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The emotional impact of loss narratives:
Event severity and narrative perspectives

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Abstract

Out of the complex influences of event, narrative and listener characteristics on narrative emotions, this paper focuses on event severity, narrative perspectives, mood, and dispositions for emotion regulation and empathy. Event severity and perspective representation were systematically varied in sad autobiographical narratives to study their influence on quantity and quality of readers' emotional response. Each of three stories were manipulated to contain elaborated perspectives, only the past protagonists' perspective (dramatic narration), and very little perspectives at all (impersonal narration). We predicted that event severity influences the quantity of emotional response, while degree of perspective representation influences plausibility and whether emotional responses are sympathetic or interactional, i.e. directed against the narrator. Hypotheses were confirmed except for plausibility, and perspective representation had an effect only on anger against and dislike of the narrator. In a second study, impersonal narration evoked anger at and negative evaluations of the narrator which were related to blaming the narrator for showing too little emotional involvement. The generalizability of findings across emotions and implications for sharing of emotions in everyday and clinical settings are discussed.

The emotional impact of loss narratives: Event severity and narrative perspectives

One of the most powerful elicitors of emotions is narratives. We hear stories from our children, friends, colleagues, and we read novels and watch movies to arouse our emotions. Despite their importance, the emotional effects of narratives and the mechanisms involved are understudied in psychology. Therefore we first present an encompassing model of four kinds of narrative emotions and of five major influences on the evocation of narrative emotions. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that a structural element in narratives, the representation of subjective perspectives, influences the evocation of readers' emotions. Three of the four narrative emotions and four of the five influences will be included in the two studies.

First we point out a structural similarity between emotion and narrative. In Frijda's (1986) process model, emotion begins with the appraisal of a situation as out of the ordinary. The appraisal is inherently evaluative, as it relates probable outcomes to the individual's concerns. The appraisal creates an action readiness that is specific to the kind of situation, and may show in typical physiological, expressive, and experiential reactions. This basic structure of the emotion process resembles the normative structure of narratives (Ekman, 2003; Lazarus, Lazarus, Campos, Tennen, & Tennen, 2006; Oatley, 1992). Narrative is a text format which transports past events into the present. The two basic features of narrative are that it reproduces the sequence of past events in their linear arrangement of the text, and that it evaluates these past events (Labov & Waletzky, 1967). Narratives normatively begin with an *abstract* which announces their main point, and continue with an *orientation* that provides a context of normality. Then comes a break with normality, the *complication*, which is followed by attempts by the protagonist to return to a normal state of affairs, the *result* of which may be successful or not. The *coda* leads the listener back to the present (Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Stein & Glenn,

1979). The structural homology between narrative and emotion process is that in both a state of normality is interrupted by a problematic situation which affects the individual's well-being, the evaluation of which constitutes the emotion, which may be ended by solving the complication (Oatley, 2004).

The concept of narrative originated in literary studies of folk tales and literature, was applied to the cinema, and to everyday storytelling. Narratives may be filmed and watched, written and read, or told and listened to. Written stories tend to be better formed and more reflected upon, while oral stories tend to be more spontaneously produced and therefore revealing of the speaker. Literature is an aesthetic form and is part of a shared cultural heritage, while everyday narratives are highly transient and personal communications. Finally stories can be fictional or claim to relay the truth, although even autobiographical narratives are expected to contain some degree of embellishment. It is a strength of the concept of narrative that general narrative mechanisms can be studied across these distinctions. Our interest is in a general conception of narrative emotions and in general mechanisms for evoking them, and in our empirical work we will start with transcribed autobiographical oral narratives.

Narrative Emotions

In this section we define the place of narrative emotions in emotion psychology and define four kinds, generalizing across specific kinds of narratives. Emotional situations are most often social in nature. Frequently it is the emotion of another person with whom we interact which in turn elicits our own emotions, leading to a communication of emotions (Darwin, 1872; Planalp, 1999). If, for example, the other is angry and therefore provoking, we may in turn react with anger, or else also with fear or even sadness. We may also react emotionally if the interest at stake is not our own, but that of another individual, because we empathize with the other. The

quality of our emotional reactions as witnesses then depends on whether we identify with the interests of the other or not. If we do, we react with sympathetic emotions of compassion or happiness-for-the-other. If we do not identify with the interests of the other, we may react with the counter-empathetic emotions (Zillmann, 2006) of pleasure-in-others' -misfortune (*Schadenfreude*) or amusement and with envy or jealousy (Ben-Ze'ev, 2000). These latter emotions are not sympathetic, but still empathetic, because they too require taking the perspective of the protagonist.

In everyday life we often do not witness the experience of another person directly, but we are told what has happened. Listening to a narrative is prominent among the emotion-eliciting situations listed by Ekman (2003). Emotional experiences usually motivate one to tell others about them (Rimé, 2009). Following authors such as Scheff (1979), Oatley (1992), and Tan (1996), we distinguish four kinds of *narrative emotions*, i.e. emotions elicited by listening to, reading, or watching stories.

First there are *sympathetic emotions*, in which we feel with the protagonist of the story and - in the case of autobiographical narratives - also with the narrator, and we accept their emotions. Sympathetic emotions include compassion with a sad protagonist, but also sympathetic indignation with an angry protagonist, worry about a frightened protagonist, or symhedonia with a happy protagonist (Ben-Ze'ev, 2000; Rozman & Rozin, 2006). Sympathetic emotion varies in the degree to which it is perceived as a distanced feeling-with-the-other or as one's own emotion (cf. for literary narratives Cupchik, Oatley, & Vorderer, 1998; cf. in a more general developmental vein Hoffman, 2000). Immersion in a narrative, termed 'transportation' by Gerrig (1993), induces a positive evaluation of the narrative (cf. Argo, Zhu, & Dahl, 2008 for literary narratives) and being persuaded by its message (cf. Green & Brock, 2000 for non-literary,

written narratives).

Sympathetic emotions may be elicited by the emotions expressed by the protagonist, and also simply by his situation with which the reader identifies (Oatley, 1999, on reading fiction). If the listener or reader appraises the protagonist's situation differently from the protagonist and narrator, his or her sympathetic emotion may not be identical with the emotion of the protagonist and narrator (Ben-Ze'ev, 2000). Special cases are *laconic narratives* which lack emotional evaluation. This may be an especially effective narrative technique to evoke narrative emotions, because the reader is left alone in having to produce the adequate emotional response to the protagonist's situation. Literary theorist von Koppenfels (2007) has analyzed this cold style as a typically modern literary style, from Flaubert to Kertesz, for provoking strong narrative emotions.

A second kind of narrative emotion evaluates not the fortune of an actor, but actions of an actor or the actor as a whole person (Ben-Ze'ev, 2000, p. 94). In the case of a narrator recounting personal experiences, the listener or reader may develop emotions directed towards the protagonist/narrator. To differentiate these from sympathetic emotions, we shall term all emotions directed at the narrator *interactional emotions*. These react to the actions of the protagonist by taking the position of an observer, or to the telling of the story by taking the listener's own interests as the frame of reference. Thus the listener may become angry at the protagonist because of how he or she acted, or at the narrator because of how the story is presented. Or the emotions evaluate the whole person of the protagonist, such as in narrator-directed love and hate, liking and disliking, admiration or contempt, desire and repulsion or disgust. We include counter-empathetic emotions in the interactional emotions, because they contrast with the protagonist's own emotions and are therefore directed against her or him. Our

grouping of emotions into sympathetic emotions versus interactional emotions cuts across systematizations of emotions such as those by Ben-Ze'ev (2000), because the criterion used here is whether the reader takes the position of the protagonist/narrator and has concordant emotions, or whether the reader takes the position of an interactant of the protagonist/reader.

A third kind of narrative emotion is an *aesthetic emotion* which reacts to the narrative as an artefact (Tan, 1996, on cinema). These may be interest, aesthetic pleasure and enjoyment, suspense and surprise. Interest and aesthetic pleasure relate to how artfully a story is narrated. Suspense results from the passive situation of the reader and relates to the hoped-for outcome of the protagonist's attempts to solve the complication.

Finally a fourth kind of narrative emotion may be termed *autobiographical emotions*. They are related to the personal memories which are cued by the narrative (Scheff, 1979). These emotions may be more idiosyncratic than those directly elicited by the narrative because memories and their meaning vary greatly. In our studies, hypotheses will regard sympathetic and interactional emotions, and aesthetic emotions will be explored.

Determinants of Quantity and Quality of Narrative Emotions

We highlight five factors that influence the quantity and quality of narrative emotions. First, the intensity of an emotional response is strongly determined by the appraisal of how much an event affects the interests of the individual (Frijda, 2007). Readers' sympathetic emotional response will depend on how severe the event is judged to be for the specific protagonist or for an average individual. For example, the death of a young sibling will, as a rule, be judged to be more severe than the death of a pet.

Second, the intensity of narrative emotions is also influenced by readers' dispositions to react with specific emotions (e.g., trait fear, trait anger), to focus on or down-regulate emotions

(Frijda, 2007), and to empathize with others. Third, the present mood of the individual increases the probability of reacting to events with emotions congruent to the present mood. Fourth, the likeability of a protagonist influences the overall tendency to react with sympathetic versus counter-empathetic emotions. The likeability of a protagonist depends both on the moral evaluation of his or her actions as well as on how attractive or repulsive he or she is, in terms of sexual attractiveness, potency, and character traits (Zillmann, 1994; 2006, using film clips). Also, sympathetic emotions require that the other has not deserved being in a predicament (Ben-Ze'ev, 1990).

We now turn to a fifth factor which we believe to influence both the quality and quantity of the emotional response to narrative. It is a formal characteristic of the narrative, namely the degree to which subjective perspectives are represented. This is the influence of interest in our two studies, and will be tested together with the influence of event severity. Mood and dispositions for empathy and for regulating emotions will serve as control variables, while protagonist likeability will be a dependent variable in Study 2.

The Representation of Perspectives in Narrative

The central thesis of this paper is that if subjective perspectives are represented in a narrative, the sympathetic emotions can be evoked in the reader, and the more perspectives are absent in narrative, the more the reader will react with interactional emotions directed against the narrator. The taking of perspectives of others is a fundamental mechanism in human communication (Mead, 1934) and more specifically in empathy (Decety, 2005). We introduce five linguistic means to represent perspective which are prominent in narratives, and then use them to define three degrees of representation of perspectives in narrative.

Perspective, point of view (Bal, 1997), or focus (Genette, 1980), is defined by the source of

the information in the narrative. If it is told from an *omniscient* point of view, the reader has access to all information, both from an outside observer's perspective and from the subjective perspectives of the various protagonists. If a narrative is told from a *subjective* point of view, only information available to one protagonist is provided, both concerning his or her introspective knowledge and knowledge of the world. If a narrative is told from a *behavioral* point of view, only information accessible to an observer is available.

Subjective perspective is more explicitly presented by mental expressions which describe mental acts or internal states. While cognitive acts imply some distance, acts of feeling (emotions) and perceiving are more embedded in the narrated events. Also, mental expressions can be used from a past perspective near the recounted events, or from a present or future perspective, looking back at and re-evaluating the events. Another device for representing a distanced perspective onto the events in autobiographical narratives are comparisons between how something was seen then and how it is seen today (Habermas & Paha, 2001).

