the story recipients. As a final note, it is, on the one hand, self-evident that there is a plethora of other factors which may intrude upon these identificational processes, such as, for instance, a difference in common ground (e.g. Helen's story), and, on the other hand, that there is a variety of potential aspects of identification, viz. with the protagonist, the narrator or the story events, which could not be teased out here fully. These thus remain fascinating topics for future scrutiny.

Appendix: transcription conventions

,	An interval the equivalent of an orthographic comma
!	Expression of excitement equivalent to the orthographic exclamation point
(.)	An interval shorter than or equal to 0.5 seconds
st̲agger	Accentuated production
wee:d	Produced with lengthening of the vowel
YEAH	Produced more loudly
°oh dear°	Produced more silently
hh	Audible exhalation
.hh	Audible inhalation
↓yes	Produced with falling intonation
↑decky	Produced with rising intonation
< okay >	Produced with slower pacing
up to the-	Production cut-off by self or other
£I'm appalled£	Produced with smile voice
fa(h)ce	Laughter bubbling within speech
the wrong[gu:y [((*chuckles*))	Overlap of utterances and/or extralinguistic actions
And that's my story= =You can walk!	Utterance directly latching onto the previous
((*laughter*))	Describing extralinguistic actions
( )	Unintelligible utterance
(she was old)	Researcher's guess at an unintelligible utterance

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Bionotes

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