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Rhetoric of Self-Expressions in Online Celebrity Gossip

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Julkaisun nimike

Itseilmaisujen retoriikka internetin julkkisjuoruissa

Tiivistelmä

Tämä väitöskirjatyö tarkastelee englanninkielisten ja suomenkielisten, julkisuuden henkilöitä arvostelevien verkkokeskustelijoiden itseilmaisuja viiden tutkimusartikkelin kautta. Tutkimuksessa itseilmaisut ymmärretään arvottaviksi ja siten subjektiivisiksi kommenteiksi, joita yksilöt jakavat toisten kanssa. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on syventää ymmärrystä siitä, miten itseilmaisujen retoriikka internetin julkkisjuoruissa luonnehtii läheisyyttä (samuutta) ja etäisyyttä (erilaisuutta). Tutkimus perustuu retoriseen kritiikkiin (*rhetorical criticism*) ja siinä itseilmaisuja analysoidaan suostuttelevina teksteinä, joissa julkkis-verkkokeskustelijat rakentavat ja kontrolloivat puhujan luotettavuutta, eetosta, ja tulevat osaksi yhteisöä.

Väitöskirjatutkimuksen taustalla on lähestymistapa, jossa argumentoiva (looginen) ja esteettinen (tunteellinen) retoriikka nähdään kokonaisuutena. Tutkimusaineisto koostuu 1800 verkkokeskustelukommentista (900 englanniksi, 900 suomeksi), jotka on kerätty julkkisjuoruja sisältäviltä verkkokeskustelupalstoilta. Tutkimuksessa yhdistyvät kielitieteellinen arvottavan kielenkäytön analyysi ja uuden retoriikan teoriaan pohjautuva moraalisen argumentaation tutkimus.

Tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että julkkisjuoruja sisältävien verkkoympäristöjen itseilmaisullinen retoriikka perustuu eetokseen, jossa reettori omilla valinnoillaan antautuu kontekstin ohjattavaksi. Itseilmaisut sekä englanninkielisessä että suomenkielisessä aineistossa olivat jännitteisiä: läheisyyttä luotiin intiimissä suhteessa mediaobjekteihin (kuten julkkisten kuviin) kuitenkin samalla etäännyttämällä julkisuuden henkilöiden representoimat "toiset", joita joko pilkattiin tai moralisoitiin. Englanninkieliset keskustelupalstat perustuivat vahvemmin intiimiin ja leikittelevään tunteiden jakamiseen kuin suomenkieliset, joilla julkisuuden henkilöihin assosioidut ihmisryhmät olivat vakavamielisemmän moralisoinnin kohteita. Taito tunnistaa suostuttelun keinot itseilmaisuissa on tärkeää yksilöiden uusmediakritiikille heidän yrittäessään löytää oman äänensä verkkoympäristöissä.

Asiasanat

Retoriikka, itseilmaisu, eetos, julkkisjuoru, verkkokeskustelu

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Rhetoric of Self-Expressions in Online Celebrity Gossip

Abstract

This study explores self-expressions of English-speaking and Finnish online participants of celebrity gossip through five case studies (articles). In this study, self-expressions are seen as evaluative and hence subjective comments that individuals share with other people. The aim is to better understand how the rhetoric of self-expressions in online celebrity gossip characterizes proximity (sameness) and distance (difference). The study is based on rhetorical criticism and it analyses self-expressions as persuasive texts in which online gossipers construct and control ethos (character) and become part of a community.

By exploring distance and proximity as interrelated concepts, this study is consistent with the approach to rhetoric in which the argumentative (or logical) and aesthetic (or emotional) strands form a synthesis. The research material consists of 1800 online comments (900 English-language and 900 Finnish) taken from the comment sections of web pages dealing with celebrity gossip. This study combines the linguistic analysis of evaluative language with the analysis of moral argumentation based on New Rhetoric.

According to the findings, the rhetoric of self-expressions in online celebrity gossip highlights an ethos through which rhetors, because of their individual choices, surrender to the power of context. Self-expressions in both English and Finnish were tense: proximity was created in an intimate relationship to media objects (such as pictures of celebrities) and it was simultaneous with practices of mockery and moralizing that distanced 'others' represented by celebrities. English-language celebrity gossip was more intimately and playfully emotional than the celebrity gossip in Finnish-language contexts, which, by comparison, involved more serious moralizing of groups associated with celebrities. Recognizing the means of persuasion in self-expressions is important for the new media literacy of individuals who try to find their own voices online.

Keywords

Rhetoric, self-expression, ethos, celebrity gossip, online comment sections

PREFACE

For me, doing this PhD has been the project of finding my own academic voice. It would not have been possible without moments of struggle. Looking back, I am thankful for the struggles that I faced during this project. They made me who I am as a scholar. This study was conducted in cooperation with many brilliant scholars whom I have been privileged to meet. The project led me on interesting adventures, both at home (thanks to Langnet, the Finnish Doctoral Programme in Language Studies) and abroad (thanks to all those wonderful people I met during my study visit in Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media at North Carolina State University).

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1 INTRODUCTION

I have always loved miniatures: all tiny, cute little things that someone else would see as meaningless and pointless, just too small to be taken seriously. What caught my interest when I was a child were all kinds of little figures, those that came from inside chocolate eggs, those that were used to decorate dollhouses, and those that I made myself of clay or wood, some of them smaller than the size of my fingertip. What captivates me about miniatures is that at first they may seem too small to be recognized. However, once you have noticed them and have finally taken a closer look at them you can see that they make visible things that are so much bigger than themselves.

Celebrity, here understood as a pseudo-individual made well-known through media representations (see Boorstin 1992 [1961]: 45–76), is one of the figures in which I have been interested for the past five years. But celebrity has not been the only figure, albeit the most spectacular one, in my play. I have tried to figure out bigger things through the relationship of four small characters: the celebrity as the centre of attention, the 'self' and the 'other' as the gossipers talking about the celebrity and the media as those technologies and content that not only provide the whole scene but act on it as well. For me, these four figures represent a miniature of *celebrity gossip* that I understand as the mediated genre of human relationships through which individuals' private lives are made a public issue. I see celebrity gossip as a characteristic example of communication in the public spaces of contemporary western culture. By this I mean the Internet with its comment sections, blogs and social media spaces that have finally made it possible to see all these four main characters acting on the same scene at the same time.