A device to narrow the perspective to that of the past protagonist is dramatic speech (Bal, 1997; Chafe, 1994). It shifts the center of temporal and local deictic expressions such as 'here' and 'there' or 'now' and 'tomorrow' from the time of narration to the narrated time, from the narrator to the protagonist. This may be supported by the use of historical present tense and direct speech. Dramatic speech creates a sense of immediacy (Ulatowska, Olness, Samson, Keebler, & Goins, 2004) and emotionality.

Also the nature of clauses contributes to the representation of perspective. *Narrative clauses* are defined as following one another in the sequence of the events they report (Labov & Waletzky, 1967). They thereby transpose the reader into the past and create a sense of reliving. This is absent in *chronicles* (Linde, 1993) which merely summarize events, *descriptions that*

refer to atemporal facts, and *arguments which* contain logical relations. Finally the grammatical subject is another means for representing perspective. Using an impersonal grammatical subject or dropping the subject altogether renders the message more evasive and opaque as to who is responsible (Nariyama, 2004).

In an earlier paper, we outlined three apparently typical combinations of means to represent perspectives in narratives (Habermas, 2006). The most elaborated version of perspective representation is narrated from an omniscient point of view and uses cognitive and perceptual mental expressions both from the past and the present perspective. The dramatic version with an intermediate degree of perspectives representation uses dramatic speech, limiting perspectives to that of the past protagonist. The impersonal version with minimal perspective representation contains a mix of behavioral and omniscient point of view, very few mental expressions, and impersonal grammatical subjects.

In an exploration of emotional responses to three different narratives each representing one of the three degrees of perspective representation, listeners reacted with mostly sadness, anxiety, and compassion to the dramatic narrative, and with mostly anger to the impersonal version (Habermas, 2006). However, in this exploratory study content was confounded with perspective representation.

In a more systematic study of effects of narrative perspectives on readers reactions, Polya, Laszlo, and Forgas (2005) presented autobiographical narratives about finding out or revealing one's identity as Jewish, gay, or infertile respectively, each presented in one of three versions of varying degrees of perspective representation, to 21 psychotherapists and 61 students. The first two versions were equivalent to our elaborated and dramatic versions of perspective representation, while the third version was not like our impersonal version, but a variant of the

dramatic version, with comments added that the narrator could still see the scene before his or her eyes. The authors studied the influence of narrative perspectives on impression formation. Narrators of the elaborate version were judged to be most mentally healthy and least anxious. Narrators of the dramatic version were judged to be least shy and most vigorous and impulsive. Finally, narrators of the third, also dramatic version were judged to be most anxious. This study focussed on impression formation, not on narrative emotions. However it does underline a more positive evaluation of the most complete representation of perspectives, and suggests that the dramatic mode of narrating is perceived as more emotional.

Hypotheses

In the following two studies we intended to test the effects of narrative perspectives on the emotional response of readers. Mainly for reasons of economy we presented transcripts of manipulated autobiographical oral narratives to readers. Both language and our questions suggested that these were really autobiographical stories, not fiction. To control for the effect of the severity of the narrated event, we chose events of three degrees of severity. The first hypothesis was that the more severe a narrated event is, the stronger the overall emotional reaction of readers and the stronger their sympathetic emotions are.

The second hypothesis regarded three effects of narrative perspectives. In Hypothesis 2a we expected the dramatic version with a focus on the protagonist's perspective to elicit the strongest sympathetic emotions, because the reader is drawn into his or her experience of the past situation, while other, possibly competing perspectives are excluded. Thus the reader can only sympathize with the protagonist, not with other characters. Exclusively taking the perspective of the protagonist probably promotes immersion in the story world (Gerrig, 1993) more so than also taking distanced perspectives from the present onto the past. Furthermore the exclusion of all

but the protagonist's perspectives renders the appraisal of the past situation more unequivocal and therefore also more emotional. We expected the impersonal version to elicit the fewest sympathetic emotions as no perspectives are offered to be sympathized with.

The other two hypotheses regarded linear effects of narrative representation. We expected 2b) that the more various perspectives are included, the more plausible or credible a narrative will be. Our main reason is that the more different views of an event are presented and related to each other, the more probable it is that a fairly balanced view of events is presented. The hypothesis presupposes that the perspectives presented are in agreement with common sense.

In hypothesis 2c we expected that perspective representation is inversely related to the amount of interactional emotions directed at the narrator, especially anger, and a negative evaluation of the narrator. In the impersonal version the reader takes on the task of finding and feeling the adequate emotions for the protagonist and narrator. We expect such sympathetic feelings, however, to be superseded by interactional emotions, because the reader reacts to the narrator's refusal or inability to react with the normative emotions. Labov (1972) expects that if a narrator fails to provide any evaluation, i.e. a subjective perspective on the narrated events, that listeners question the reportability of the event and ask "So what's the point?" However, event severity itself may be enough to determine reportability (Labov, 1997). Still we believe that there is a norm for narrators to represent their perspective on the events, i.e. to evaluate. If this norm is violated and the event is serious enough to require an emotional reaction, the reader may turn with negative emotions against the narrator. We expected the elaborate version to elicit the fewest negative interactional emotions, because it offers all possible perspectives and therefore asks the least evaluative work from the reader.

Other possible influences such as dispositions and mood were controlled for. Some aesthetic

narrative emotions were included for exploratory purposes. Autobiographical memories were elicited by the narratives in Study 1, but will not be reported because the vast majority were simply identical to the narrated events (e.g., ‘death of my Grandma’). Study 1 was a first, more exploratory approach to the hypotheses. We followed up with Study 2 as a near replication with a more straight forward design and additional control variables and new dependent variables resulting from the open-ended answers obtained in study 1.

Study 1

Method

Participants

A total of 162 adults between the ages 19 and 65 ($M = 27.56$, $SD = 10.67$.) answered a questionnaire. Three quarters were female (122 women, 39 men, one missing). Sixty-one percent of the questionnaires were filled out in classes of Psychoanalysis, attended by students with a variety of subject majors, 15% by students approached on campus, and the remaining 24% by acquaintances of research assistants, most of whom had no university education. About 4% of the questionnaires were returned incomplete and therefore reprinted and distributed again to different participants. Completing the questionnaire took 20 to 30 minutes.

Material

Selection of narratives. Out of a larger set of oral narratives of sad events collected by students as part of their course work, we selected three narratives with one severe, one intermediate, and one less severe event. Severity was pre-tested with five adults. The three stories dealt with the death of the narrator’s brother, grandmother, and dog.

Construction of three versions of narratives with differing degrees of representation of perspectives. The three selected stories were divided into propositions using a manual already

used in other narrative studies for which this coder had attained an interrater agreement of 98.5% (Habermas & de Silveira, 2008). All three stories were shortened to an equal length of 40 propositions. Then we constructed three versions with differing degrees of representation of perspectives for each of the three stories. The *elaborated version* had the most complete representation of perspectives, the *dramatic version* had perspectives mostly restricted to the past protagonist, and the *impersonal version* had almost no representation of perspectives (Table 1).

The elaborated versions are narrated from an omniscient point of view. They contain the highest percentage of mental expressions (cognitive and perceptual), and both from a present and a past point of view. What is most distinctive for the elaborative narrative form is that the narrator explicitly states his past and present perspectives, e.g. by saying “I was totally at a loss when she died. Nowadays I think that when she finally died I was relieved.”

The dramatic narrative version induces the protagonist’s perspective in the reader without explicitly stating it. It provides only information available to the past protagonist, and transports both narrator and reader to the past protagonist’s position. Mental expressions are used mainly from the protagonist’s past perspective with mostly perceptual terms focussing on the immediate experience of the past situation. Also, elements of dramatic speech are used more than in the other two versions, such as direct speech, historic present, the shift of the *origo* of temporal and spatial deictic expressions from the here and now to the then and there. A typical example is: “The telephone rings, I pick up the receiver, and I hear my aunt say: ‘Grandma is dead’.”

Finally the impersonal version is defined by the paucity of subjective perspectives, gaps and breaks, lack of detail and lack of grammatical subjects in sentences, and inconsistent motives, such as in “Didn’t know how to react. I tell mom: ‘She’s dead’.” Very little subjective perspectives are represented at all. The knowledge provided is mostly from an external

observer's point of view. Therefore it contains very few mental expressions, some dramatic speech, and the highest percentage of propositions with or without an impersonal grammatical subject. Once the nine narratives were constructed, we coded them with a manual for perspective representations in narratives (already used in Habermas, Ott, Schubert, Schneider, & Pate, in press) to make sure that the stories had all the linguistic characteristics we intended them to have.

Combinations of three stories in each questionnaire. Each questionnaire contained all three different stories (loss of brother, grandmother, dog). Across questionnaires, the order of stories was systematically varied, with six different orders possible. Degree of perspective representation was also varied systematically, so that a questionnaire could contain three times the same version of perspective representation, or twice one version and one of another, or three different ones. The systematic permutation of the three versions and the order of the versions results in 27 possible ordered combinations of versions. Combining these with the six possible orders of stories resulted in a total of 162 individual questionnaires.

Readers' emotional reactions. To measure readers' emotional reactions, we relied on five-point rating scales and answers to some open-ended questions. To control for the *initial emotional state*, we first asked for ratings of four basic emotions, sadness, fear, anger, and joy ("At the moment I feel..."). The following instruction read: "Please take your time and read the following three stories and answer a series of questions for each. Please imagine that the narrator is of your own gender." Each narrative was presented on a new page. Each narrative was followed by identical sets of items for event severity, suspense, and plausibility of the story, followed by ratings of the emotional reaction in terms of sadness, fear, anger, and joy. These were asked three times, once for the overall emotional *reaction to the story* („The story makes me ...“), once for *sympathetic emotions* regarding the narrator („I feel ... with the narrator“; with

an additional item for pity), and once for *interactional emotions* towards the narrator („The narrator makes me ...“; with an additional item ‘liking of narrator’).

Immediately following each narrative, two open-ended questions asked “How do you feel now?” and “What would you like to tell the narrator?” Based on the answers provided, we devised categories. To gain a rough measure of the strength of emotional response, answers to the first question were coded as containing sympathetic emotions, with Cohen’s Kappa $\kappa = .84$ based on the independent coding by two coders of responses to 99 narratives. Answers to the second question were coded as sympathetic, as criticizing the narrator for showing too little emotion or for showing exaggerated emotion, and other critical remarks or suggestions for what to do ($\kappa = .78$). We constructed a variable *sympathetic versus critical remarks*, by assigning a ‘2’ for a sympathetic response and a ‘-1’ for any of the latter critical codes. On the basis of the same answers, we constructed a variable for *criticism of exaggerated or missing emotion* by assigning a 1 to criticisms of exaggerated, a -1 for criticism of missing emotion, and a 0 if neither was mentioned. We also found a number of critical remarks on the form of the narrative as well as some remarks regarding questions of guilt. We simply coded whether either remark was present at least once in any of the open answers.

Scales of Emotional Experiencing. At the end of the questionnaire we included the Scales of Emotional Experiencing (SEE; Behr & Becker, 2004) to control for habitual ways of dealing with emotions. A total of 42 items distributed on seven scales describes how one habitually perceives, evaluates, and handles one’s feelings. The scales are ‘Acceptance of One’s Emotions’, ‘Emotional Flooding’, ‘Emotions Perceived through Bodily Sensations’, ‘Imaginative Symbolization’, ‘Emotion Regulation’, and ‘Downplaying of Emotions’.

