I consider storytelling to be basically a cooperative activity, something that is achieved jointly by those who participate in it. A person who wants to tell a story in conversation cannot do so unless the others present agree to let him do it and show that they are willing to align themselves as story recipients or as a story audience (Sacks, 1974). Likewise, the teller is dependent on the other parties to show appreciation of the story and indicate that they are willing to accept the point that s/he is trying to make through the story (Jefferson, 1978; Eriksson, 1994a). It is also often the case that the listeners, by means of their various activities during the account, affect its course (Goodwin, 1986).

Story-telling is, however, in many important respects one man’s enterprise. In contrast to the situation in the many other activities that take place within a conversation, in the telling of a story, one person controls the floor for a relatively long stretch of time and s/he is also the one who has the final responsibility for the account, the world constructed through it, and the conclusions can be drawn from it.

In this paper I intend to demonstrate through the detailed analysis of a single story-telling episode, the means employed by Swedish adolescents wishing to present what used to be called a performed narrative (cf. Wolfson, 1982). Moreover, I will try to show what the teller tried to achieve through the story-telling, the way it is designed and the way in which it is met by the listener.

This particular story-telling episode was recorded at a summer camp for children from Stockholm, in the summer of 1989. The teller is a girl aged fifteen, and the addressed listener is another girl of the same age. Both the girls come from working-class homes and they are both born and raised in Sweden, the former by Swedish parents, the latter by a Swedish mother and an Indian father.

Although the two girls are from the same suburban area in the south of Stockholm, they do not know each other from home; they have met for the first time at summer camp and the private conversation in which the story occurs is one of their first, perhaps even the very first. The conversation that surrounds the story-telling is mainly about the girls’ previous histories: where they were born and where they have lived, which school they attend, their search for mutual acquaintances, if and where they have been abroad etc. Their conversation is for long periods structured in such a way that one of the girls tells details about herself and her life on a certain topic and then the other presents facts about herself on the same topic.
Involved style and performed narratives

The conversational style of Swedish adolescents differs considerably from the style used by most adults. According to Nordberg (1985), the former is characterized, compared to the latter, by higher speed, more interruptions and more overlapping talk and also more frequent and more abrupt topic changes. The style of adolescents tends, moreover, to be more emotional (in that the speakers use more evaluative statements) and more implicit (things are presupposed rather than mentioned). One aspect of the latter characteristic is the frequent use of prosody and paralinguistic means, for example onomatopoeic expressions, variation in pitch and loudness and changes in voice quality, to fulfil different communicative goals.

Underlying these differences seem to be two contrasting strategies for human interaction. Tannen (1984) uses the terms ‘involved’ versus ‘considerate’ style for these. The involved style means that the interlocutors try to create solidarity by involving each other personally and emotionally in the conversation and its topic. The considerate style, in which the interlocutors are doing exactly the opposite, entails showing more respect to the other’s need for freedom from imposition.

Nordberg (1985) discusses some possible explanations for the differences he found. On the one hand, they can be seen as reflecting a stage in the language development of the individual. Many of the traits that are found in the conversational style of adolescents, for example the heavy dependence on prosodic and paralinguistic means, can also be found at an earlier stage of the language development, in the language use of children.

Most of these characteristics are, however, in a global perspective also found in the speech of adults, among traditional working-class or peasant populations as well as among highly literate ones, for example the Jewish urban middle-class on the American east coast. This reveals the need for other explanations of a cultural or social-psychological nature. The differences found by Nordberg should therefore, also reflect differences in the living conditions of adolescents and adults in Sweden. Nordberg points out the great importance for the individual member in the adolescent peer group to gain acceptance and approval from the others in the group; furthermore, he maintains that the members in this group, due to the relatively homogeneous character of youth culture and the fact that they spend more time together, have a considerable amount of experience and knowledge in common.

Closely connected to the strategies for conversations in general are the specific strategies for telling a story, the performed narrative, as described, for example, by Goffman:

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For what a speaker does usually is to present for his listeners a version of what happened to him. In an important sense, even if his purpose is to present the cold facts as he sees them, the means he employs may be intrinsically theatrical, not because he necessarily exaggerates or follows a script, but because he may have to engage in something that is a dramatization – the use of such art as he possesses to reproduce a scene, to replay it (Goffman, 1974: 503f).

The function of the dramatization is, according to Goffman, to allow the listener to re-experience the events that took place and thereby make him share the perspective of the teller.