Although the celebrity seems to be the most attractive character, I argue that it is time to put the 'self', the anonymous and ordinary, in the spotlight. This study focuses on the 'self' as the character whose acts in internet spaces are socially meaningful. By these acts, I mean *self-expressions*, which I define as the evaluative and hence subjective comments that individuals aim at sharing with those with whom they communicate. Self-expressions are at home in the meaning-making practices surrounding celebrity phenomena, for being a celebrity or evaluating celebrities involves the art of the self. Online environments provide new, intriguing possibilities for this art, as the celebrity culture scholar P. David Marshall (2010) suggests. Self-expressions require the art of persuasion, namely, *rhetoric*. A characteristic of self-expressions is getting closer to one's interlocutor(s), which may go hand in hand with the mocking and moralizing of others, particularly those epitomized by the celebrity figure. The figures of the

'co-gossiper' (the proximate 'other') and the 'celebrity' (the representative of distant 'others'), simultaneously existing in the mediated context, symbolize the complexity of self-expressions particularly tense in online environments. Thus self-expressions are not merely about the individual; they also involve trust, values and persuasion as a collective issue through the relationships of proximity and distance. *Celebrity culture*, by which I mean all the ways of defining and controlling individuality through media representations of publicly well-known individuals (see e.g. Marshall 2006: 6–7; 2010), is a particularly complex field of relationships, which also makes it an interesting subject of study. As the media scholar Roger Silverstone (2007: 48) points out, the contemporary cult of celebrity, in terms of sameness and difference, is more complex than we often realize.

What interests me in celebrity gossip is exactly this complexity of sameness (proximity) and difference (distance). In this study, therefore, I explore proximity and distance in the rhetoric of online gossipers' self-expressions. A rhetorical approach is in line with the study of self-expressions because rhetoric highlights the role of individual agents (see Puro 2007: 13). That is because rhetorical studies underline free choice-making related to persuading and getting persuaded, which are issues of individual responsibility. Moreover, rhetoric used in digital contexts is self-expressive as it highlights identity but it is also surrounded by affordances and constrains, both social and technological, which means that individual rhetors expressing themselves through new media are not all-powerful although they have the power to make individual choices (Zappen 2005). I see proximity and distance as concepts that are needed when discussing the complexity of the rhetoric of self-expressions in online celebrity gossip.

1.1   Proximity and distance in communication

Proximity and distance are broad, philosophical concepts characterizing the social relations involved in communication. To approach self-expressions as relational expressions, I have utilized the ethical remarks of the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1993). His theory of *Postmodern Ethics* concerns the relationships that the 'self' (the Self) has with both the proximate 'other' (the Other) and the distant one (the Third). While proximity is the relationship connecting the Self and the Other (those communicating on an emotional and moral level), distance is the realm of justice and social rules that comes with the Third who is also a sort of other but a distant one, an outsider, as Bauman (ibid. 112–116, 132) argues. The Third refers to groups of people living in society where relationships are faceless and stereotype-based, not personal or private (ibid. 112–116, 130). The

relationships of proximity and distance are particularly complex in communication via media that show us all kinds of beings and provoke us to position ourselves in relation to them, as Silverstone (2007) argues. These beings are those represented by mediated faces and voices. They are part of our world, often also our society, and we therefore have legal duties to them, but we do not meet them face-to-face. Thus we do not know them in person.

The Other and the Third as philosophical concepts were first introduced by the philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas[1] (1969) who saw these concepts as fundamental to being the Self as a moral and ethical agent. In the field of rhetorical studies, by which I mean the branch of communication studies focusing on the art of persuasion, Pat J. Gehrke (2009: 152–157) suggests that the relation to the Other is the first relation of alterity essential to the Self as a (social) being, since it involves the basic idea of otherness that makes other relationships possible. The first relation, however, is not the only relation in which the 'self' is involved for 'relationality never occurs merely as one-to-one but rather that one always begins in community' (ibid. 159). The *'self'* in this study means the rhetor, the person responsible for self-expression, while *'other'* (the Other) means the proximate audience as the addressed group of hearers or readers. *'Others'* (the Third) refers to people and groups outside this proximity, either distant or distanced. Moreover, by *proximity* I mean the emotional and moral realm of trust between the 'self' and the 'other'. By *distance*, conversely, I mean the way the 'self' positions itself in relation to other people through difference.

As rhetorical concepts, proximity and distance can be seen as dialectical (polar). As the rhetorician Kenneth Burke (1969: 184–189) argues, such a dialectical logic is characteristic of philosophical thinking in rhetorical studies. Moreover, a special type of dialectical relationship in rhetoric is 'ultimate dialectic' by which Burke (ibid. 189) means a transformative relationship in which polar concepts are ways into each other. I understand proximity and distance as transformative concepts which, despite their polarity, are still flexible. This means that they are not either-or ways of positioning the 'self' in relation to other people. In other words, they both are to be seen as simultaneously present in the rhetoric of self-expressions. On the one hand, proximity is utilized as a way of creating distance from 'othered' beings through shared mockery and moralizing separating 'us'

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[1] Note that Lévinas was not a rhetorician: he was critical towards the idea of rhetoric as such. However, his theory of otherness can be applied to rhetorical criticism which deals with otherness. Despite his criticism towards rhetoric, Lévinas' idea of 'Other' can be seen as close to the rhetorical criticism's concept of audience meaning the otherness that the 'self' is responsible for addressing. (see Davis 2005: 193–194)

from 'them'. Such a form of proximity is common to mediated communication in which media representations, such as celebrity gossip stories, are objects evaluated in rhetoric. On the other hand, distance, as referring to communal rules in self-expressions, creates proximity that connects people together on a shared normative basis. Consequently, proximity can be a way into distance and distance can be a way into proximity. Moreover, the rhetorical practice in which the 'self' builds a relationship to both 'other' and 'others' through proximity and distance is seen here as *moral positioning*. Thus 'morality' in this study is approached as a social order empirically involved in rhetoric which concerns people and their behaviour.

A tension between proximity and distance is characteristically present in gossip, since gossipers create proximity as emotional togetherness at the expense of distanced 'others'. According to the sociologist Jörg R. Bergmann (1993), gossip is a moral genre in which groups of individuals, such as neighbours or friends, evaluate, often with an accusing tone, the behaviour and character of those not present in the conversation and by so doing contribute to the normative achievement of social integration in a community. In private sphere gossip, the gossip producer, gossip recipient and targets of gossip are part of the same gossip triad, which means that their roles may shift in a way that each member of the community has a similar potentiality to become the object of evaluation (ibid. 45–70). Gossip was the medium of mass communication before technical reproduction (see ibid. vii). This is because gossip is a reconstructive genre that is reproduced after reproductions as it reaches new people (ibid. 19–44). In that sense, gossiping may be socially risky for the reputation of gossipers, particularly if they tell false or misleading details about someone who belongs to the gossip community (ibid. 102–107). Thus the target of gossip – despite being temporally absent – can never be entirely excluded because in the next moment that very same person may be the co-gossiper. Perhaps this is why the private sphere of gossip involves the negotiation of moral principles and social norms as situated meanings with the purpose of also identifying with the targets of gossip, not condemning them entirely (see ibid. 130–134).