Results

For the following analyses, outliers in dependent ratings were corrected to three standard deviations from the means for cells defined by severity and version (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2001). Minor deviations from a normal distribution and a few minor inhomogeneities of variance were tolerated because of the large number of cases (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2001, p. 74). Because we had systematically varied the number of the three versions among the three stories presented to each participant, ranging from none to three examples of each version, perspective representation could not be used as a within-factor in analyses of variance (ANOVAS). Therefore tests of significance are run on the basis of all 486 stories, but degrees of freedom were corrected to the total number of independent measurements, i.e. $N = 162$. The versions of perspective representation were distributed almost equally between the sexes. Gender effects were nevertheless tested for exploratory purposes.

Manipulation Check and Construction of Dependent Variables

In an ANOVA with gender as between-factor and expected severity as within-factor ($N = 159$ due to missing values), ratings of severity differed significantly between the three stories, $F(2, 314) = 133.92, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .46$. The brother story was rated to be very severe ($M = 4.73, SD = .49$), the grandmother story severe ($M = 3.94, SD = .78$), and the dog story least severe ($M = 3.43, SD = .91$). Women rated stories as more severe than men, $F(1,157) = 7.75, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$.

To test whether the instructions which aimed at measuring emotional reactions to the story, sympathetic reactions, and interactional reactions indeed did measure different aspects of emotional reactions, the respective items for sad, anxious, and angry emotions were averaged for each condition. In an ANOVA for repeated measurement, the three instructions led to significantly different responses, $F(2,968) = 151.92, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .24$, sympathetic

emotions being strongest and interactional emotions weakest.

The correlations between emotion ratings were explored within the sets of initial emotional state, story-related emotions, sympathetic emotions, and interactional emotions respectively, by visual inspection and by running principal components analyses for each set of ratings. Ratings of joy showed inconsistent and low correlations across type of emotion and were excluded from further analyses. Anger correlated positively with anxiety and sadness, but low ($r < .30$) except for initial emotions, while sadness and anxiety correlated strongly ($r > .50$) throughout.

Maximizing internal consistency (α) led to the construction of one indicator each for initial negative emotions (anxiety, sadness, anger, $\alpha = .55$), for story-related sad and anxious emotions (anxiety, sadness, $\alpha = .67$), for sympathetic emotions (pity, anxiety, sadness, $\alpha = .79$), and two indicators for interactional emotions: One averaged sad and anxious emotions ($\alpha = .43$), the other anger and liking (inverted; $\alpha = .58$).

We then explored the correlations between initial emotions and habitual ways of dealing with emotions (SEE) with dependent variables, in order to select the most predictive covariates. From among the SEE-scales, being emotionally flooding and imaginative symbolization via fantasies and dreams showed the highest correlations (see Table 2). Women had significantly higher values on both these scales ($p < .001$).

Effects of Severity and Perspective Representation

We calculated four ANOVAS with initial emotional state and the two SEE-scales as covariates, with gender, severity of event, and representation of perspectives as factors (2 x 3 x 3). A significant prediction by the SEE-scales most often attenuated gender differences. Planned contrasts were calculated for linear differences of severity of event, and for differences between elaborated and dramatic versions and between dramatic and impersonal versions. In addition, we

explored effects of severity and perspective on the answers to open-ended questions.

The first hypothesis that the intensity of negative emotional reactions to the story and of sympathetic negative emotions increased with the severity of events was confirmed (Table 3). Planned contrasts for linear effects of severity were significant both for sad and anxious reactions to the story ($p < .001$) and for sympathetic emotions ($p < .01$). As an additional way to test the hypothesized influence of severity of event we reran the ANOVA with the individually rated event severity as an additional continuous predictor. With both dependent variables, rated severity had a high impact ($p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .14$ for reaction to the story and $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .12$ for sympathetic reaction), while the effect of severity in terms of differences between the three stories was no longer significant (both $\eta^2 = .01$). Severity also had a significant effect on the number of sympathetic answers in response to the question ‘How do you feel now’, $F(2, 149) = 7.94$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$, which was also positively affected by the scale ‘Symbolic Imagination’, $F(1, 149) = 6.19$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$, and by female gender, $F(1, 149) = 8.50$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$.

The second hypothesis regarded effects of perspective representation on sympathetic emotions, plausibility, and interactional emotions. All three differed significantly by degree of perspective representation (see Table 3 and Figure 1). Planned contrasts showed the same pattern for all variables, the dramatic version differing from the impersonal ($p < .05$ for plausibility and $p < .001$ for the other two). Contrary to the hypothesis, plausibility was not higher for the elaborate than for the dramatic version. In contrast, the mean interactional sad and anxious emotions did not differ significantly by degree of perspective representation, neither in planned contrasts nor overall, $F(2, 149) = 1.76$, n.s., partial $\eta^2 = .01$, only by severity, $F(2, 149) = 4.15$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$.

We then explored the effect of perspective representation on answers to the open-ended question of what one would like to tell the narrator. It had a significant effect, $F(2, 149) = 10.03$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$, as did gender $F(1, 149) = 6.62$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. Reactions were most sympathetic in the dramatic version and most critical in the impersonal version as expected, with a significant planned contrast between these two conditions ($p < .001$), basically mirroring the reverse sympathetic reactions and disliking. Women reacted more sympathetically.

To explore whether the narrator of the impersonal version was perceived to ward off negative emotions, we also tested comments that the narrator was showing too little versus exaggerated emotions. Perspectives did make a significant difference, $F(2, 149) = 3.77$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$, with significantly ($p < .05$) more critical remarks about a lack of emotion in the impersonal than in the dramatic version, but no difference between the dramatic and elaborate version. Also, women criticized more for a lack of than for an abundance of emotions, $F(1, 149) = 7.72$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. Severity of event also made a difference, $F(2, 149) = 7.46$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$, the least severe story eliciting the most criticism for an abundant emotions.

Finally, we also explored spontaneous remarks concerning the form of the narrative and guilt. Narrative form was mentioned critically in reply to three elaborated narratives, to two dramatic narratives, and to 10 impersonal narratives, which was significant in a Kruskal-Wallis test, $H(2) = 7.83$, $p < .05$, $r^2 = .02$. Mentioning of guilt was tested with an ANOVA, showing a significant interaction of degree of perspective representation with severity, $F(4, 149) = 4.08$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$, and a significant main effect of severity, $F(2, 149) = 56.11$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .19$. Guilt was mentioned most frequently for the least severe, and least frequently for the story of intermediate severity, possibly reflecting not so much differences in severity rather than individual characteristics of story contents.

Discussion

Thus all four hypotheses were confirmed, although the expected differences between the elaborated and dramatic version were not significant. The implications of these findings will be pointed out in the general discussion. Two aspects of this study motivated us to plan a second study with some variations. A drawback of the design had been that we tested all possible permutations of the three versions at the cost of not being able to test hypotheses in a within-subjects design. Therefore in Study 2 each participant judged three narratives with the same degree of perspective representation, varying perspective representation only between participants. The disadvantage might be that differences between degrees of perspective representation might not be elicited as clearly as when participants respond to contrasting versions. Furthermore, only angry dislike, but not sad and anxious interactional emotions had been affected by perspective representation, suggesting that possibly perspective affects also the character of the narrator. Therefore we decided to add other aspects of the evaluation of the narrator, following the lead of Polya, Laszlo, and Forgas (2005). Thus in addition to retesting the hypotheses from Study 1, we tested the effect of perspective representation on the evaluation of narrator character. The open-ended answers in Study 1 had indicated reactions to several additional aspects of the narratives, namely its aesthetic quality, the protagonist's guilt, and the adequacy of the strength of the narrator's emotional reaction. Items concerning these aspects were therefore added. Finally, we also added a measure of dispositional empathy and some items complementing existing items to increase reliability.

Study 2

Method

Participants

A total of 216 adults between the ages 19 and 50 ($M = 24.29$, $SD = 4.58$) answered a questionnaire. The 36 men did not differ in age from women. All questionnaires were filled out in classes of Psychoanalysis. Six questionnaires were distributed again to other participants.

Material

Combination of narratives. A third of the participants read the three stories in the elaborated version, another third in the dramatic version, and a third in the impersonal version. The order was systematically varied (6 combinations), as was the position of the questionnaires for emotional experiencing and dispositional empathy either at the beginning or end of the questionnaire (2 combinations), resulting in 12 different combinations for each of the three versions. Each of the resulting 36 different questionnaires was presented six times, resulting in 216 questionnaires.

Readers' emotional reactions. In addition to the items used in Study 1, one item was added to measure *plausibility* in a different wording ('plausible' in addition to 'comprehensible'), *interesting* (in addition to 'suspense'), and *well told*. *Trembling in sympathy with the narrator* was added to complement sympathetic fear. Several new items evaluated the character of the narrator. We added *I don't like the narrator* to complement *The narrator is likable* as well as the items *sincere*, *untrustworthy*, *honest to self*, *overdoes his emotional reaction*, *shouldn't deny own feelings so strongly*, and *is mentally sane*, *It is his/her own fault*, and *He/she is not responsible for what happened*.

The open-ended questions were limited to an initial and concluding question "How do you feel now?", and immediately following each narrative the question "What would you like to tell the narrator?" Responses were coded by the same coder using the same manual as in Study 1.

Scales of Emotional Experiencing. We included only the two subscales of the SEE (Behr &

Becker, 2004) which had correlated most strongly with the dependent variables in Study 1, ‘Being flooded by emotions’ and ‘Imaginative symbolization’.

Dispositional Empathy. As a second measure of habitual emotional reactions we added a measure of dispositional empathy, as this is relevant for the emotional reaction to others’ situations, the German E-Scale (Leibetseder, Laireiter, & Köller, 2007).

Results

Data were analyzed following the same procedures as in Study 1, except that perspective representation was treated as between subjects-factor with a significance level of 5%. Neither age nor gender varied significantly with perspective representation.

Manipulation Check and Construction of Dependent Variables

We checked the rated severity of narrated events in an ANOVA with gender as between-factor and expected severity as within-factor ($N = 216$). The planned linear contrast was significant, $F(1, 212) = 182.80, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .46$ (loss of brother: $M = 4.83, SD = .40$, grandmother: $M = 4.10, SD = .84$, and dog: $M = 3.73, SD = .87$), and again women judged stories to be more severe than men, $F(1,212) = 7.10, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. Again we tested whether the instructions asking for overall emotions to the story, sympathetic emotions, and interactional emotions made a difference, using average negative responses in a repeated multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). Instruction again made a significant difference, $F(2,848) = 149.88, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .41$.

Similar overall correlational patterns showed as in Study 1, and we again used maximization of internal consistency to create dependent variables, including some of the additional variables. For overall emotional reactions to the story we again formed one variable for sad and anxious reactions ($\alpha = .72$). We averaged two variables each for suspense ($\alpha = .73$), plausibility ($\alpha = .72$),

and used the single item quality of narrative, which correlated equally with suspense and plausibility. For sympathetic emotions, we averaged the two items each for sad and anxious emotions and one for compassion ($\alpha = .89$). Exploration of the interactional emotions and impressions formed of the narrator in exploratory factor analyses using the Scree-test resulted in three factors. The first factor corresponded to ‘Dislike of and anger at narrator’ in study 1, with dislike, likeability (negative), and anger as well as ‘his/her own fault’ and ‘reacts too strongly’ (negative), and was termed ‘Blameworthiness’. The second factor with ‘mentally sane’ (negative), ‘sincere’ (negative), ‘honest to self’ (negative), and ‘too little emotional reaction’, was termed ‘Insincerity’, while the third factor carried anxious and sad feelings directed at the narrator. We constructed three variables by averaging each set of items ($\alpha = .71, .67, \text{ and } .56$ respectively). For reasons of comparability with Study 1, we also again constructed the variable ‘anger and dislike versus narrator’ ($\alpha = .55$).