Wolfson (1982) presents a list of means that are used to stage this vernacular theatre, which includes direct speech, asides, repetitions, expressive sounds, sound effects, historical present tense and different motions and gestures.

These performance features partially resemble those mentioned by Labov (1972) as examples of internal evaluation. According to Labov, the main parts of the narrative (or story) are, first, the event structure which recounts the actual events; second, the orientation during which information about the setting and the persons involved is given; and, finally, the evaluation, which is ‘the means used by the narrator to indicate the point of the narrative, its raison d’être; why it was told, and what the narrator is getting at’ (Labov, 1972: 366).

The evaluative means can be divided into external evaluation and internal evaluation. The former implies that the teller comments on the story outside the narrative fiction through direct comments about the point of the story as he sees it. When using internal evaluation, on the other hand, the teller’s comments on the events in the story are implicit and built into the story. One way of doing this is to allow the characters in the story to comment on the course of events they are experiencing, for example by expressing the anger or amusement they feel, through the use of direct quotations. Internal evaluation can also be accomplished in other ways, some of which might not be identified with performance features, for example through the use of various morphological, syntactic and lexical devices such as negations and comparative clauses (descriptions of ‘what is not’ make ‘what is’ more prominent), lexical items that quantify or intensify certain parts of the story, use of different verb tenses, etc. Labov’s study of the use of evaluative devices in stories told by black and white adolescents in New York, shows that the use of inner evaluation is more frequent in stories by black adolescents than by whites and that for all groups of speakers the use of this device tend to increase with age. He concludes that the frequent use of this internal or embedded evaluation is a distinctive trait of skillful narration.

The concept of point, the meaning that is given to the events in the story, i.e. the way in which these are understood by the participants in the telling, has received extensive discussion from Linde (1986). She differentiates two types of meaning that could be conveyed by evaluation. First, there is reportability, which has to do with the fact that events must in some way be out of
the ordinary in order to be told in the form of a story. The evaluative devices
can therefore be used by the teller to show why and how the events in the
story are extraordinary and therefore storyworthy. The other kind of meaning
that can be conveyed through the story makes reference to different social
norms and values to the identities of the participants. Linde says, concerning
the image of the speaker given in the story:

Almost invariably, first person narratives demonstrate that the protagonist is a good
person, behaved correctly, did the best that could be expected in the circumstances.
Even in narratives which purport to show some bad action of the speaker, there is a
split between speaker and protagonist, so that the speaker is shown to be a good person
who recognizes what the protagonist did wrong (Linde, 1986:187).

In sum then, dramatization makes the listeners re-experience the events of
the story and become personally involved in what is told. The involvement
serves the function not only of maintaining their interest in the story but also
of making them accept the point that the listener is making by the telling of it.

The storytelling\(^2\)

1. It was fucking distressing (.) like this (.)
2. it was like this once we were at a pool disco at the swim bath
3. (0.6)
4. and then Lasse and Kjelle threw me in the water (0.5)
5. yeah (.) with my clothes on and all (0.8)
6. yeah- and then I also had my lenses in you know (.)
7. they we- then I had- (you know) plain (.)
8. they were uncoloured (0.3)
9. so I had- I thought I had lost them
10. cause I was looking under the water (0.2) like (.)

B: [Mm]

11. so when I came up I couldn’t see a thing (0.5)
12. and then after a while it- it took fucking long after (0.4)
13. yeah so- (0.8) yeah some- (.) yeah like (1.0)
14. yeah it took quite a long time (.)
15. the first one appeared (.)
16. but the other one didn’t appear you know (.)

B: [Mm]

17. I just help you know where is it (.)
18. and everybody was in the water looking for it
19. I just (0.4) he de (.) hi like this (0.2) embarrassing you know

B: [Mm]