In contemporary (western) cultures, gossip is not limited to local communities: celebrity gossip serves as the mediated genre of shared emotions, values and moral meanings. While face-to-face gossip touches small communities, *celebrity gossip* speaks to the general category of 'ordinary' people living in society, which also makes it one of the central products in contemporary media participation. In this study, celebrity gossip is defined as the mediated genre that makes individuals' private lives a public issue and by so doing serves as a way of defining the individual. Celebrity gossip comes to life in the meaning-making

practices of tabloids and their audiences (e.g. Hermes 1995; Turner 2004; Hinerman 2006). Celebrities are not only individuals known of their 'well-knownness' (see Boorstin 1992 [1961]: 57), but first and foremost they are cultural exemplars whose behaviour and character as topics of media content are materials for social meaning-making (e.g. Hermes 1995; Rojek 2001: 51–68; Turner 2004: 118; Meyers 2013: 19–20). Celebrities are not symbolically distant from the 'self'; rather they carry moral meanings precisely because they also are seen to represent private, moral selves (Hinerman 2006: 456–458). In general, all the social and mediated practices of defining identity, individuality, nationality, norms and values through making meanings of well-known individuals can be seen as practices of celebrity culture (see e.g. Marshall 2006: 6–7; 2010). I regard celebrity gossip as the basic product of celebrity culture.

Unlike private sphere gossip, mass-mediated gossip is not based on the circle of acquaintanceship between gossip participants and their targets (Bergmann 1993: 51). Celebrities, therefore, easily become 'fair game' of moral discourse that does not threaten the reputation of gossipers or call for their responsibility. That is to say, celebrities are often treated as invulnerable objects 'made' to be evaluated in accordance with one's own pleasures and preferences. Celebrity gossip connects the 'self' to the 'other' and takes place because of distance from celebrities that also are close to the gossipers. The relation of proximity and distance in celebrity culture (see Silverstone 2007: 48) is particularly tense when media texts and audience's online participation concern low-status celebrities who are represented as both ordinary and exceptional individuals, often in terms of moral troubles or health issues, such as addictions (e.g. Tiger 2013). According to Laura Saarenmaa (2010), 'intimate voices' in celebrity gossip magazines are spectacular stories of celebrities' personal miseries that are not authentic confessions but stories meant for commercial purposes.

There seems to be a demand for the spectacular stories of celebrities' downfall. Accordingly, one of the central phenomena in contemporary celebrity culture is *Schadenfreude*, the enjoyment of celebrities' miseries as Steve Cross and Jo Littler (2010) point out. The reactions of mocking and moralizing put 'others' represented by celebrities in the category of moral 'inferiors'. Such categorizations are here understood as *othering*, that is, ways of disidentifying with the person seen to represent 'inferiors' among and like 'us'. One of the prominent groups in celebrity culture often put in the category of moral 'inferiors' is a young, working class or middle class woman – one single body who is seen to represent all moral vices (Tyler 2008; Paasonen & Pajala 2010; Williamson 2010; see also Skeggs 2005). She is called the 'chav', the 'bitch' and the 'attention whore'. Interesting in this sort of othering is that the moral 'inferior' is not the

'suspicious alien', such as an 'illegal' immigrant, but a proximate stranger who is part of the same national and cultural collective as her oppressors (see Skeggs 2005: 970; also Bhabha 1996). Compared with humanitarian appeals in which physically and socially distant sufferers are represented as obvious characters of 'them' (see Orgad 2012: 160–161; Chouliaraki 2013: 54–66), celebrities seen as moral inferiors are examples of 'others' characterized by their status as 'ordinary'. By *ordinary people* I mean individuals that are part of the same culture with media participants and who do not have any specific, achieved merit or position that legitimizes their public visibility (see e.g. Turner 2010).

Online spaces characterize an important shift in celebrity culture by highlighting the active role of the celebrity-gossip audience in cultural production, as Erin A. Meyers (2013: 15) argues. In such spaces of media content, gossip texts and pictures produced by media industries become objects for audience's reactions. This means that gossip no longer has the function of disclosing something in celebrities' lives that is 'secret' or 'private'. Anne Graefer (2013) sees celebrity gossip blogs as discourses of new media participation that make the reactions to celebrity objects an essential content of media discourse itself. In other words, it is the self-expressive participation of those interested in celebrity gossip that reveals something new and not yet widely explored in celebrity culture. However, online comments as reactions to celebrity gossip are not separate from the mass-mediated gossip but belong to the same chain. Consequently, I see also online participants' reactions to celebrity topics as part of celebrity gossip itself.

What is striking in celebrity gossip on blogs and in discussion forums in particular is that preferences are socially organized ways of categorizing certain ordinary people into the group of 'others' (Fairclough 2008; Tyler 2008; Meyers 2010; 2013; Paasonen & Pajala 2010). By these collective preferences, I mean belief systems of domination (particularly sexism, racism and class-based domination) that aim at constructing moral 'inferiors'. Moreover, celebrity gossip does not only concern the 'ordinary' but it also is a genre made *for* – and particularly in online contexts, made *by* – ordinary people characterized by their more or less prominent anonymity in public spaces. According to Joke Hermes (1995), most celebrity gossipers are women and gay men, that is, groups that are often othered in their own culture and society. As Sofia Johansson (2007: 144, 148, 189) argues, tabloid reading offers the disempowered celebrity audience feelings of empowerment and gives hope in terms of social mobility when they have the power to momentarily position themselves above celebrities.

Despite celebrities' 'fame capital', contemporary celebrities and celebrity gossipers are often related to each other through the idea of ordinary people. One

significant group of online gossip participants evaluating celebrities in online spaces is that of (young) women themselves (Fairclough 2008: 10–12, 17–19; Meyers 2010: 227; also Meyers 2013: 11). According to Meyers (2010: 227), most consumers of celebrity gossip blogs are white, heterosexual women belonging to the middle or upper-middle class. Thus the gossip discourse that provides a momentary joy of proximity may always turn against the social group of gossipers who condemn and mock those who are, in one way or another, like themselves. However, celebrity gossip in online spaces, despite its prominently sexist and classist meanings, is highly complex and also involves some forms of resistance (see Meyers 2010: 228, 309, 320). For instance, some celebrity gossip blogs contribute to positive coverage of black celebrity culture, while others aim at challenging sexist ideologies (Meyers 2010: 309). According to Graefer (2013: 240), resistance in online celebrity gossip is related to the playful and humorous style of participation which attacks traditional understanding of 'good' and 'bad', 'proper' and 'improper'. Such playfulness, however, does not mean that online celebrity gossip would be free of oppressive tendencies. As Meyers (2010: 317) argues, the 'fun of gossip and celebrity culture can often mask more troubling readings of celebrities as markers of race, class, gender, and sexuality'.

Positioning that temporarily reinforces proximity between interlocutors evaluating selected 'others' among and like 'us', is here called *emotivist morality*. This moral positioning derives from emotivism. Emotivism, according to Alasdair MacIntyre (2003 [1985]: 11–12), one of its best-known critics, is 'the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character'. The argument of emotivism goes on to claim that because morality is about preferences, it is an individualistic and hence a subjectivist issue (see MacIntyre 2003 [1985]: 6–35; also Sayer 2011: 24, 32–35). Note that both MacIntyre and Sayer see emotivism as a doctrine according to which values and norms in general are in the eye of beholder. Emotivist morality in my study refers to a moral positioning in which the treatment of 'others' is a rhetorical means to create a proximate relationship to the 'other'. Hence, in emotivist morality, preferences are not merely individual but they become socially shared. Emotivist morality as a rhetorical phenomenon is more thoroughly discussed in Section 1.3.