Initial emotional state and habitual ways of dealing with emotion showed similar correlations with dependent variables as in Study 1. Empathy correlated highly with sympathetic emotions and also the sad and anxious overall reactions to the story. We therefore added empathy as an additional covariate. Women had significantly higher values in emotional flooding and in dispositional empathy ($p < .001$), but not in imaginative symbolization.

Effects of Severity and Perspective Representation

We again calculated four ANOVAS with initial negative emotional state, dispositional empathy, habitual emotional flooding, and imaginative symbolization as covariates, and with gender and perspective representation as between subjects-factors and severity of event as within subjects-factor ($2 \times 3 \times 3$). Although the three stories differed in rated severity in the expected direction ($M = 3.12, SD = 1.04; M = 2.55, SD = 1.10; \text{ and } M = 2.34, SD = .96$, for the brother,

grandmother, and dog stories), the effect of severity on overall emotional reaction to the story was qualified by an interaction with perspective representation (see Table 4). Emotional reaction was highest and differed between all three stories only in the dramatic version, while in the elaborated and impersonal versions the grandmother and dog stories did not differ. However when the ANOVA was rerun without the covariates, severity had a significant main effect, $F(2,424) = 29.99, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .12$. The most influential covariate, empathy, predicted stronger reactions to the more severe stories, with $r = .43, .32, \text{ and } .30$ for the three stories respectively. Similar differential patterns of correlations with empathy showed for sympathetic reactions ($r = .54, .44, \text{ and } .40$) and judgments of suspense ($r = .25, .23, \text{ and } .11$). For both of these dependent variables, leaving the covariates out of the analyses produced significant effects of severity similar to those found in Study 1, confirming the first hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2 regarded effects of perspective representation. Sympathetic emotions differed by perspective representation in the expected direction, the impersonal version again eliciting less sympathetic emotions than the dramatic version (planned contrast, $p < .05$), which did not differ from the elaborated version. The reverse pattern was again found for the original variable used in Study 1, anger at and dislike of the narrator, with a significant main effect of perspective representation, $F(2,208) = 3.59, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .03$, and a significant planned contrast between the dramatic and impersonal version ($p < .05$). The two new variables for evaluations of the narrator, ‘blameworthiness’ and ‘insincerity’, were both strongly affected by perspective representation. Blameworthiness peaked in the impersonal version and was lowest in the dramatic version (planned contrast between the two $p < .001$). Insincerity showed a significant interaction between severity and perspective representation, with insincerity again peaking in the impersonal version and being lowest in the dramatic version in the brother and grandmother

story, while in the least severe dog story insincerity decreased linearly with perspective representation (planned contrast impersonal versus dramatic version, $p < .001$). Again, plausibility failed to vary by perspective representation (see Table 4 and Figure 2). Also, sad and anxious interactional emotions again showed no effect of perspective representation. The only significant effect on these was by dispositional empathy, $F(1,208) = 10.33$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$.

Perspective representation also had a significant main effect on critical versus sympathetic responses to the open-ended question what one would like to tell the narrator, $F(2,208) = 10.54$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .09$, as did gender, $F(1,208) = 4.99$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$, empathy, $F(1,208) = 12.35$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .06$, and emotional flooding, $F(1,208) = 4.62$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. The dramatic version aroused the most sympathetic reactions and the impersonal version the most critical ones (planned contrast $p < .001$) with women again reacting more sympathetically. Both empathy and emotional flooding correlated positively with sympathetic reactions. Representation of perspectives again had a significant effect on comments that the narrator reacted with too little versus too much emotion, $F(2,208) = 6.82$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .06$. The dramatic and elaborated versions had comparable frequencies of critical remarks mostly on exaggerated emotions, while the impersonal version more often had critical marks about missing emotions (planned contrast dramatic versus impersonal version $p < .001$). Finally perspectives representation had a linear effect on an increase of sympathetic responses to the concluding question ‘How do you feel now’ when compared to the same initial question, using the Jonckheere-Terpstra test, with $J = 6742$, $z = -2.10$, $p < .05$, $r^2 = .02$.

Discussion

The studies confirm that severity of an event is the single most important factor for

determining the size an emotional reaction (Frijda, 2007), even though this effect was attenuated in Study 2 by the differential effect of dispositional empathy. This parallels the findings of Polya, Laszlo and Forgas (2005) that the content of a story has a stronger effect than narrative perspectives do. Besides event severity, initial emotional state, or mood, and dispositional ways of handling emotions and of empathizing with others influenced both the strength and quality of narrative emotions. As was to be expected, dispositional empathy correlated with sympathetic emotions, but also with the overall emotional reaction to the stories.

The central characteristic of interest, perspective representation in narratives, also influenced readers' emotional reactions. Sympathetic emotions were aroused least by the impersonal version devoid of perspectives, with a trend for the dramatic version to arouse the most sympathetic emotions. The central hypothesis that impersonal narratives elicit interactional emotions directed against the narrator was confirmed for anger about and dislike of the narrator, but not for sadness about or anxiety regarding the narrator. Expanding on this result, Study 2 showed that the negative evaluation of the narrator was related to the impression that he or she was not reacting with the adequate emotions to the event, but hid them from self and others, which was taken as a sign of a lack of mental sanity. Both *feeling rules* (Hochschild, 1983) regarding appropriate emotional experience and *display rules* (Ekman, 2003) regarding the appropriate expression of emotions guide judgments of appropriateness, although the participants' comments mainly aimed at the emotional experience and not its expression. The results suggest that if evaluative perspectives are excluded from a narrative, the reader does not only fill in the missing emotion, sadness in our case, but also reacts with blaming the narrator for violating emotion rules. This suggests that the exclusion of evaluative perspectives influences the likeability of the narrator, which in turn influences narrative emotions. Thus our studies suggest that the adequacy of

emotional reactions by the narrator, as expressed by evaluating the story from subjective perspectives, is an independent factor in determining narrative emotions, in addition to event severity, dispositions, mood, and protagonist likeability.

Narratives were least plausible in the impersonal version, but the elaborated version was no more plausible than the dramatic version. This finding is surprising as subjective perspectives serve to evaluate and motivate actions. Possibly the sympathetic emotions elicited by the dramatic version render the narrator likeable and therefore credible, overruling more cognitive, information-based aspects of plausibility which are served better by the elaborated version. However, it remains unclear why Polya and colleagues (2005) found more positive evaluations of the narrator for elaborated versus dramatic versions whereas we found hardly any differences between the two versions. Maybe it is something about the specific stories used here, such as that loss stories do not leave enough room for actions which need to be motivated.

Limitations and Future Studies

Other sad stories than those of loss and stories eliciting other emotions such as danger and humiliation need to be studied to test the generalizability of the findings across different emotions. Also, different combinations of linguistic and narrative devices for representing perspectives should be tested. An additional factor, the likeability of the protagonist, should also be manipulated, as a decrease in perspective representation might have the strongest effects in combination with an unattractive or morally bad protagonist. On the side of reader reactions, judgments on the quality and quantity of the emotions the narrator is and should be experiencing should be systematically assessed.

What may be special about stories of loss is that they also require an adequate emotion for moral reasons of respecting the person who has died. But reacting with anger to humiliation may

also be morally required in the sense of fulfilling an obligation towards the self. As we are interested in generalizing the findings to listening to oral narratives, both in everyday and in clinical settings, stories with different degrees of perspective representation will need to be read aloud and listened to. This would open the possibility of using more direct measures of emotions such as physiological or facial reactions which may be more subtle and revealing than self-report measures and therefore facilitate finding effects of perspective representation.

Implications

We shall point out three implications of the finding that in sad stories the representation of perspectives influences the sympathetic versus interactive emotional and narrator –evaluative response of the reader. First, narrating negative personal experiences in such a way that personal perspectives, emotions and thoughts are included makes it easier for readers and probably also listeners to sympathize with the narrator. When experiencing negative events, there is a strong tendency to share them with others (Christophe & Rimé, 1997). If narrators are able to go beyond mere facts by sharing their points of view with the listener, they are more likely to arouse sympathy and understanding. If, on the other hand, they exclude the meaning of the experience for themselves and for others from the narrative, they are more likely to arouse negative reactions directed against them. Thus the way negative autobiographical memories are told has effects on the immediate social response. This emotional reaction of the reader or listener may mediate the social effects of sharing negative emotions which are known from studies on emotional self-disclosure (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998) and on sharing of negative emotions (Graham, Huang, Clark, & Helgeson, in press) on the provision of support and the development and deepening of close relationships. If, as we have hypothesized (Habermas, 2006), the exclusion of perspectives is a consequence of more severe defense mechanisms, the

effects are likely to create and perpetuate interpersonal problems.

Second, the exclusion of subjective perspectives from narratives may be one of the mechanisms by which the subtle emotional communication works, which psychoanalysis has termed countertransference. If an individual defends against the perception of emotions or thoughts, for example simply by excluding them from his or her narrative, this may elicit similar or reciprocal emotions in the other which are not sympathetic, but either apparently unrelated to the narrator or directed towards him or her (Racker, 1968). This study is a first attempt to study systematically outside a clinical situation which mechanisms of emotional communication may be at work in countertransference.

Finally, theories of emotion usually include narratives as typical elicitors of emotions, but these are rarely studied. The present study shows that, although complex, narratives may still be studied systematically by identifying important aspects of narratives and manipulating or controlling them. Research into the emotional effects of narratives is of relevance for the empirical study of reading, for the social psychology of sharing problematic experiences, and for the clinical psychology of autobiographical narratives in professional helping relationships.

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Table 1

*Linguistic Characteristics of the Three Degrees of Perspective Representation in Narratives**(Mean Percent of Propositions, SD in Brackets when different from 0)*

	Degree of representation of perspectives		
	elaborative	dramatic	impersonal
Point of view	omniscient	subjective	subj.-behavioral
Mental expressions	35.0	20.0	10.0
Cognitive	14.4 (2.4)	7.5 (2.2)	2.5 (2.8)
Perceptual	13.3 (4.3)	9.7 (3.2)	5.8 (3.1)
Present	15.3 (4.2)	3.9 (1.8)	2.8 (2.0)
Past	19.7 (4.2)	15.8 (1.8)	3.9 (1.3)
Atemporal	0	0	3.3 (1.25)
Comparisons then-today	10.0	0	5.0
Dramatic speech: Direct speech	0	20.0	10.0
Historic present	0	40.0	20.0
Shift of origo to past	0	20.0	10.0
Clauses: Narrative clauses	40.0	62.5	35.0
Chronicles	35.0	32.5	47.5
Hypothetical event	5.0	0	0
Descriptions	7.5	2.5	5.0
Arguments	12.5	2.5	12.5
Subject: Impersonal	0	0	15.0
No subject	10.0	15.0	25.0

Table 2

Correlations of Covariates and Readers' Reactions: Study 1 (1st Row) and Study 2 (2nd Row)

	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Initial sad + anx. state	.18	.16	.17	.06	---	---	-.01	-.07	---
	.15	.10	.04	.09	.07	.14	-.06	-.06	.01
2. Emotional flooding (SEE-Scale)	.22	.15	.17	.01	---	---	.01	.06	---
	.16	.20	.06	-.08	-.07	.17	.14	.05	.12
3. Imaginative symbolization (SEE-Scale)	.24	.22	.13	-.08	---	---	.13	.20	---
	.16	.16	.18	.06	.01	.01	.00	.18	.11
4. Dispositional Empathy	.43	.58	.29	-.18	-.20	.09	.09	.24	.19
5. Sad + anx. reaction to story		.72	.59	-.22	---	---	.34	.27	---
		.80	.68	-.20	-.12	-.16	.10	.19	.19
6. Sympathetic emotions			.51	-.44	---	---	.47	.30	---
			.54	-.37	-.27	-.35	.22	.28	.27
7. Sad + anxious vs. narrator				-.04	---	---	.21	.21	---
				.03	.09	.00	.00	.19	.12
8. Dislike + anger vs. narrator					---	---	-.44	-.16	---
					(.83)	.52	-.34	-.08	-.38
9. Blameworthiness						.53	-.29	.02	-.35
10. Insincerity							-.42	-.08	-.36
11. Plausibility								.20	---
								.19	.41
12. Suspense									.45
13. Good story									

Note. Study 1/Study 2: $r > .15/.13$, $p < .05$; $r > .20/.17$, $p < .01$; $r > .25/.22$, $p < .001$.