20. (.) yeah (.) so then- (.)
21. then the- they thought like that they saw the lens (.)
22. so they tried to catch it in the water
23. and then I discovered that it- (.)
then it appeared that (.) other one (.)
B: [(laughter)] [(laughter)]
25. and the others were down in the water looking for it you know+
26. and they just oh there it is you know (.) I just
C: [And] you had it under the eye lid
B: [(laughter)]
27. Yeah (.) and like I just (.) hello hello like you don’t have t- (.)
28. And then Torbjörn, it is a guy, he asked like this (.)
B: [Mm]
29. shall I tell (.) them that they should pay the lenses (.)
30. I just eh (.) de- I take care of that you know (.) like
31. yeah (.) and they were in the water looking for it (.)
32. I- (.) I just but you don’t have to lo-
33. I started to move (.) like away you know.
34. being quiet like you know
35. I just but you don’t have to look (for it)
36. they just what (.)
37. (I) just say (.) but I have them
38. +they just damned like bloody shit you know+
39. I just uh hum like bloody embarrassing (.)
40. I just uh
41. (2.0)
42. oh God
43. (0.8)
44. I walked around there borrowin’ clothes
45. I did- I didn’t have any eh
46. it was in the winter like this (0.4)
47. then I came to the centre like this
48. with big trousers and a sweat-
49. and a sort of sweater that was just hanging like this
50. Anna and Maria just (.) oh bloody hippie
51. I just hm thanks
52. (0.4)
53. It was so bloody embarrassing (.)
54. they were down in the water looking for it you know
55. and they thought they saw it you know and tried to catch it (.)
56. and then I discovered that it appeared you know from the eye like
57. I just ah you don’t have to look for it
58. they just uh (.) like really just kill you
59. (1.6)
60. ugh
61. (7.0)
B: Isn’t it tough to have lenses I mean besides getting them under your eyelid once
in a while to clean them and all that

To sum up, the content of the story is this: the protagonist and her friends is at a disco for teenagers arranged at a public swimming bath. She is thrown in the water by some boys, with her clothes on. When she gets out of the water she discovers that she no longer has her contact lenses in her eyes. After a while one of the lenses appears from under the eyelid, but the other one is still missing. She then thinks she has dropped it in the water and tells her friends,
who go into the water and start looking for the contact lens. They think that they see the lens and on some occasions they think that they are about to catch it. However, after a while the heroine discovers that she has the lens after all. It appears from under the other eyelid. She feels embarrassed and therefore hesitates, but finally tells her friends, who become very annoyed about having searched in vain.

Means of dramatization

In the analysis of the way in which the dramatization is accomplished in the story I will concentrate on the structural means used by the teller, and leave out mere lexical and syntactical devices. In the first part I focus on the overall structure of the story, while I treat the use of direct discourse separately in a second part.\(^3\)

Overall story structure

One way in which the tellers can dramatize their stories is by what Goffman calls 'structured suspense'. Goffman observes:

that any presentation of a strip of experience falls flat if some sort of suspense cannot be maintained. For, indeed suspense is to the audience of replayings what being lodged in unforetellable unfoldings is for participants in real life (Goffman, 1974: 507).

This brings to mind what Labov says about evaluations. In the first outline of this narrative model (Labov & Waletzky, 1967), the authors notice that many narratives contain an evaluation section which 'delineates the structure of the narrative by emphasizing the point where the complication has reached a maximum: the break between the complication and the result' (Labov & Waletzky, 1967: 34f).

To return to our story: it is introduced by an external evaluation (line 1), by which the teller states that the story is going to be about a negative, distressing experience.\(^4\) Then a section follows in which the teller gives details about the background, an orientation (that the events took place in the swimming baths and that she had her contact lenses in), and presents some initial events (that she was thrown into the water and thought she had lost the lenses, that her friends started looking for them etc). The tension in the story reaches its peak at line 23–24 when the heroine discovers that she has the missing lens after all (when it appears from under her eyelid) and as a consequence realizes that she has made the others search for it in vain. Additionally distressing for her is the fact that her friends think that they have been about to catch the
lens, which is apparently a mistake. Both these facts are at this point known to the protagonist in the story and to the audience in the story-telling but not to the other figures in the story. It is on this unequal distribution of knowledge among the characters in the story that the tension in the story is built. We notice that the listener, through her laughter, shows her orientation to and appreciation of the story at this point and that she acknowledges that the tension here is reaching a maximum.

The resolution of the story appears in lines 35–40, when she finally manages to inform the others that she has found the lens, and that it has not, after all, been in the water.

Between these two events, the finding of the contact lens and the heroine’s telling the others, there is quite a long section during which no events that contribute to the main story line are related, but when the teller instead takes the opportunity to stress the awkwardness of the situation.

In doing this she makes use of repetitions (cf. Tannen, 1983). The fact that the others are in the water, first mentioned in line 18 (and everybody was in the water looking for it), is now repeated in line 25 (and the others were down in the water looking for it you know), that is, right after the finding of the lens in line 24 (then it appeared that one). The importance of this is further emphasized by the speaker’s relatively loud voice at this point. This event is also described once more in line 31.