Emotivist morality occurring in self-expressive media contents can be seen as a rhetorical performance that opposes a moral positioning called *conventionalism*. In conventionalism, the discourse of ethics as theoretical formalism is equated with moral positioning. According to Andrew Sayer (ibid. 24, 33, 153–158), conventionalism can be seen as the doctrine of rationalized moral norms which

are not at all sensitive to the specific and complex contexts of human social life. In contemporary individualistic societies, morality is criticized because it is associated with such a restricting form of relationship, as Sayer (2011: 16) argues. In rhetorical terms, conventionalism focuses on the power of the rhetor to effectively and 'objectively' transfer meanings to the audience. The 'objective' distance has its roots in the Enlightenment project in which the educational discourse of deductive reasoning supported rationalistic, and hence impersonal, ways of dealing with moral problems (see Jonsen & Toulmin 1988: 277–278). Such 'objectivity' was later transformed into the modernist idea of public communication in which the relationship of those participating in public forums is ideally characterized by a rational distance (Bauman 1993: 83). The rationalistic participation in public spaces can be seen as an heir of the Enlightenment project according to which a 'universalistic' relationship in public rhetoric is convincing. The systemic and forced form of rationality belongs to the first phase of modernity, which Bauman (2000) calls 'solid' modernity to distinguish it from the modernity's 'liquid' phase. Bauman (ibid. 34) stresses that both phases of modernity, despite their differences, are focused on individualization. While 'solid' modernity is the phase of heavy, rationalistic and fixed individualization, modernity in its 'liquid' form can be understood as a relational and networked phase of individualization involving uncertainty and instability of values and of the purpose of life. To translate Bauman's remarks into the language of rhetorical studies, the rhetoric of solid modernity is an authorial construct while the liquid phase is more dependent on each audience and context in which rhetorical practices take place.

While conventionalism is based on a distant relationship between interlocutors, emotivist morality highlights proximity of those involved in a rhetorical practice. These two moral positionings, albeit seemingly opposed to each other, have one essential thing in common. They both emphasize a certain form of discourse as the ultimate source of positioning the 'self' in relation to the 'other' (see Sayer 2011: 33–34). While conventionalism reflects a rationalized form of moral positioning at the expense of proximity to the 'other', emotivist morality highlights emotional togetherness with the 'other' and at the expense of 'others'.

Both MacIntyre (2003 [1985]) and Sayer (2011) defend a third option: seeing morality as neither formalistic rules nor emotional preferences, but as the practical issue of purpose. Such a practical moral positioning, here called *practical morality*, focuses on virtues which can be defined as dispositions acquired by human beings in order to live a good life and achieve its purpose (see MacIntyre 2003 [1985]: 181–203). A characteristic genre of practical morality is the narrative as the shared story in which people aim at understanding their moral

character in relation to other people (MacIntyre 2003 [1985]: 204–225). Thus narratives, such as autobiographical accounts, are stories that may involve self-reflections of authors (see Linde 1993). By self-reflection, I mean that the 'self' tries to see itself from a distance and, in turn, the distant or distanced being(s) as proximate. Such moral positioning involves norms that are applied in context and seen as 'lived' values. Thus narratives are related to experienced time: something has happened and the narrator evaluates the event at a temporal distance. In self-reflective narratives, proximity and distance are not torn apart between 'other' (the preferred, proximate audience) and 'others' (the distanced audience). In that sense, self-reflection differs from those dissonant self-expressions that contribute to emotivist morality. Self-reflection is closely related to what Bauman (1993: 50–51; 60) means by morality as internally determined identification and the personal moral call that appeals to the responsibility of the 'self'. In Silverstone's (2003; 2007: 47–48; see also Orgad 2011) terms, moreover, positioning based on such critical self-reflection would be called 'proper distance', by which he means a relationship that makes possible to identify with other people, even the mediated faces, through both difference and sameness. Compared with conventionalism in which effective transfer of meanings is central, both emotivist and practical morality are more focused on the audience. While the persuasiveness of emotivist morality is based on the emotions of the audience, practical morality is a way of addressing the audience as a moral equal. The reason why I discussed all three of these categories of moral positioning (conventionalism, emotivist morality, practical morality) is that they characterize rhetors' rhetorical choices of social order involved in their self-expressions.

The expressions of individuals in and through media have become prominent because of *the demotic turn*, which Graeme Turner (2004: 82–85; 2010) defines as the cultural shift of the 21st century that has made the participation of 'ordinary' individuals *the* issue of mediated togetherness, particularly on the Internet. In terms of distance and proximity, the Internet is particularly interesting, since the physical and social distance between interlocutors is so immense, technological and incomprehensible that people aim at overcoming it by creating *intimacy* as the most instant form of proximity (Silverstone 2003). The desire for intimate relationships does not only characterize online participants, but is typical of contemporary media culture in general. In the contemporary *mediapolis*, which Silverstone (2007: 25–55) defines as the shared, technological and mediated space of appearance, appearing trustworthy means reducing distance from the 'other' (ibid. 123). I understand intimacy as an object-focused relationship that wipes out distance between the rhetor and audience. Such intimacy, synonymously called 'aesthetic proximity' (see Bauman 1993: 115; 130–132), is characteristic of participation in online celebrity gossip in

which instant reactions to media artefacts (pictures, videos, texts) representing celebrities become the way of addressing the audience (see Graefer 2013).

Also Robert Arpo (2005: 282–283) describes an online discussion forum in a way that aptly illustrates this intense form of proximity. According to his description, an online discussion forum is like a dark room. We never know whether there is someone communicating with us, so we have to yell and provoke in order to get a response (ibid.). Another relevant description of online, technologized communication comes from Sherry Turkle (2011) who argues that we are 'alone together' in the digital terrain. We use technology to share our personal interests, to seek acceptance and trust by attracting attention through our self-expressions. Consequently, self-expressions are fundamentally rhetorical: they are acts that aim at affecting other people. The understanding of communicative practices as acts is at the heart of rhetorical studies, which provides a useful starting point for the analysis of self-expressions in online celebrity gossip.

Although there is a growing number of empirical studies exploring the ways celebrities and other public figures are evaluated online (e.g. Fairclough 2008; Jerslev 2010; Meyers 2010; Paasonen & Pajala 2010; Graham & Harju 2011; Tileagă 2012; Graefer 2013; Meyers 2013; Tiger 2013; Jerslev 2014), the rhetorical tension of proximity and distance involved in online celebrity gossip has thus far not been explored. Empirical analyses focusing on mediated representations of distant 'others', such as images of starving Africans in humanitarian campaigns, have been conducted (e.g. Orgad 2012: 160–161; Chouliaraki 2013: 54–66). Moreover, Graefer's (2013) study of online gossip blogs focuses on representations of those celebrities who were seen as privileged individuals. What still remains almost untouched is the idea of the ordinariness[2] of 'others' evaluated in self-expressions that are produced and shared daily over the Internet. Thus my study of online self-expressions focusing on celebrities as representatives of ordinary 'others' fills a research gap. Moreover, although many celebrities are globally well known, gossip about their life is also a local issue, invoking moral meaning-making of nationally meaningful themes. Essential for the understanding of the role of distance and proximity in online celebrity gossip is the comparison between culturally and nationally limited contexts (and thus potentially less plural social and geographical environments) and contexts that welcome participants from backgrounds that are geographically and socially spread-out.