Table 3

Study 1: Analyses of Variance for Emotional Reaction to Story, Sympathetic Emotions, Dislike of Narrator, and Plausibility

Source	df	Emotional reaction to story		Sympathetic emotions		Dislike + anger vs narrator		Plausibility	
		F	η^2	F	η^2	F	η^2	F	η^2
Corrected model	12	8.35***	.18	6.47***	.14	5.23***	.12	4.27***	.10
Prior sad-anx. emotions	1	7.31**	.02	6.86**	.01	2.14	.01	.14	.00
Emotional flooding	1	8.60**	.02	.96	.00	.54	.00	.02	.00
Imaginative symbolization	1	20.15***	.04	15.51***	.03	3.50	.01	10.27**	.02
Gender (G)	1	1.30	.00	9.96**	.02	4.74*	.01	2.99	.01
Perspective (P)	2	.98	.00	6.92**	.03	14.48***	.06	3.26*	.01
Severity of event (S)	2	18.35***	.07	5.93**	.02	10.19***	.04	15.19***	.06
P x S	4	.59	.01	1.51	.01	0.51	.00	0.34	.00
error		149		149		149		149	

Note. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 4

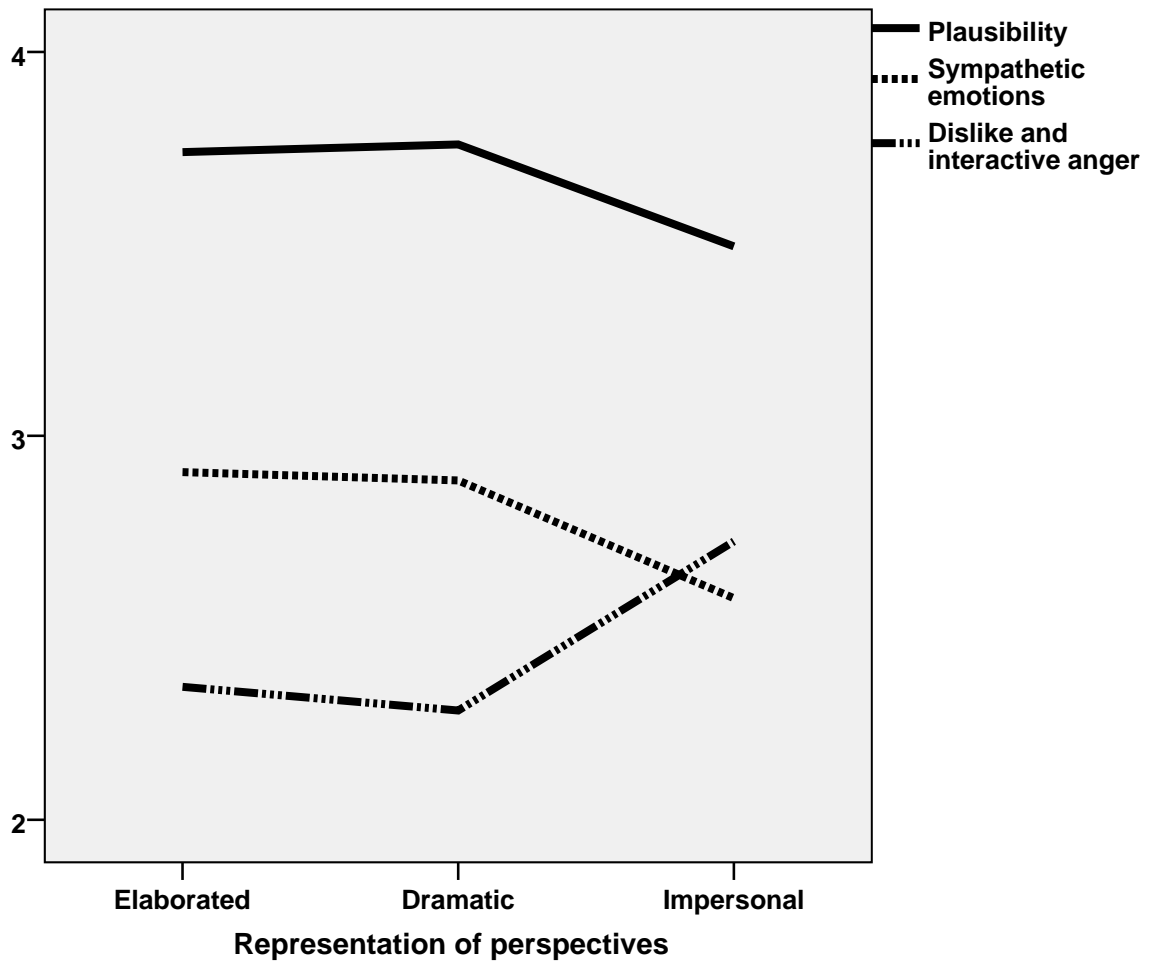
Study 2: Analyses of Variance for Emotional Reaction to Story, Sympathetic Emotions, Blameworthiness and Insincerity of Narrator, and Plausibility

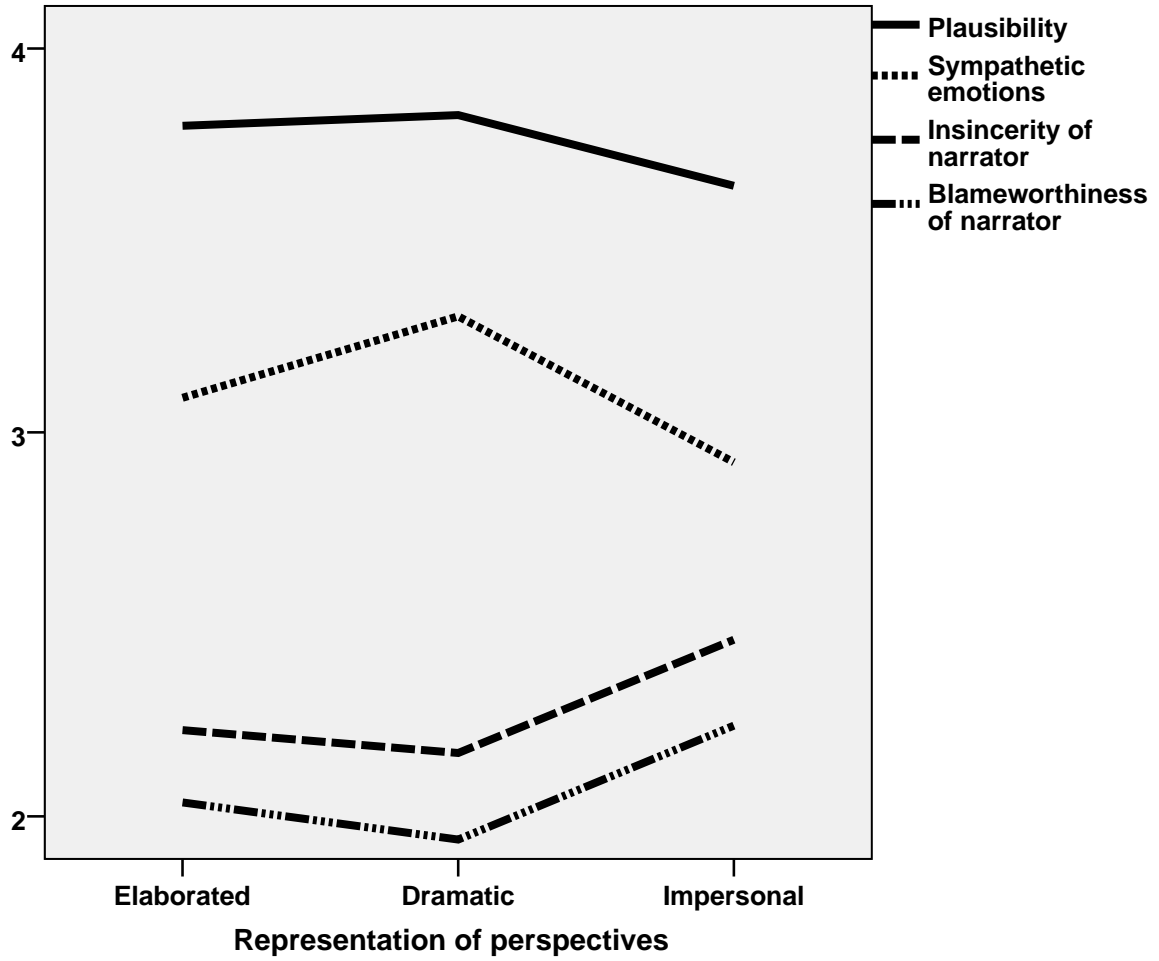
Source	df	Emotional reaction to story		Sympathetic emotions		Blameworthiness of narrator		Insincerity of narrator		Plausibility	
		F	η^2	F	η^2	F	η^2	F	η^2	F	η^2
Between subjects:											
Prior sad-anx. emotions	1	7.06**	.03	5.07*	.02	1.07	.01	5.71*	.03	2.36	.01
Emotional flooding	1	0.01	.00	1.29	.01	.49	.00	2.06	.01	7.91**	.04
Imaginative symbolization	1	0.04	.00	.83	.00	1.94	.01	.29	.00	.10	.00
Empathy	1	27.31***	.12	73.82***	.26	.27	.00	2.99	.01	.26	.00
Gender (G)	1	7.72**	.04	2.92	.01	5.83*	.03	1.25	.01	.01	.00
Perspective (P)	2	1.49	.01	3.04*	.03	10.48***	.09	9.48***	.08	2.56	.02
Error	206										
Within subjects:											
Severity of event (S)	2	.86	.00	.30	.00	.11	.01	1.32	.01	2.34	.01
S x P	4	3.05*	.03	1.38	.01	1.48	.01	3.44**	.03	1.36	.01
Error	416										

Note. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Figure 1. Mean plausibility, sympathetic emotions, and dislike and interactional anger by degree of perspective representation (Study 1)

Figure 2. Mean plausibility, sympathetic emotions, impressions of insincerity of narrator and narrator blameworthiness by degree of perspective representation (Study 2)





Three Sad Stories in Three Versions of Perspective Representation, Translation from German Original

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The first number indicates the story or gravity, the second number the version (degree of the presentation of perspective).