In the following line, 26 (and they just oh there it is you know), she also repeats the fact that her friends thought that they were almost catching the lens, first mentioned in line 21–22 (then they thought they saw the lens (.) so they tried to catch it in the water). It is noticeable that this event is repeated. Instead of merely relating it, as in the earlier instance, in line 26, the teller dramatizes the event through the use of direct speech.

Lines 28 to 30 contain a sequence in which one of her friends is singled out of the group as an individual who offers her a further favour: going and telling the boys who threw her into the water that they should pay for the lens if (and then Torbjörn it is a guy he asked like this (.) shall I tell them that they should pay the lenses, I just eh (.) de- I take care of that you know), an offer that further underlines and makes very tangible the fact that the friends who are taking great pains to help her are unknowingly doing this unnecessarily, and points to the fact that she eventually will have to tell them the bitter truth.

The tension is also highlighted by her repeated attempts to explain, in line 27 and 32 (and like I just hello hello you don’t have t-), attempts which do not succeed until line 35.

Finally, in line 33–34, she conveys her embarrassment by describing her own actions, the way in which she starts to withdraw and becomes silent. The way in which the teller can evaluate the events in the story in this way by describing the actions of the other characters in the story has also been observed by Labov (1972).
In line 25–34, then, the teller takes great pains to make clear to the listener in which sense the situation is difficult and embarrassing for her. She stresses the fact that her helpers are acting in bad faith, a fact known to her (and to the audience) and for which she is responsible. This is done by the use of repetitions and descriptions of actions by her and her friends. She does not, however, state this explicitly (in the form of what Labov calls external evaluation). Through the use of all these devices, all this talk, she also fulfils another goal, namely to prolong the period between the point at which the problem is revealed to the audience and the point at which it is solved, i.e. the period during which the audience is kept in tense expectation.

The resolution, in line 35–40, is also highly dramatized through the consistent use of direct discourse to present it. I will discuss the use of direct discourse below.

When the story ends, a short interlude follows, during which the teller describes what happened later that night (line 42–52) and then she returns to the previous occasion and repeats the story in a compressed version, which consists of those lines most highlighted in the main story. This summary, like the story as a whole (line 1), is introduced by an external evaluation (line 53), when the teller explicitly states her attitude towards the events in the story.

**Direct speech and thought**

The most salient feature of dramatization in this story is the use of direct discourse for representing the speech and thoughts of the characters in the story. Instead of merely relating what someone else said, as in indirect discourse, the teller, while speaking the words of other(s), is enacting this person’s role. When she does this she is in one sense no longer herself, but is acting the role of another. This has led Clark & Gerrig (1990) to assign direct reports of speech or thought to the class of non-serious actions: actions that are patterned on real actions but are ‘seen by the participants to be something quite else’ (Goffman, 1974: 44).

The alternation between the different stances that the teller takes in telling a story can be described in terms of Goffman’s concept of participant status, the positions or roles taken for an utterance by the individuals in a perceptual distance from it. Goffman discusses both hearer and speaker roles, but I will restrict myself here to the latter.

In speaking, a speaker displays his current self in different ways. Goffman (1979:17) distinguishes between the animator, who is ‘the talking machine, a body engaged in acoustic activity or [...] an individual active in the role of utterance production’, the author, who is ‘someone who has selected the sentiments that are being expressed and the words in which they are encoded’, and finally the principal, who is ‘someone whose position is established by
the words that are spoken, someone whose beliefs have been told, someone who has committed himself to what the words say’. Related to this is also the notion of figure, the aspect of self displayed through the talk:

by interjecting a remedial statement such as, “Whoops, I got that wrong...”, or “I meant to say...” we are projecting ourselves as animators into the talk, but this is a figure, nonetheless, not the actual animator; it is merely a figure that comes closer than most to the individual who animates its presentation (Goffman, 1979: 20).

In the same way as a teller can introduce a figure that is linked to himself or herself through biographical continuity, s/he can also embed an entirely different persona.

What happens in direct discourse is, to put it somewhat simplistically, that the teller animates words for which someone else is the principal. In one sense the principal of the statement is the figure present in the world that is talked about (he is, according to Goffman; 1979: 21, also the animator and author of these words) but the figure is also, in the case of personal narratives, related to a person in the social world of the teller and the story audience.