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[2] I would like to thank specifically Shani Orgad for encouraging me to find the *problématique* of this study in the ordinariness of 'others' in celebrity culture.

1.2   Aim and research questions

This dissertation explores proximity and distance in self-expressions of English-speaking and Finnish online participants of celebrity gossip. The overall aim of this study is to better understand how the rhetoric of self-expressions in online celebrity gossip characterizes proximity and distance. By exploring distance and proximity as interrelated concepts, this study is consistent with the approach to rhetoric in which the argumentative (or logical) and aesthetic (or emotional) strands are seen to form a synthesis (see e.g. Fisher 1984). Thus argumentative and aesthetic aspects of rhetoric are not inflexibly polar: they are always intertwined with each other in self-expressions. I treat self-expressions as rhetorical 'speeches' made by those who are not known by their name as an indication of their authority but rather remain more or less anonymous. Rather than assuming that emotivist morality is the *only* possible social order online gossip participants contribute to, I explore the celebrity-concerned online comment sections as prominent sites where emotivist morality becomes persuasive, in that it entails proximity between 'us' (online gossip participants and a group they identify with) at the expense of certain 'others' (celebrities as representatives of 'inferior' groups). Although I assume that emotivist morality is to be found in online celebrity gossip, this study should not be read as a normative defence of that moral positioning.

For two reasons, this study focuses on online celebrity gossip representing violence involving celebrities. Firstly, violent acts are based on subjective preferences in treating people and thus involve issues of power and domination made evident by media representations within popular culture (see Fiske 1989: 127–130). Secondly, from the viewpoint of the rhetoric of self-expressions, violence is a particularly interesting phenomenon. As the rhetoricians Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca (2000 [1969]: 54–59, 62) discuss, violence can be understood as the force through which the possibility of the 'other' to make a choice is denied. Thus violence, from that perspective, is the point where persuasion no longer matters. According to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (ibid. 62), violence is given a free hand by sceptics and fanatics, that is, those who attack against the idea of free choice-making important in rhetoric and argumentation. Violence as a rhetorical phenomenon seems like a paradox. How can *rhetorical* (practices based on the freedom of choice of individuals) and *violent* (practices attacking the very idea of individual freedom) expression be one and the same thing? From the point of view of 'ultimate' concepts, violence is to be seen as a special case of rhetoric, like slaying is a special case of identification or war is a special case of peace (see Burke 1969: 19–20). Violence as a special case of rhetoric is involved in the late-modern 'liquidity' or 'lightness' in which

freedom is associated with individuals' free choice-making and acting *as such*, despite the issues of responsibility in the choice-making and acting (see Bauman 2000).

Online forums and other networked contexts are interesting from the viewpoint of rhetorical violence because participation in online spaces is based on individuals' freedom of choice (individuals can find a forum that matches their own interests) but rhetorical practices in those spaces may contribute to crowd behaviour creating more and more sameness. Rhetorical violence is an impulsive reaction that aims at altering the *in-dividual* whole through a freely chosen intimacy that excludes otherness. Thus self-expressions involving rhetorical violence are based on a distance from the empathetic proximity to human beings. At the same time, such self-expressions try to force others to an intimate proximity to themselves. Rhetorical violence, tensely individualist and social at the same time, is characteristic of the comments of online participants of celebrity gossip in which embodied, often humorous, reactions to objects become the way of positioning the 'self' in relation to the audience (see Graefer 2013). Although such aesthetically creative reactions seem to be the sign of 'active' participation of individuals (see ibid. 153), online commenting just for fun may still involve aggressive practices attacking otherness (see Meyers 2010: 317). These tensions provide an interesting starting point for the rhetorical criticism of self-expressions in online celebrity gossip.

Moreover, online gossip comments that are analysed in this study concern domestic violence and fights involving female celebrities. In the Finnish context, research into the various meanings of gendered violence is part of a relatively new academic interest in understanding different types of violence as different kinds of cultural and social problems (Ronkainen & Husso 2013). In other words, meanings of gendered violence are so deeply rooted in culture that self-expressions concerning different types of gendered violence (e.g. men's domestic violence against women or violence between women) may differ from one another. Although the meanings of gendered violence are not the main focus of the present study, I explore online comments on both domestic violence and female celebrities' fights, assuming that the rhetoric of self-expressions is related to cultural meanings given to the two types of gendered violence.

It is noteworthy that in media representations (such as in documentaries and other genres of popular culture) discussing fans who are deeply involved in celebrities' lives, there is the stereotype of 'fan emotivism' in accordance with which fans are shown as pathological beings with an excessive and irrational interest in celebrities (Hills 2007). As Meyers (2010: 228, 309, 320) and Graefer (2013:

240) argue, practices in celebrity culture, such as online celebrity gossip, may also involve moments of intended resistance to common sense meanings and values. Thus emotivist morality in online celebrity gossip is not irrational but it can be understood as rhetorical performance that is impulsive *for a reason*. To avoid blindly supporting the stereotype of 'fan emotivism', I have chosen a rhetorical approach that helps to uncover, contextualize and understand the expressions of those interested in celebrities. I also bear in mind the potential resistance that online celebrity gossip may involve. However, such resistance also is analysed critically in this study because the playful expression common to online comments evaluating celebrities may involve oppressive meanings (see Meyers 2010: 317).

The present study is based on the New Rhetoric, focusing on rhetorical criticism of the moral dimension of persuasion (see Kuypers & King 2009: 8). Roughly put, while the moral dimension is involved in everyday persuasion in the form of evaluations of people, rhetorical criticism is an art that aims at uncovering such evaluations and thereby producing critical understanding of human communication (see Kuypers & King 2009: 8; Kuypers 2009: 13). In other words, those utilizing rhetorical criticism as their approach aim at increasing the understanding of the specific qualities of rhetorical artefacts (i.e. texts and other human-made pieces of art) based on clearly defined criteria (see German 1985: 87). Successful rhetorical criticism, therefore, is liberating when it offers critics, as well as their audiences, new insights into persuasive texts and enhances awareness of the persuasive means promoted by these texts (Brummett 1994: 76–77; 102–103). The use of rhetorical criticism as the ethical approach of this study is indebted to the North American rhetorical tradition in which rhetoric is not seen as mere stylistic tricks or forms of argumentation but rather is regarded as the essential art of human communication. Moreover, although women are a central group of 'others' in celebrity culture, rhetorical criticism in this study is a way of approaching the categorizations of moral 'inferiority' in online celebrity gossip more broadly, without any particular feminist point of view.