1.1 Most severe (death of brother), elaborate version

- 1) I have I had three brothers, a younger one and two older ones.
- 2) The second eldest spent half the summer holidays just sitting in front of the PC.
- 3) One afternoon a mate of his then rang up
- 4) and asked
- 5) if he wanted to go to the lake with him.
- 6) My brother did not.
- 7) My mother told him
- 8) it was about time he did something else
- 9) other than always just sitting in front of the PC.
- 10) So he called his mate back
- 11) and agreed to go.
- 12) His mate 'd only just got his driving licence,
- 13) but he promised my mother
- 14) to drive slow and "proper".
- 15) In the evening my mother and me heard the sirens of the ambulance.
- 16) As usual I didn't pay much attention,
- 17) there 're always ambulances driving around,
- 18) but my mother at once became nervous
- 19) because my brother wasn't home yet.
- 20) Three quarters of an hour later there were the police at our front door
- 21) and they informed us
- 22) that my brother was dead
- 23) because the driver 'd driven too fast.
- 24) My mother had a nervous breakdown.
- 25) Even today she reproaches herself
- 26) for urging my brother to go along.
- 27) I still ask myself
- 28) what would 've happened
- 29) if my brother 'd been driving.
- 30) At the time he was only eighteen.
- 31) In the meantime the visits to the cemetery still take place but only once a month.
- 32) I believe
- 33) it simply hurts my mother too much.
- 34) She still blames herself
- 35) although she knows
- 36) there's nothing she could 've done.
- 37) For me too the experience was real bad.
- 38) Didn't actually want to take my driving licence at all.
- 39) I find car driving awful.
- 40) Yeah, the loss of my brother was real terrible for my family.

1.2 Most severe (death of brother), dramatic version

- 1) That was in August 2001.
- 2) My second eldest brother spent half the holidays just sitting in front of the PC.
- 3) That afternoon a mate of his rang up
- 4) and asked
- 5) if he wanted to go to the lake with him.
- 6) My brother declines,
- 7) hangs up
- 8) and then sits down again in front of the computer.
- 9) My mother says to him:
- 10) "It's about time you did something else
- 11) other than always just sitting in front of the PC."
- 12) So he calls his mate back
- 13) and agrees to go.
- 14) His mate 'd only just got his driving licence,
- 15) before driving off he says:
- 16) "I'll drive slow and proper."
- 17) We waved
- 18) and watched them leave,
- 19) then we went back into the house.
- 20) I didn't even have a funny feeling,
- 21) actually it was a perfectly normal day.
- 22) When we – me and my mother – hear the sirens of the ambulance
- 23) it's already evening and my brother's still not back.
- 24) My mother looks over at the clock
- 25) and walks restlessly from left to right.
- 26) I say to her:
- 27) "Don't worry,
- 28) there 're always ambulances driving around."
- 29) Three quarters of an hour later there are the police
- 30) and they inform us
- 31) that my brother's dead.
- 32) My mother starts to tremble,
- 33) then at once she breaks into tears.
- 34) She had a nervous breakdown.
- 35) I had no idea
- 36) how I was supposed to react.
- 37) I was totally shocked.
- 38) I dunno
- 39) if I can reproach the driver for anything.
- 40) In any case that was a terrible experience.

1.3 Most severe (death of brother), impersonal version

- 1) That was in August 2001.
- 2) I have I had three brothers, a younger one and two older ones.
- 3) The second eldest spent half the holidays indoors at the computer
- 4) and that although it was fine weather.
- 5) That afternoon a mate of his rang up
- 6) and asked:
- 7) "D'you want to come to the lake with me?"
- 8) My brother declined
- 9) and sat down again in front of his computer.
- 10) My mother told him:
- 11) "It's about time you did something else."
- 12) So he then tells his mate he'll go.
- 13) His mate 'd only just got his driving licence,
- 14) but promises before their departure
- 15) to drive slow and "proper".
- 16) When you hear the sirens of the ambulance
- 17) it's already evening.
- 18) There 're always ambulances driving around,
- 19) no one thinks of anything like that.
- 20) My brother isn't home yet
- 21) and my mother keeps looking over at the clock
- 22) and makes you real nervous.
- 23) Then there are the police at our front door.
- 24) You know
- 25) how that sort of thing goes.
- 26) But you can't do anything about it any more.
- 27) His mate 'd driven too fast
- 28) and in a curve the car skidded off into a tree.
- 29) The driver survived, though badly injured.
- 30) My mother 's never driven a car since then.
- 31) Wouldn't actually 've even taken my driving licence
- 32) if they hadn't persuaded me.
- 33) Oh well, passed the test,
- 34) dunno
- 35) how I managed that,
- 36) even today still drive real shaky.
- 37) My father and my two brothers 've coped with it best I guess.
- 38) At least so it seems.
- 39) Anyway they don't talk about it.
- 40) Yeah, that's it.

2.1 Medium severe (death of grandmother), elaborate version

- 01) Well on May 12 1997 I had my last written A level.
- 02) We were all in real high spirits at school
- 03) because we'd got it all over with.
- 04) But when I came home at lunchtime
- 05) the phone rang.
- 06) It was my aunt,
- 07) her voice sounded so funny.
- 08) At the time my granny was in hospital
- 09) because she had a heart attack,
- 10) but the doctors said
- 11) she was already much better
- 12) and her condition was absolutely no cause for concern.
- 13) Oh well, she died in the morning.
- 14) She was only 64 years old
- 15) and lived near us.
- 16) I couldn't help thinking the whole time about
- 17) how to tell my mother.
- 18) Then half an hour later she came home from work
- 19) and I told her
- 20) that her mum had died.
- 21) Was thinking the whole time
- 22) how it would be
- 23) when one day my mother isn't there any more.
- 24) That was terrible.
- 25) And then the funeral: a minister gave a little sermon
- 26) – the memory of it is still real bad –
- 27) my little cousin wept beyond words,
- 28) then one by one we went over to the coffin
- 29) and could say goodbye.
- 30) I laid a flower in the coffin
- 31) and then prayed.
- 32) Really start bawling, I didn't want that
- 33) because otherwise it'd 've been even worse.
- 34) At suppressing things I'm now an expert.
- 35) In the meantime I like thinking back to my granny.
- 36) Today I believe
- 37) she must 've been somehow released
- 38) as she suffered badly from tinnitus.
- 39) But that really was a hard time
- 40) because I was like paralysed.

2.2 Medium severe (death of grandmother), dramatic version

- 01) Well, took my A levels in 1997.
- 02) May 12 was my last written exam
- 03) and I was in real high spirits at school,
- 04) but when I came home at lunchtime
- 05) the phone rings.
- 06) I picked up the receiver,
- 07) It was my aunt,
- 08) her voice sounded funny.
- 09) At the time my granny was in hospital
- 10) because she had a heart attack,
- 11) but the doctors 'd said:
- 12) "She's already much better,
- 13) her condition is no cause for concern."
- 14) And my aunt is just saying:
- 15) "She died this morning."
- 16) I hang up,
- 17) go in my room
- 18) and creep into my bed.
- 19) First I cry,
- 20) then I'm like in a state of shock.
- 21) I'm thinking the whole time about
- 22) how to tell my mother.
- 23) Half an hour later she comes home from work
- 24) and at once I tell her:
- 25) "Granny's dead.
- 26) I'm so sorry."
- 27) And then the funeral: up front a minister gives a short sermon,
- 28) then one by one we go forward to the coffin
- 29) and there say goodbye.
- 30) I stand with my mother before it,
- 31) see the coffin standing there
- 32) and can't grasp
- 33) that my granny's supposed to be lying inside.
- 34) As for the loss I've simply suppressed it.
- 35) At suppressing things I'm an expert.
- 36) Only later could I talk quite normal about
- 37) what she was like
- 38) or what we experienced
- 39) and that I like thinking back to her.
- 40) But that really was a hard time.

2.3 Medium severe (death of grandmother), impersonal version

- 01) That was May 12 1997,
- 02) have just taken my A levels.
- 03) May 12 was my last written exam.
- 04) Then you're in real high spirits at school
- 05) because you've got it all over with.
- 06) But when I come home that day
- 07) the phone rings.
- 08) It's my aunt,
- 09) her voice sounds so funny.
- 10) At the time my granny was in hospital
- 11) because of a "small" heart attack,
- 12) but actually she was over it.
- 13) They'd said:
- 14) "Her condition is absolutely no cause for concern."
- 15) Oh well, she died that morning.
- 16) Went pretty quick it seems.
- 17) She was only 64 years old.
- 18) Yeah, you've no idea at all
- 19) how you're supposed to react.
- 20) My mother's still at work
- 21) and only comes home half an hour later.
- 22) Was then my job like
- 23) to tell her.
- 24) So I'm thinking the whole time
- 25) how best you can do that sort of thing
- 26) and then tell her:
- 27) "Granny's dead."
- 28) And then the funeral: one day there was first that saying goodbye
- 29) where the coffin was laid out.
- 30) A minister gave a little sermon,
- 31) then one by one we went forward to the coffin
- 32) in order to say goodbye.
- 33) Stood with my mother before it,
- 34) but didn't really say goodbye
- 35) because I couldn't cry proper,
- 36) wasn't possible somehow.
- 37) Am now an expert at suppressing things.
- 38) Well, so far it's worked quite well.
- 39) In any case everybody celebrated their A levels
- 40) and I just couldn't.

3.1 Least severe (death of dog), elaborate version

- 01) It was, it isn't about a human being like but about my former dog.
- 02) As with time he keeled over more and more often
- 03) at some point my parents said
- 04) that healthwise he was no longer acceptable
- 05) and therefore must be put to sleep.
- 06) At the time the dog was 13 years old
- 07) and for me he was sort of a little brother like.
- 08) On the day we were er digging the grave
- 09) he was running around between our legs,
- 10) rooted around in the earth
- 11) and wanted to help us somehow with the digging.
- 12) Then that hit us all real badly at the time.
- 13) Er, yeah, sure we gave him the sleeping pill too late.
- 14) When the vet came
- 15) he crawled under my bed
- 16) and I could really see the fear in the dog.
- 17) That was terrible.
- 18) But I wasn't allowed to help him,
- 19) much as I'd 've liked to.
- 20) Till the second attempt by the vet then came
- 21) I was hoping all the time
- 22) that then perhaps he wouldn't die today after all.
- 23) And I was right there then,
- 24) I sat with him
- 25) and then I er saw
- 26) how he was sleeping peacefully
- 27) and how then the injection gradually...
- 28) and how he breathed his last.
- 29) And oh well, his death struggle took a pretty long time.
- 30) Yeah for me it's still real bad.
- 31) Even today I still reproach myself for that.
- 32) Well really digested it, that I still haven't even done today
- 33) because I go over that day again and again.
- 34) Er I still remember sort of my little brother. Hm yeah quite stereotype bittersweet.
- 35) On the one hand I remember all the lovely and funny things,
- 36) or I think to myself:
- 37) Oh, now he'd be here
- 38) and would do this and that and –
- 39) on the other hand it's also again, oh well feelings of guilt and sad like.
- 40) That's somehow strange.