Another question concerns the meaning of the presented discourse: whose voice is being heard through the words spoken? Or, in Goffman’s terms, who is the author of the utterance? A traditional view is that the direct discourse is presented through the voice or perspective of the original speaker as opposed to indirect discourse which reflects (mainly) the perspective of the teller. Bakhtin (1981) stresses, contrary to the usual practice in more traditional linguistics, the importance of the context for the meaning of the utterance. As a consequence, he suggests, there is inevitably a change in meaning when an utterance is moved from one context to another:

the speech of another, once enclosed in a context, is – no matter how accurately transmitted – always subject to certain semantic changes. The context embracing another’s word is responsible for its dialogizing background, whose influence can be very great (Bakhtin, 1981: 340).

The voice of the teller or, in writing, the author, always influences and colours the voice of the original speaker.

Furthermore, Tannen (1989), who questions the literal conception of reported speech, has shown that much of what is rendered in the form of direct discourse has never been expressed by anyone (cf. Clark & Gerrig, 1990; Londen, 1991). Tannen uses the term ‘constructed dialogue’ to express the fact that ‘uttering dialogue in conversation is as much a creative act as is the creation of dialogue in fiction and drama’ (Tannen, 1989: 101).

There are therefore, good reasons to suggest that it is the teller of a story who is the author of the utterance rendered in the form of direct discourse. The teller uses this form, which, far from being a verbatim quotation, is con-
structured to achieve an effective telling, to fulfill the goals he or she has for the story in the social situation of the telling.

An important trait of the direct discourse in the story above is the way in which it is framed. Instead of more traditional quotation markers, for example *say*, *think* or *ask*, the teller, in the majority of the cases, uses a Swedish equivalent of *just* (*ba*) to introduce the quotations. I have shown (Eriksson, 1994a) the way in which this marker has developed out of more traditional uses of the adverb *vara*, a development which can be described in terms of a grammaticization process, possibly explained in terms of the speaker’s need to evaluate the events in the story.

One important difference between this marker and the more traditional ones is that the former does not make explicit whether the content of the quotation is to be taken as something that was actually said or whether it was something that the person thought or felt at the time. It is therefore an appropriate way of expressing the view of the teller through the acts of the figures. In this way it contributes to the implicitness which is a pivotal feature in the narrative style of adolescents.

The ambiguity can be seen in the uses of direct discourse in line 17 (*I just help you know where is it*), 19 (*I just (0.4) he de (.) hi like this (0.2) embarrassing you know*), 39 (*I just eh uh hum like*) and 40 (*I just eh*), all of which seem to have as their main object the expression of the speaker’s feelings about what is happening.

One means used by the teller to express her emotional states through these instances of direct discourse is the stuttering way she talks. This can be observed in the examples from line 19 and 39 above, and also in line 30 (*I just eh (.) de- I take care of that you know*), which is an example of direct speech. Another way of showing her embarrassment, by not finishing the utterance, can be seen in line 32 (*I (.) just but you don’t have to lo-*). In all these examples she also uses her voice quality – quiet, anxious – to signal the same thing.

The anger of her friends when they find out that they have been searching in vain for the lens, in line 38 (*they just damned like bloody shit you know*) and line 58 (*they just uh (.) like really just kill you*) is expressed through the use of much louder voice than the surrounding talk (marked by +), lexically by the use of swear-words (38), and through the content, a threat (58).

The constructedness of the direct speech is also shown in the speech by her friends. In the majority of the cases she uses a plural pronoun to introduce the direct discourse, thus ascribing it to them as a group (see, for example line 26, *and they just oh there it is you know*). It is, however, very unlikely that they said this in a choir-like way. Instead this instance of direct speech should be treated as a summary of what they said, did and felt at the time, something that is constructed by the speaker to forward her point.6

Although no systematic comparisons are available I think there are good reasons to assume that dramatizing devices are more frequently used in sto-
ries by (Swedish) adolescents than by adults. The impression I have from my material does not contradict Nordberg (1985) who states that both direct speech and onomatopoeic expressions are much more frequent in adolescent speech than in the speech of adults. Moreover, in the stories told by adolescents, direct quotation is more important, in the sense that it is used for more functions, i.e. to express emotional states and attitudes, than in adult discourse.

The factors discussed by Nordberg to explain the adolescents’ use of an involved style can also be applied to the dramatizing character of the stories told by adolescents. There may, however, also be more specific explanations, linked to the communicative situation in adolescent peer groups. Some of the features that Nordberg mentions, for example high frequency of interruptions, overlapping talk and abrupt topic changes, point to the fact that there is a reckless competition for the floor, the right to speak and be listened to, in adolescent groups. The desire to speak and attract the attention of one’s co-interlocutors is thus far more important here than the willingness to be attentive to what these others have to say. In other words, it is crowded on stage and not quite clear who is going to act and who is going to be a spectator.