Although I position this study in the broad field of rhetorical studies, rhetorical criticism as practiced here should be seen as multidisciplinary. Rhetorical concepts form the core of rhetorical criticism in my study, but I also utilize findings and ideas originating from media studies and cultural studies on the moral and social relations of human beings. Findings and discussions in these fields are significant when explaining the specific contexts that surround online self-expressions. As an approach to communication, the rhetorical criticism of this study starts with the idea that communication is never a simple or neutral transfer of meanings, but rather involves meaning-making struggles, tensions and

ambiguities in terms of otherness. In this sense, the rhetorical criticism of the present study approaches communication as a relational practice grounded in social (inter)action and representations of otherness and not in the efficient transfer of meaning determined by sheer human will (see Gehrke 2009: 153; see also Orgad 2012: 15–51).

I approach the relationship of proximity and distance in self-expressions by reviving, and revising, the concept of *ethos* as the idea of character essential for the Ancient polis. Particularly the Aristotelian ethos involving both reason and emotion is essential when approaching the tension of distance and proximity in online participation. Although the idea of the individual was not as prevalent in the Ancient polis as it is in the contemporary mediapolis (about the mediapolis, see Silverstone 2007), the Aristotelian ethos deals with how the speech of one single speaker is addressed to the audience and contributes to the *collective* issue of trust. The verb *contribute* is central here, because in the Aristotelian ethos, the 'self', the rhetor, is intrinsically social. Ethos exclusively lies neither in a person nor in a community but rather is circulated throughout and among the speaker, audience, scene and polis, as Kristie S. Fleckenstein (2005; 2007) states. Because of its social and communal meaning, the concept of rhetorical ethos, particularly the Aristotelian one, should be revived (and also revised) in the digital era in which no single rhetor is credited as the master of speech (e.g. Warnick 2004; Fleckenstein 2005; 2007; Pildal Hansen 2007; Losh 2009: 47–95).

According to Aristotle, ethos is the means of persuasion based on character through which rhetors construct their credibility in front of the audience (*Rhetoric* I.ii.1356a: 3–4)[3]. Ethos has three parts: 1) *phronesis* (practical wisdom, good sense or reason); 2) *arete* (good moral character, good moral values, moral virtue); and 3) *eunoia* (goodwill or emotions, the cooperative principle of ethos) (*Rhetoric* II.i.1378a: 5; see also Miller 2001: 270; 2004: 198). Arete (moral virtue) is central to the understanding of ethos. According to Aristotle, 'virtues are productive of good things and matters of action' (*Rhetoric* I.vi.1362b: 6). Virtues, moreover, contribute to the golden mean (*Nicomachean Ethics* II.vi–ix; see also Urmson 1973). The point that Aristotle does not explicitly bring up in his discussion of virtues is that deficiency and excess, the two extremes, may, in some situations, characterize virtues (Urmson 1973: 225). Accordingly, virtue, the arete part of ethos, is not necessarily the state of a character that already is in

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[3] In the citations referring to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, the first number (e.g. I) refers to a book, the second one (e.g. ii) to a chapter and the third one (e.g. 1356a) to the so-called Bekker numbers. I use the numbers (e.g. 3–4) after the Bekker numbers to refer to specific parts of each chapter to be found in Kennedy's translation of Aristotle's Rhetoric (1991).

balance; it may also involve oscillation between two extremes. Thus virtues are situated in action as well (see e.g. Fleckenstein 2007).

This study explores the self-expressions of online participants of celebrity gossip as 'speeches' contributing to ethos through its parts, that is, phronesis, arete and eunoia. I focus on argumentation, autobiographical telling and emotional appeal as ways through which relationships to 'others' are utilized as rhetorical tactics of addressing the preferred audience, that is, the 'other'. I regard *phronesis* as the distance between the rhetor and audience, *arete* as the rhetoric of balance and oscillation between distance and proximity and *eunoia* as the proximity between the rhetor and audience. These three components of ethos are seen here as *means of persuasion*. They are by no means static parts of ethos but parts that can move and change their relation to one another through rhetorical acts in context. The relationship of these three means of persuasion is essential to ethos. Note that what I mean by phronesis and arete as empirical concepts has to be understood in a more descriptive sense than what Aristotle, for the most part, argues in *Rhetoric*. When using these Greek terms, I refer to their rhetorical use as a means of persuasion, not the virtues of a person as such.

Moreover, by constructing their own ethos, people try to affect the ethos of others, and by evaluating the ethos of other people, they themselves try to appear trustworthy. Thus ethos as the connection between the individual and collective is at the heart of the rhetorical idea of community in which the 'self' is positioned in relation to other people, as Nedra Reynolds (1993: 327–334) argues. Community, as a rhetorical concept, can be seen as the social construct connecting the rhetor (the 'self') and audience (the 'other') both intellectually and emotionally based on common experiences, beliefs, stories and other ways of making meanings, as Carolyn R. Miller (1993: 212) suggests. The rhetorical concept of ethos is essential for online communication because it involves the idea that our self-expressions never exist for their own sake but rather are invitations to form a community.

As mentioned above, the Aristotelian ethos is an ambiguous concept. It has both a normative and a descriptive meaning.[4] Aristotle (*Rhetoric* I.ii.1356a: 4) had a specific ethos in mind when arguing that 'we believe fair-minded people to a greater extent and more quickly [than we do others]'. This description of ethos goes hand in hand with Aristotle's ethical ideal related to a person's moral

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[4] I would specifically like to thank Carolyn R. Miller for helping me to see Aristotle's ethos as a concept that has both normative and descriptive dimensions.

character. From that perspective, some means of using language are naturally more persuasive than others, and ethos is based on these particular means of persuasion.

However, in Chapter 8 of the first book of *Rhetoric*, Aristotle approaches ethos as a wider concept when discussing the kinds of characters that are dependent on each form of political organization (e.g. aristocracy, democracy, tyranny) (*Rhetoric* I.viii.1366a: 6). This indicates that although Aristotle held his own preferences concerning what kind of character is trustworthy, his concept of ethos is also applicable when approaching trustworthiness in various kinds of communities. In line with Aristotle's remarks that ethos may vary in accordance with each community in question, the present study does not limit the empirical analysis of ethos to any particular idea of distance and proximity. Accordingly, this study holds that it is possible that online celebrity gossip involves self-expressions of conventionalism or practical morality, although emotivist morality can be assumed the most typical moral positioning in celebrity gossip.

The descriptive definition of ethos is particularly relevant when analysing online communication, since such discourse involves the idea of ethos as the process of earning trust (see Miller 2001; Mitra & Watts 2002: 484, 486, 495–496; Miller 2004; Warnick 2004). As Aristotle (*Rhetoric* I.ii.1356a: 4) argues, persuasion based on ethos 'should result from the speech, not from a previous opinion that the speaker is a certain kind of person'. In online contexts, similarly, 'it is the quality of the performance that counts', as Barbara Warnick (2004: 264) stresses. According to Fleckenstein (2005: 331, 334; see also 2007), ethos in online, digital and networked spaces, which she calls cyberethos, is meaningful as a discursive pattern, not as the character of an individual avatar or a user. Because of the various performances and the diversity of potential audiences in online contexts, I do not see the three parts of ethos (phronesis, arete, eunoia) as limited to any specific normative idea of what ethos 'should be'. Since this study is an empirical research, I assume that trustworthiness may vary in accordance with each audience. Thus trustworthiness to a Finnish-speaking online audience of national celebrity gossip may mean a different thing compared with English-speaking audience interested in American and highly commercialized celebrities.