3.2 Least severe (death of dog), dramatic version

- 01) It was, it isn't about a human being like but about my former dog.
- 02) At some point my parents then said
- 03) that he must be put to sleep.
- 04) Well everything wasn't half as bad till the day itself,
- 05) then we were digging er the grave right there in our garden,
- 06) he's running around between our legs
- 07) and roots around in the earth.
- 08) Er yeah, and sure we gave him the sleeping pill too late.
- 09) And then the vet came round,
- 10) the dog barks at him
- 11) and then hides behind the sofa.
- 12) I see the fear in his eyes
- 13) and at once think:
- 14) "He knows
- 15) there's something wrong
- 16) and probably he knows
- 17) that he must die."
- 18) But we weren't allowed to help him.
- 19) Till the second attempt by the vet then came
- 20) I was of course hoping the whole time
- 21) that then perhaps he wouldn't die today after all.
- 22) And then my father calls:
- 23) "Come down,
- 24) now it's time."
- 25) And er I still see
- 26) how he's sleeping peacefully
- 27) and how then the injection gradually...
- 28) I sit next to him
- 29) and so kneel there
- 30) and am right there
- 31) when he breathes his last,
- 32) but also notice at once
- 33) that he's resisting,
- 34) that he's fighting against it.
- 35) Yeah for me it was
- 36) as if I'd helped kill my little brother.
- 37) Yeah well bury him, that I then did not do,
- 38) but I still felt
- 39) how his skin became colder.
- 40) Well er yeah, that was not a lovely experience like.

3.3 Least severe (death of dog), impersonal version

- 01) It was, it isn't about a human being like but about my former dog.
- 02) That was a bull terrier.
- 03) At some point they then said:
- 04) "He must be put to sleep."
- 05) Well, everything wasn't half as bad till the day itself,
- 06) then we 're digging er the grave right there in our garden.
- 07) At this moment he's still alive
- 08) and running around between our legs.
- 09) Er yeah, and sure he got the sleeping pill too late,
- 10) so then he was still in top form,
- 11) so wasn't at all tired or anything
- 12) when then the vet came.
- 13) And the whole thing dragged on for a very very long time like
- 14) till the second attempt by the vet came.
- 15) And then they say:
- 16) "Now it's time."
- 17) So I'm right there then
- 18) when he gets the injection
- 19) – there was no other way,
- 20) couldn't do anything –
- 21) and er you still see
- 22) how he's sleeping peacefully
- 23) and how then the injection gradually...
- 24) Then sat over it over him
- 25) and so kneeled beside him
- 26) and was also right there then
- 27) when he breathed his last.
- 28) And oh well, his death struggle took quite a long time after all,
- 29) but you also noticed
- 30) that he's resisting
- 31) and fighting against it.
- 32) Yeah, somehow it's still
- 33) as if you'd helped kill your little brother.
- 34) Yeah well bury him 's something I then did not do.
- 35) But you still like feel
- 36) how the skin becomes colder
- 37) after he stops breathing.
- 38) And yeah, I still reproach myself even today.
- 39) But that's how it is.
- 40) Everybody must die someday.

Die erste Ziffer bezeichnet die Geschichte bzw. Schwere, die zweite Ziffer die Version (Grad der Perspektivenrepräsentation: 1- elaborierte Version, 2 – dramatische Version, 3 – unpersönliche Version)

1.1

- 1) Ich habe hatte drei Brüder, einen jüngeren und zwei ältere.
- 2) Der Zweitälteste saß schon die halben Sommerferien nur am PC.
- 3) An einem Nachmittag rief dann ein Kumpel von ihm an
- 4) und fragte,
- 5) ob er mit an den See kommen wolle.
- 6) Mein Bruder wollte nicht.
- 7) Meine Mutter sagte zu ihm,
- 8) er solle endlich mal was anderes machen,
- 9) als immer nur vor dem PC zu sitzen.
- 10) Also rief er nachträglich bei dem Kumpel an
- 11) und sagte zu.
- 12) Der Kumpel hatte erst kurz den Führerschein,
- 13) aber er versprach meiner Mutter
- 14) langsam und „ordentlich“ zu fahren.
- 15) Am Abend hörten meine Mutter und ich die Sirenen vom Krankenwagen.
- 16) Ich dachte mir wie immer nichts dabei,
- 17) es fahren ja ständig Krankenwagen herum,
- 18) doch meine Mutter wurde sofort nervös,
- 19) weil mein Bruder noch nicht daheim war.
- 20) Eine Dreiviertelstunde später stand die Polizei vor unserer Haustür
- 21) und teilte uns mit,
- 22) dass mein Bruder tot sei,
- 23) weil der Fahrer zu schnell gefahren war.
- 24) Meine Mutter bekam einen Nervenzusammenbruch.
- 25) Sie macht sich bis heute Vorwürfe,
- 26) weil sie meinen Bruder zum Mitfahren gedrängt hatte.
- 27) Ich frag mich immer noch,
- 28) was gewesen wäre,
- 29) wenn mein Bruder gefahren wäre.
- 30) Er war damals erst achtzehn.
- 31) Mittlerweile finden die Besuche auf dem Friedhof nur noch einmal im Monat statt.
- 32) Ich glaube,
- 33) dass es meiner Mutter einfach zu sehr weh tut.
- 34) Sie gibt sich immer noch die Schuld,
- 35) obwohl sie weiß,
- 36) dass sie nichts dafür kann.
- 37) Für mich war das Erlebnis auch total schlimm.
- 38) Wollte meinen Führerschein eigentlich gar nicht erst machen.
- 39) Ich finde Autofahren schrecklich.
- 40) Ja, der Verlust meines Bruders war für meine Familie wirklich furchtbar.

1.2

- 1) Das war im August 2001.
- 2) Mein zweitältester Bruder saß schon die halben Ferien nur am PC.
- 3) An dem Nachmittag rief ein Kumpel von ihm an
- 4) und fragte,
- 5) ob er mit an den See kommen wolle.
- 6) Mein Bruder sagt ab,
- 7) legt auf
- 8) und setzt sich dann wieder an den Computer.
- 9) Meine Mutter sagt zu ihm:
- 10) „Mach doch endlich mal was anderes,
- 11) als immer nur vor dem PC zu sitzen.“
- 12) Also ruft er nachträglich bei dem Kumpel an
- 13) und sagt zu.
- 14) Der Kumpel hatte erst kurz den Führerschein,
- 15) vor dem Wegfahren sagt er noch:
- 16) „Ich werd langsam und ordentlich fahren.“
- 17) Wir haben gewunken
- 18) und ihnen hinterher geschaut,
- 19) dann gingen wir wieder rein ins Haus.
- 20) Ich hatte nicht mal ein komisches Gefühl,
- 21) eigentlich war es ein ganz normaler Tag.
- 22) Als wir - ich und meine Mutter - die Sirenen vom Krankenwagen hören,
- 23) ist es bereits Abend und mein Bruder immer noch nicht da.
- 24) Meine Mutter schaut rüber zur Uhr
- 25) und läuft unruhig von links nach rechts.
- 26) Ich sag noch zu ihr:
- 27) „Mach Dir keine Sorgen,
- 28) es fahren doch ständig Krankenwagen herum.“
- 29) Eine Dreiviertelstunde später steht die Polizei vor uns
- 30) und sie teilt uns mit,
- 31) dass mein Bruder tot sei.
- 32) Meine Mutter fängt an zu zittern,
- 33) dann bricht sie sofort in Tränen aus.
- 34) Sie hatte einen Nervenzusammenbruch.
- 35) Ich wusste gar nicht,
- 36) wie ich reagieren sollte.
- 37) Ich war total geschockt.
- 38) Ich weiß nicht,
- 39) ob ich dem Fahrer Vorwürfe machen kann.
- 40) Auf jeden Fall war das ein furchtbares Erlebnis.

1.3

- 1) Das war im August 2001.
- 2) Ich habe hatte drei Brüder, einen jüngeren und zwei ältere.
- 3) Der zweitälteste saß schon die halben Ferien nur drinnen am PC
- 4) und das, obwohl gutes Wetter war.
- 5) An dem Nachmittag rief dann ein Kumpel von ihm an
- 6) und fragte:
- 7) „Willst Du mit an den See kommen?“
- 8) Mein Bruder sagte ab
- 9) und setzte sich wieder vor seinen PC.
- 10) Meine Mutter sagte zu ihm:
- 11) „Mach doch endlich mal was anderes.“
- 12) Also sagt er nachträglich bei dem Kumpel zu.
- 13) Der hatte erst kurz den Führerschein,
- 14) verspricht vor dem Losfahren aber noch,
- 15) langsam und „ordentlich“ zu fahren.
- 16) Als man die Sirenen vom Krankenwagen hört,
- 17) ist es bereits Abend.
- 18) Fahren ja ständig Krankenwagen herum,
- 19) da denkt ja keiner an so was.
- 20) Mein Bruder ist noch nicht daheim
- 21) und meine Mutter schaut dauernd rüber zur Uhr
- 22) und macht einen ganz nervös.
- 23) Dann steht die Polizei vor unserer Haustür.
- 24) Weiß man ja,
- 25) wie so was abläuft.
- 26) Aber ändern kann man eh nichts mehr.
- 27) Der Kumpel war zu schnell gefahren
- 28) und das Auto schleuderte in einer Kurve raus gegen einen Baum.
- 29) Der Fahrer hat überlebt, allerdings schwer verletzt.
- 30) Meine Mutter fährt seitdem kein Auto mehr.
- 31) Hätte meinen Führerschein eigentlich gar nicht erst gemacht,
- 32) wenn man mich nicht überredet hätte.
- 33) Na ja, hab die Prüfung geschafft,
- 34) weiß nicht,
- 35) wie ich das hingekriegt hab,
- 36) fahre auch heute noch total unsicher.
- 37) Mein Vater und meine beiden Brüder haben es wohl am besten verkraftet.
- 38) Scheint zumindest so.
- 39) Jedenfalls reden sie nicht drüber.
- 40) Ja, das war's.

2.1

- 1) Also am 12. Mai 1997 hatte ich meine letzte schriftliche Abi-Prüfung.
- 2) Wir waren alle total gut drauf in der Schule,
- 3) weil wir alles hinter uns hatten.
- 4) Aber als ich mittags nach Hause kam,
- 5) klingelte das Telefon.
- 6) Meine Tante war dran,
- 7) ihre Stimme klang schon so komisch.
- 8) Meine Oma lag damals im Krankenhaus,
- 9) weil sie einen Herzinfarkt hatte,
- 10) aber die Ärzte meinten,
- 11) dass es ihr schon viel besser gehe
- 12) und ihr Zustand absolut unbedenklich sei.
- 13) Na ja, sie ist morgens gestorben.
- 14) Sie war erst 64 Jahre alt
- 15) und hat bei uns in der Nähe gewohnt.
- 16) Ich musste die ganze Zeit daran denken,
- 17) wie ich es meiner Mutter sagen soll.
- 18) Sie kam dann eine halbe Stunde später von der Arbeit nach Hause
- 19) und ich sagte ihr,
- 20) dass ihre Mama gestorben sei.
- 21) Habe die ganze Zeit daran gedacht,
- 22) wie es wäre,
- 23) wenn meine Mutter mal nicht mehr da ist.
- 24) Das war schrecklich.
- 25) Dann noch die Beerdigung: Ein Pfarrer hat eine kleine Predigt gehalten
- 26) - die Erinnerung daran ist immer noch schlimm -
- 27) mein kleiner Cousin hat so unsagbar geweint,
- 28) dann sind wir einzeln zum Sarg
- 29) und durften uns verabschieden.
- 30) Ich habe eine Blume in den Sarg gelegt
- 31) und dann gebetet.
- 32) Richtig losheulen wollte ich nicht,
- 33) weil es sonst noch schlimmer gewesen wäre.
- 34) Im Verdrängen bin ich seitdem Meister.
- 35) Mittlerweile denke ich gerne an meine Oma zurück.
- 36) Heute glaube ich,
- 37) sie wäre irgendwie auch erlöst worden,
- 38) da sie stark unter Tinnitus gelitten hat.
- 39) Aber das war wirklich eine schwere Zeit,
- 40) weil ich wie gelähmt war.