Luckman (1987) maintains that the structure of a communicative genre should be seen as a way to solve certain communicative problems. A problem for someone who wants to present a story in a typical adolescent peer group, which could affect the design of the typical telling, could be the way in which to capture and keep the attention of the interlocutors who only unwillingly take on the roles of listeners and cannot be relied on to remain in these roles. The dramatizing could be seen as a solution to this problem, since it has the power of involving the listeners in the event by letting them, not only hear the events being described, but re-experience what actually took place.

The problem of keeping the listeners attention could also explain another tendency observed in the material, namely a tendency to remove elements that are not essential for conveying the point of the story. The orienting sections, during which information about time, place and persons involved in the events is presented, are, for example, generally rather short.

What is achieved through the telling?

So far, the analysis has focused on the means employed by the teller to dramatize the telling and forward her point. I will now move on to focus on what is accomplished through the telling and the way it is done.

Stories in conversations can, like any other form of human behaviour, be used to accomplish a great variety of goals. Normally they are doing many
different things on different levels at the same time. The immediate, stated or unstated, object of the teller may be to inform or entertain, present a line of argument, present an image of him- or herself as well as of someone else etc, while he or she may also accomplish other more general social tasks, for example structuring the social organisation of the situation (cf. Goodwin, 1990). And the story may also serve more subjective needs of the individual, i.e. concerned with questions of personal identity and subjectivity.

My impression (which is hard to verify) is that the creation of images, of self or of others, is a quite conspicuous ingredient in adolescent stories. While I am going to discuss the issue of self-presentation at some length below, I would also like to mention briefly the great number of stories in my material that evolve around the evaluation of others, based on the actions that they perform, which can be funny, stupid, dangerous or clever. A number of these involve heavy criticism or depreciation (cf. Eriksson, 1994b). These kind of stories, while probably serving as means of social control, can also be seen as meeting the urge from the individual member of the adolescent peer group (as well as the group as a whole) to identify, establish, discuss and have confirmed the norms and values at stake in that group.

In our present story, however, the attention is focused on the behaviour of the figure corresponding to the teller. This kind of self-presentation seems to be an important aspect of all kinds of human interaction. In contact with others, a person:

\[\text{tends to act out what is sometimes called a line – that is, pattern of verbal and non-verbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself (Goffman, 1972: 5).}\]

In telling a story about a personal experience a teller presents him- or herself in a double capacity. He or she is displayed as the teller of the story, but also as a figure in the world created by the story (cf. Schiffrin, 1990). As pointed out by Quasthoff (1980), this gives the teller an opportunity to put forward an image of himself or herself that for various reasons may not be conveyed through practical actions in the social situation of the telling.

One interesting fact about this story-telling occasion of ours is that the participants are newly acquainted with each other. It is reasonable to suppose that presentation of self is an even more important and delicate aspect of the interaction in these circumstances than if the persons were close friends. This is a conclusion that seems to gain support from the way in which the conversation as a whole is structured: as a sharing of details from each party’s previous history.

So how, then, does the teller present herself in the story? There seem to be two competing pictures.

On the one hand, there is the point that the teller tries to convey, expressed
in her adding weight to different events and circumstances through the use of evaluative devices. She purports to show the way in which this experience is storyworthy by being an example of a most embarrassing experience. This entails a presentation of herself as someone who makes a mistake with negative consequences for other persons, her friends, although she cannot really be blamed for this, since she is but a victim of the circumstances. What she explicitly presents is an image of herself as a person who has lost control over the situation, a picture that, due to cultural values, can be said to be negative. In this way the story can be seen to meet the demands of keeping an ironical distance to one’s own subjectivity. Interestingly, this theme, while not at all uncommon in stories told by girls, is much more rare in the stories told by boys. To put it bluntly, there is a clear tendency for boys to present themselves as heroes in their stories, although they do not make this the point of the story, while girls are more often anti-heroines or victims. That is, girls are much more willing to let their insufficiency and misadventures become public by presenting them in the form of a story.

However, to say that the story is one in which the teller presents a basically negative picture of herself is far too premature a conclusion.

First, as Linde (1986) observed, whenever a story is showing a negative view of the teller and his or her actions, the teller tends to dissociate himself or herself from the acts or situation of the protagonist and thereby shows that she is aware that the acts were wrong and is therefore a good person. The careful framing of the story as something embarrassing marks this dissociation.