In this study, *phronesis* (logic) refers to reasoning that indicates a participant's capacity to draw conclusions and create online comments legitimized by the community (such as 's/he did wrong because s/he hit her/him'). Phronesis in online comment sections does not necessarily have a practical nature, but it may serve as the logic for sharing abstract, distancing rules (such as 'an eye for an eye') or emotion-laden preferences based on cumulative interaction (such as 'the

bitch deserved it!' 'yes she did!' 'LOL'). Emotion-laden preferences as comments posted on celebrity gossip sites can be seen as indicators of a kind of persuasion that is not logical in terms of a linear or hierarchical structure but rather is based on cumulative fragments. Such fragments, according to Jeffrey T. Grabill and Stacey Pigg (2012), are characteristic of the 'messy rhetoric' online. I regard such emotional sharing that takes place without careful reasoning as a sign of emotivist morality.

I assume that *arete* (moral virtue) can be found in narratives involving autobiographical moralizing based on experiences that online participants tell as stories of their own life. Through autobiographical moralizing, online participants may, potentially, put themselves in the place of celebrities and thereby indicate their own moral character (such as 'I feel for Rihanna. I know how it hurts if someone insults you when you are innocent...'). In general, autobiographical moralizing can be understood as a narrative genre, which, as MacIntyre (2003 [1985]: 204–225) states, involves the potential to deal with practical aspects of life. Although autobiographical telling is often regarded as a prominent characteristic of online forums and blogs (e.g. Arpo 2005: 295–296; Östman 2008; 2010; 2011), online discourse seems to reject the narrative structure when allowing 'no ending' and no moral explanation of media content, as Shani Orgad (2012: 132, 195–196) argues. The lack of closure and the absence of moral interpretations can also be seen as the characteristics of emotivist morality as it emerges through co-produced mockery attacking those categorized into the group of moral 'inferiors' in online-gossip discourse. Such rhetoric of proximity between interlocutors would oppose, or at least set aside, the self-reflective moral considerations of online participants.

Finally yet importantly, *eunoia* (emotions) is here defined as the sharing of emotional expressions (see e.g. Miller 2004: 212–213). In emotivist morality, eunoia takes place as an asymmetrical form of sympathy that reinforces togetherness between 'us' at the expense of 'others' ('I hate her!', 'Me too. The bitch deserved it!'). Thus eunoia is not just proximity but may create distance through othering as well. This study holds that emotion-laden self-expressions, however emotivist, are not merely expressive or arise purely unprompted from within; they are evaluative and informative because they have referents (Sayer 2006: 457). According to Sara Ahmed (2004), emotions are reactions towards something and about something. They are not merely reactions to individuals; they are attached to objects as well, contributing to a certain *relationship* that makes them the shared basis of a community. Emotions may also be reactions to material objects, such as photographs, which occupy 'the spaces between people and people and people and things' (see Edwards 2005: 27). In accordance with

these remarks, I consider emotions to be reactions characterizing relationships between people and between people and objects. These relationships, moreover, come to life as evaluative uses of language (see Martin & White 2005). While emotions connecting people, such as online gossip participants, are signs of proximity, emotions as a person's reaction to an object may also characterize distance. This is the case in celebrity gossip where the gossipers' emotional reactions towards celebrities may work to distance these objects of evaluation from gossipers. Hence some emotions, such as disgust, are involved in the practice of disidentification. Disgust is a reaction that distances 'us' from uncomfortable proximity to otherness (Probyn 2000: 131). Disgust, therefore, also represents an intimate relationship to objects: it cannot take place without intimacy as the first relation (ibid.). Through disgust, certain characters, such as working class women, are dehumanized and categorized as moral 'inferiors' (see Tyler 2008).

I argue that eunoia and values go hand in hand. Since emotions are reactions towards something and about something (e.g. Ahmed 2004), they contribute to values as desirable goods (e.g. Sayer 2011). Thus value can be seen as the good to which emotion is attached. The classification of values applied to this study is derived from Richard Lanham's (2006) idea of a motive spectrum (purpose, game, play) as combined with Shalom Schwartz's (1992; 2007) concepts of moral and self-interested values. According to Lanham (2006: 166–176), purpose is the serious practical and moral motive of everyday life, whereas game is the competitive side of human nature, while play is the aesthetic and pleasure-oriented motive that often serves a formal idea or mere style. Moreover, Lanham (ibid. 172, 182) argues that play and game emerge spontaneously in everyday life. Purpose, on the contrary, is more conscious and aims at problem solving (see ibid. 166–176). In the categorization of values suggested by Schwartz (1992; 2007), purpose resonates with moral values (universalism, benevolence, conformity, tradition, security), game consists of values of self-interest in competition with other people (power, achievement) and play involves values of self-interest without regard to other people (self-direction, stimulation, hedonism). In particular, game and play as signs of spontaneity can be seen as rhetorical motives characterizing emotivist morality. Compared with purpose, game and play are more focused on reactions to objects. Such objectifying is common to participation in online celebrity gossip in which shared reactions to a celebrity object form the feeling of togetherness (e.g. Graefer 2013).

In addition, another aspect of rhetoric in online environments is that when participants turn against the community's expectations, they are judged. This judgement can at times take the form of removing their comment or even their

entire profile (e.g. Gurak 1999: 247; Reid 1999: 118–120, 130–132; Silverstone 2003: 481; also 2007: 138; Orgad 2007: 37–38; Warnick 2010). Such discourse-internal moral features are seen here as ways of *ethos control*. In online communication, ethos control is made possible by the interactive nature of togetherness of participants who continuously change their roles by turning from the rhetor into the audience member and vice versa. When performance matters (Warnick 2004: 264), such performance is also controlled by online co-participants. Ethos sanctioned by a group entails that ethos is a communal issue (see Reynolds 1993: 327). The way ethos is understood in this study is illustrated in Figure 1.
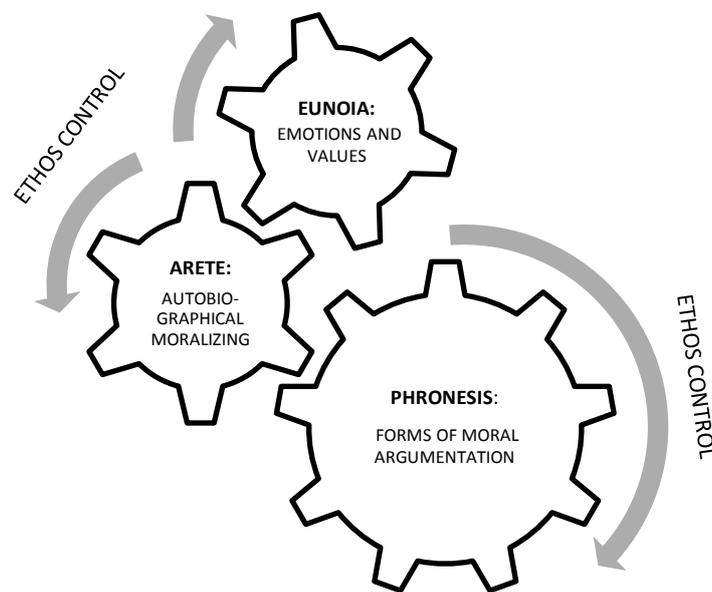
Figure 1.   Ethos construction and ethos control.