2.2

- 1) Also, hab mein Abitur 1997 gemacht.
- 2) Am 12. Mai war meine letzte schriftliche Prüfung
- 3) und ich war total gut drauf in der Schule,
- 4) aber als ich mittags nach Hause kam,
- 5) klingelt das Telefon.
- 6) Ich hab den Hörer abgenommen,
- 7) meine Tante war dran,
- 8) ihre Stimme klang schon so komisch.
- 9) Meine Oma lag damals im Krankenhaus,
- 10) weil sie einen Herzinfarkt hatte,
- 11) aber die Ärzte hatten gesagt:
- 12) „Es geht ihr schon viel besser,
- 13) ihr Zustand ist absolut unbedenklich.“
- 14) Und meine Tante sagt gerade:
- 15) „Sie ist heute Morgen gestorben.“
- 16) Ich leg auf,
- 17) gehe in mein Zimmer
- 18) und krieche in mein Bett.
- 19) Erst weine ich,
- 20) dann bin ich wie im Schockzustand.
- 21) Ich denke die ganze Zeit daran,
- 22) wie ich es meiner Mutter sagen soll.
- 23) Sie kommt eine halbe Stunde später von der Arbeit nach Hause
- 24) und ich sag gleich zu ihr:
- 25) „Oma ist tot.
- 26) Es tut mir so leid.“
- 27) Dann noch die Beerdigung: Ein Pfarrer hält vorne eine kleine Predigt,
- 28) dann gehen wir einzeln vor zum Sarg
- 29) und verabschieden uns dort.
- 30) Ich stehe mit meiner Mutter davor,
- 31) seh den Sarg da stehen
- 32) und kann nicht fassen,
- 33) dass meine Oma dadrin liegen soll.
- 34) Den Verlust hab ich einfach verdrängt.
- 35) Im Verdrängen bin ich Meister.
- 36) Erst später konnte ich ganz normal darüber sprechen,
- 37) wie sie war
- 38) oder was wir erlebt haben
- 39) und dass ich gerne an sie zurückdenke.
- 40) Aber das war wirklich eine schwere Zeit.

2.3

- 1) Das war am 12.Mai 1997,
- 2) hab gerade mein Abitur gemacht.
- 3) Am 12. Mai war meine letzte schriftliche Prüfung.
- 4) Da ist man total gut drauf in der Schule,
- 5) weil man ja alles hinter sich hat.
- 6) Aber als ich an dem Tag nach Hause komme,
- 7) klingelt das Telefon.
- 8) Meine Tante ist dran,
- 9) ihre Stimme klingt schon so komisch.
- 10) Meine Oma lag damals im Krankenhaus
- 11) wegen eines „kleinen“ Herzinfarkts,
- 12) aber eigentlich war sie darüber hinweg.
- 13) Man hatte gesagt:
- 14) „Ihr Zustand ist absolut unbedenklich.“
- 15) Na ja, sie ist an diesem Morgen gestorben.
- 16) Ging wohl ziemlich schnell.
- 17) Sie war erst 64 Jahre alt.
- 18) Ja, man weiß ja gar nicht,
- 19) wie man reagieren soll.
- 20) Meine Mutter ist noch auf der Arbeit
- 21) und kommt erst in einer halben Stunde nach Hause.
- 22) War dann halt meine Aufgabe,
- 23) ihr das zu sagen.
- 24) Ich überleg also die ganze Zeit,
- 25) wie man so was am besten macht
- 26) und sag dann zu ihr:
- 27) „Oma ist tot.“
- 28) Dann noch die Beerdigung: da gab es an einem Tag erst diese Verabschiedung,
- 29) wo der Sarg aufgebahrt wurde.
- 30) Ein Pfarrer hat eine kleine Predigt gehalten,
- 31) dann sind wir einzeln vor zum Sarg gegangen,
- 32) um uns zu verabschieden.
- 33) Stand mit meiner Mutter davor,
- 34) hab mich aber nicht wirklich verabschiedet,
- 35) weil ich nicht richtig weinen konnte,
- 36) ging irgendwie nicht.
- 37) Bin seitdem Meister im Verdrängen.
- 38) Also, hat bis jetzt ganz gut geklappt.
- 39) Auf jeden Fall haben halt alle Abi gefeiert
- 40) und ich konnte eben nicht.

3.1

- 1) Es war, es geht halt um keinen Menschen sondern um meinen früheren Hund.
- 2) Weil er mit der Zeit immer häufiger umgekippt ist,
- 3) meinten meine Eltern irgendwann,
- 4) dass er gesundheitlich nicht mehr tragbar sei
- 5) und deshalb eingeschläfert werden müsse.
- 6) Zu dem Zeitpunkt war der Hund 13 Jahre alt
- 7) und er war halt eine Art kleiner Bruder für mich.
- 8) An dem Tag als wir ähm das Grab ausgehoben haben,
- 9) ist er uns zwischen den Beinen rum gelaufen,
- 10) hat in der Erde gebuddelt
- 11) und hat irgendwie helfen wollen beim Graben.
- 12) Das hat uns dann alle sehr getroffen damals.
- 13) Ähm, ja, wir haben ihm dann auch die Schlaftablette zu spät gegeben.
- 14) Als der Tierarzt gekommen ist,
- 15) ist er unter mein Bett gekrochen
- 16) und ich hab dem Hund die Angst wirklich angesehen.
- 17) Das war schrecklich.
- 18) Aber ich durfte ihm ja nicht helfen,
- 19) so gerne ich es gewollt hätte.
- 20) Bis dann der zweite Anlauf vom Tierarzt kam,
- 21) hab ich die ganze Zeit gehofft,
- 22) dass er ja dann vielleicht doch nicht heute sterben würde.
- 23) Und ich war dann dabei,
- 24) ich hab bei ihm gesessen
- 25) und ähm ich hab dann gesehen,
- 26) wie er friedlich geschlafen hat
- 27) und wie dann die Spritze allmählich...
- 28) und wie er das letzte Mal geatmet hat.
- 29) Und na ja, der Todeskampf hat doch recht lang gedauert.
- 30) Ja für mich ist es immer noch total schlimm.
- 31) Ich mach mir heute noch Vorwürfe deswegen.
- 32) Also so richtig verarbeitet hab ich es bis heute nicht,
- 33) weil ich den Tag immer wieder durchgehe.
- 34) Ähm ich erinner mich halt immer noch an sozusagen den kleinen Bruder. Hmm ja ganz klischehaft bittersüß halt.
- 35) Einerseits erinner ich mich an all die schönen und lustigen Sachen,
- 36) oder ich denk mir:
- 37) Hach, jetzt wär er da
- 38) und würde das und das machen und -
- 39) andererseits ist es halt auch wieder, na ja so Schuldgefühle und halt traurig.
- 40) Das ist irgendwie merkwürdig.

3.2

- 1) Es war, es geht halt um keinen Menschen sondern um meinen früheren Hund.
- 2) Irgendwann meinten meine Eltern dann,
- 3) dass er eingeschläfert werden müsse.
- 4) Nun es war alles halb so wild bis zu dem Tag selber,
- 5) da haben wir direkt bei uns auf dem Grundstück ähm das Grab ausgehoben,
- 6) er läuft uns zwischen den Beinen rum
- 7) und buddelt in der Erde.
- 8) Ähm ja, wir haben ihm dann auch die Schlaftablette zu spät gegeben.
- 9) Und dann kam der Tierarzt vorbei,
- 10) der Hund bellt ihn an
- 11) und versteckt sich dann hinterm Sofa.
- 12) Ich seh die Angst in seinen Augen
- 13) und denke sofort:
- 14) „Er weiß,
- 15) da stimmt irgendwas nicht,
- 16) und er weiß wahrscheinlich,
- 17) dass er sterben muss.“
- 18) Aber wir durften ihm ja nicht helfen.
- 19) Bis dann der zweite Anlauf vom Tierarzt kam,
- 20) hab ich natürlich die ganze Zeit gehofft,
- 21) dass er ja dann vielleicht doch nicht heute sterben würde.
- 22) Und dann ruft mein Vater:
- 23) „Komm runter,
- 24) es ist jetzt soweit.“
- 25) Und ähm ich seh noch,
- 26) wie er friedlich schläft
- 27) und wie dann die Spritze allmählich...
- 28) Ich sitz neben ihm
- 29) und also knie da
- 30) und bin dabei,
- 31) als er das letzte Mal atmet,
- 32) aber merke auch sofort,
- 33) dass er sich sträubt,
- 34) dass er dagegen ankämpft.
- 35) Ja für mich war es so,
- 36) als hätte ich meinen kleinen Bruder mit umgebracht.
- 37) Ja also beerdigt hab ich ihn dann nicht mehr,
- 38) aber ich hab noch gefühlt,
- 39) wie seine Haut kälter geworden ist.
- 40) Also ähm ja, das war halt kein schönes Erlebnis.

3.3

- 1) Es war, es geht halt um keinen Menschen sondern um meinen früheren Hund.
- 2) Das war ein Bullterrier.
- 3) Irgendwann hieß es dann:
- 4) „Er muss eingeschlafert werden.“
- 5) Nun, war alles halb so wild bis zu dem Tag selber,
- 6) da heben wir direkt bei uns auf dem Grundstück ähm das Grab aus.
- 7) Zu dem Zeitpunkt lebt er noch,
- 8) und läuft uns zwischen den Beinen rum.
- 9) Ähm ja, die Schlaftablette hat er dann auch zu spät gekriegt,
- 10) so dass er dann noch topfit war,
- 11) also war gar nicht müde oder so,
- 12) als dann der Tierarzt gekommen ist.
- 13) Und das Ganze hat sich halt sehr sehr lange Zeit verzögert,
- 14) bis dann der zweite Anlauf vom Tierarzt kam.
- 15) Und dann heißt es:
- 16) „Es ist jetzt soweit.“
- 17) Ich bin dann also dabei,
- 18) als er die Spritze bekommt,
- 19) - ging ja nicht anders,
- 20) konnt ja nichts machen -
- 21) und ähm man sieht noch
- 22) wie er friedlich schläft
- 23) und wie dann die Spritze allmählich...
- 24) Hab dann über dem über ihm gesessen
- 25) und also neben ihm gekniet
- 26) und war dann auch dabei,
- 27) als er das letzte Mal geatmet hat.
- 28) Und na ja, der Todeskampf hat doch recht lang gedauert,
- 29) aber man hat auch gemerkt,
- 30) dass er sich sträubt
- 31) und dagegen ankämpft.
- 32) Ja, ist irgendwie immer noch so,
- 33) als hätte man seinen kleinen Bruder mit umgebracht.
- 34) Ja also beerdigt hab ich ihn dann nicht mehr.
- 35) Aber man fühlt halt noch,
- 36) wie die Haut kälter wird,
- 37) nachdem er aufhört zu atmen.
- 38) Und ja, ich mach mir heute noch Vorwürfe.
- 39) Aber so ist das eben.
- 40) Jeder muss irgendwann sterben.