Secondly, while the description mentioned above is clearly stated in the story, there is also another picture of the protagonist emerging from it - a picture of a very popular girl: a girl who is popular among and gets attention from the boys and a girl whose friends are eager to help her when she is in trouble. This is a meaning, however, that cannot be stated explicitly in order to serve as the raison d’être of a story. To tell a story with the sole and explicit purpose of showing what a good person he or she is, is not, under normal circumstances, possible for a person in our culture, although it might be elsewhere.

This latter issue brings to the fore another interesting aspect of story-telling, namely its power to focus attention on the teller in manifold ways. Thus, for our female story-teller, the story focuses on her as the subject of attention in at least three different ways. First, as we have seen, by dramatizing an event and by letting others re-experience this event, the teller can establish and make them accept an image of herself as a person who attracts attention from others and who ought to be treated that way, while the event in question is meant to be taken as a typical illustration of the kind of person she is. Secondly, by telling a story of a past experience in which she had the attention of important others, to a spectacular degree friends of the her own sex and boys, she gives herself an opportunity to relive this successful event. Finally, in the
role of the teller, she has throughout her story had the exclusive attention of others and may be rewarded by them through their appreciation of the telling.

This attention-seeking project performed by the teller through the telling of the story is, however, quite a risky business. By introducing the story, she has put herself on the stage, and cannot trust that the audience will act as she wishes them to do.

This can be illustrated by the listeners’ responses to the telling. As can be seen from the transcript there are some reactions from the listener during the telling. At some occasions the addressed listener responds by back-channeling signals (mm) and on some other occasions, with laughter. The latter signals occur at the point at which the protagonist’s dilemma is first revealed to its full extent (after line 24 and 26). On another occasion, another girl, whom the teller cannot see during the telling, and who is therefore not likely to be considered a ratified participant by the teller, interrupts the telling, by asking a question (the comment of C after line 26), which is briefly answered by the teller, before heading into the telling again.

At the end of the telling, however, when it is the listener’s turn to show her appreciation of the story-telling, and that she has understood and agrees with the teller’s evaluation of the events recounted, there are no verbal reactions at all from the listener. This suggests that the listener does not completely agree with the content of the telling or the way it is done. At least, the subsequent actions of the teller seem to indicate that she finds reasons to suspect that this is the case.

According to Sacks (1974) the story can be seen as the first part of an ‘adjacency pair’, which sets up a normative expectation of a second part to follow. If this response is left out, as is the case in our telling, this absence is experienced by the participants as highly relevant, making a range of conclusions possible, some of which are that the listener does not appreciate the story or the way it is performed or does not share the speaker’s view of the story events. All these are possibilities that entail threats to the teller’s ability to keep face and thereby also to the solidarity between the participants.

This absence of a verbal response from the listener may be the reason why, after a 2 second pause (line 42), the teller introduces another story, with a similar content (embarrassment) and topically coherent with the first one (these events took place later the same night). By doing this she can have another chance of eliciting a response to the story. After this interlude, and another short pause (line 52), when again no response is given, she returns to the previous story and gives a summary of it by recounting the most prominent events. However, she does not succeed by this strategy either. When she finally does receive a response it is not until much later (after a 7 second pause) and one that is only indirectly tied to the content of the telling.

In the end then, this story-telling was not a success. Although the audience did not boo, it gave her no applause either.
Appendix 1: The story-telling, Swedish versions

1. De va skitjobbit (...) så hår (...)  
2. de va så här en gång vi va på baddisco i simhallen  
3. (0.6)  
4. pt å så vart ja isländg av Lasse å Kjelle (0.5)  
5. jaa (...) me kläderna på då rå (0.8)  
6. ja- så hade ja mina linser på mej också så här (...)  
7. då va- då hade ja (altså) vanli (...)  
8. dom va genomskinliga (0.3)  
9. så hade ja trodde ja att ja hade tappat i dom  
10. för ja kolla under vattnet (0.2) så hår (...)  
B: [Mm]  
11. så når ja kom upp så såg inte ja nånting (0.5)  
12. å så efter ett tag de- de tog skitlång tid efter (0.4)  
13. ja nå- (0.8) ja nåra (...) ja så hår (1.0)  
14. ja de tog rätt lång tid (...)  
15. kom den första fram (...)  
16. men den andra kom inte fram så här  
B: [Mm]  
17. (...) ja ba hjelp liksom va e den (...)  
18. å alla va i vattnet å leta  
19. ja ba (0.4) he de (...) hej så här (0.2) pinsamt hörri å  
B: [Mm]  
20. (...) mm (...) så då (...)  
21. då tro- dom trodde så här att dom såg linser (...)  
22. så dom försökta fångå nånting i vattnet  
23. så upptäckte ja att de- då- (...)  
24. så kom den fram den dära (...) andra (...)  
B: [(skratt)]  
25. +å dom andra va där nere i vattnet å leta så här+  
26. å dom ba åh där e den liksom (...) ja ba  
C: [Å dj]en satt under (...) ögonlocke  
B: [(skratt)]  
27. jaa (...) å liksom ja ba (...) men hallå hallå (...) så hår ni behöve n- (...)  
28. å så Torbjörn de e en kille han fråga så här (...)  
B: [Mm]  
29. ska ja säga till (...) dom att dom ska peja linserna (...)  
30. ja ba eh (...) de- ja sköter de hör ru (...) så hår (...)  
31. jaa (...) å dom va i vattnet å lekta (...)  
32. Ja (...) ja ba men ni behöver inte lett-  
33. dra ja mej (...) så här bort liksom  
34. tyst så här typ  
35. ja ba men ni behöve inte leta (efter den)  
36. >dom ba va (...)  
37. säge ba (...) men ja har rom  
38. +dom ba faan liksom jövlä skit så här+  
39. ja ba eh öh hum liksom skitpinsamt (...)  
40. ja ba eh  
41. (2.0)  
42. åh gud
43. (0.8)
44. ja gick ju omkring där å låna kläder (.)
45. ja ha- ja hade inga e-
46. de va vinter så här (0.4)
47. kom ja till centrum så här
48. me stora braller å en tröj-
49. å sån här tröja som ba hängde så här (.)
50. Anna å Maria ba (.) öh jävla hippie
51. ja ba hm tack
52. (0.4)
53. de va så jäska pinsamt (.)
54. dom va där nere i vattnå å leta så här
55. trodde dom dom såg den liksom å försökte fånga den (.)
56. så upptäckte ja att den komme fram så här från öga liksom
57. ja ba åh ni behöver inte leta
58. dom ba öhh (.) liksom verkligen ba döda dej
59. (1.6)
60. Usch
61. (7.0)
B: E re inte jobbit å ha linser alltså förutom att dom åker bakom e jobbit å sköta dom å så

Notes

1 This story is from a larger collection of around 150 stories from conversations between adolescents which I recorded during fieldwork periods at a summer camp for children in the summers of 1989–1993. Since the purpose of the fieldwork was to capture on tape natural conversations, I did not arrange or make any unnecessary intrusions in the social situations studied. What I did was simply to spend time with the youngsters over a period of three weeks while carrying a tape recorder. I was introduced by the staff as a person who worked at the university and was interested in the way young people speak. This particular recording took place, late at night, in the bedroom of some of the teenagers and there were seven people present in the room including the girls and myself. Although the girls in the conversation in question were probably vaguely aware of the fact that they were being recorded, they did not seem to pay much attention to it. The two girls were sitting on an upper bunk facing each other. The bed was the one closest to the wall of two beds standing next to each other. There was nobody else on the upper bunks, while three persons were lying, half asleep, on the lower couches and some others were sitting at the other end of the room. The room was rather dark, except where the girls were sitting, where a bedside lamp gave some light. The girls did not have eye contact with anybody in the room but each other, although everybody else in the room could hear what they said.

2 I present the story in an English translation using normal orthography. The following symbols are also used: (.) pause about 0.1 second, (0.5) pauses in seconds, talk within “” is produced with a loud voice and talk within [ ] overlaps with other talk. For the convenience of the reader, I have underlined all parts of the story that consist of direct discourse. A Swedish version of this story is given in Appendix 1.

3 There are other interesting ways for the teller to dramatize the story that which are not considered here, either because they are not important in this story, as for example the use of historical present tense (one instance on line 37), or are not present at all. One example of the latter is the use of onomatopoeic expressions (cf. Nordberg, 1986).
This is an instance of what Sacks (1974) calls a *story preface*. It is used by the aspiring teller to apply to the other parties for the right to take an extended turn, i.e. to talk for a longer period without being interrupted. Since it signals the point of the story it can also be used by the listeners to project the end of the story, the point at which it is suitable to show appreciation of the story.

This is a view that Bakhtin shares with many modern non-linguistic approaches to conversation analysis. For an overview see Goodwin and Duranti (1992).

For an extended discussion of this issue see Eriksson (1994c).

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