As can be seen in Figure 1, this study approaches ethos as the concept consisting of: 1) forms of moral argumentation (phronesis), 2) autobiographical moralizing (arete) and 3) emotions and values (eunoia). These three components are seen here as the means of persuasion from which ethos is constructed. Moreover, Figure 1 illustrates ethos control as the force that turns these cogs. Thus ethos control is not an additional means of persuasion; it represents the collective power that makes ethos construction itself a normative issue. By controlling autobiographical moralizing as well as values and forms of moral argumentation in the construction of a trustworthy ethos, participants in online celebrity gossip can find a shared normative ground for their togetherness.

Based on the idea of ethos construction and ethos control represented above, this study answers four specific research questions, each of which concerns one aspect of ethos as shown in Figure 1:

1. What kind of moral argumentation do Finnish- and English-language online participants of celebrity gossip use? (phronesis as the logic or distance between online gossip participants);

2. What kind of rhetorical function does autobiographical moralizing serve in online celebrity gossip? (arete as the self-reflection of online gossip participants positioning themselves in relation to other people);

3. What kinds of values do Finnish and English-language online participants of celebrity gossip aim at sharing by utilizing evaluative language? (eunoia as the proximity between online gossip participants);

4. What means of ethos control do online gossipers utilize to support celebrity mockery as the expected way of online participation? (discourse-internal normativity as the means of contributing to ethos).

I assume that ethos in digital environments is a sited construction that is related to online participants as embodied or corporal beings (see Fleckenstein 2005; 2007). By this I mean that proximity and distance in online comment sections are tied to proximity and distance as physical and symbolic constrains and possibilities of participants. Comparing nationally non-limited online-gossip contexts (English-language comment sections about celebrities who are globally well known and for the most part American) with a nationally and culturally more homogeneous group (Finnish-language online discussions about national celebrities) is interesting for two reasons.

Firstly, the industrial production of celebrity culture in the American context can be seen as more strongly commercialized compared with the Finnish context. The American celebrity culture originates back to Hollywood industry of the first decades of the 20th century (e.g. Dyer 2006). In the early phases of Hollywood industry, celebrity culture took place as the worship of stars whose status was seen as much higher than that of an average person (ibid.). Today, the worship of public personalities is no longer the primary way of participating in celebrity culture. Because of the media coverage of personal problems of individuals sold in the form of celebrity gossip, celebrity culture also takes place as the evaluation of low-status celebrities both through serious moralizing and humorous participation. In the American context, celebrity images are products of entertainment industry the spectacular rhetoric of which is well-known by the

active and media-savvy online audience. Humour as the participation of such critical audience challenges the more 'serious' moral meanings given to celebrity. Particularly in English-language online spaces, celebrities are treated as humorous objects to be made fun of (see Fairclough 2008; Meyers 2010; 2013; Graefer 2013). It is interesting from the perspective of research whether the ways of treating celebrities in online gossip in Finnish are more akin to the view in which a celebrity is still taken seriously, as a 'real' moral individual, compared with English-language discussions of American and highly commercialized celebrities. I assume that Finnish-language online comments on celebrity gossip are more focused on serious moralizing compared with English-language and more humorous posts.

Secondly, it is relevant to distinguish rhetorical challenges of online communication in different contexts. In multicultural text-based online contexts in particular, credibility may be problematic because meanings are so easily misunderstood, both unintentionally and deliberately (DuVal Smith 1999: 156). This is because moral uncertainty is higher in environments distant from one's own home groups and milieus (see Luckmann 2002: 27–28). As Michael Walzer (1994) puts it, there is more moral 'thickness' at home than abroad. It is interesting to see, therefore, whether English-language online participants deal with moral uncertainty by creating stronger emotional intimacy in gossip discourse when compared to Finnish-language participants who share Finland as their cultural home beyond the online context. Hence Finnish participants are connected to one another through national proximity. In addition, the tension between 'local' and 'global' has also been discussed in recent work within media studies. As Orgad (2012: 38–41) stresses, the strict boundaries between 'global' and 'local' should be challenged whenever analysing media contents. According to her premise, 'global' should not be equated with the contents of transnational or international media. At times, meanings made by 'local' groups may involve even more 'global' aspects than globally circulated media contents (ibid.). This study holds, therefore, that English-language online commenting on globally well-known celebrities is not necessarily more 'global' but, on the contrary, may be more strictly 'local' and more prone to emotional homogeneity than Finnish online discourse on national celebrities.

1.3   Moral rhetoric and emotivist morality

When dealing with moral communication in societies, the idea of the audience (be it present or imagined) is central because it characterizes the potential connection the 'self' may have to the 'other' (Malmberg 2012: 19). This idea goes back to

Adam Smith (2006 [1759]) who saw the ability to imagine 'oneself' in the place of the 'other' as essential for moral beings. In rhetorical terms, the 'rhetor' *identifies* with the 'audience', as Burke (1969) has famously suggested. Through identification, rhetors put themselves in the place of other people and by so doing suggest that 'I' am (or want to be) similar with another in this or that respect (see ibid. 20–21). Such identification requires ethos through which the rhetor and audience can trust each other. In this study, I use the term 'moral rhetoric' by which I mean persuasion based on ethos (the character regarded as good and trustworthy). Thus what is *seen as* good and trustworthy by online participants of celebrity gossip is the focus of this study. In this section, I will first describe in detail what I mean by moral rhetoric as a concept of rhetorical criticism. After that, I deal with emotivist morality as a *specific* way of positioning the 'self' in relation to the 'other'.

The present study approaches morality as a rhetorical issue, which involves the idea that one makes moral choices in communication and language use in context (see Kuypers & King 2009: 8). In rhetorical studies, the specific temporal and spatial context surrounding persuasion is called *kairos* (for a rhetorical definition of kairos, see e.g. Miller 2002; also Stephenson 2009). Kairos can be thought of as the perfect time and place for a text (verbal or visual) to be successfully persuasive. The analysis of kairos is central to understanding why emotivist morality flourishes in mediated contexts, especially online. However, it is also noteworthy to stress here that specific technologies, such as digital devices, are to be neither embraced nor rejected, since they are not good or bad in themselves but have potential for both positive and negative implications, depending on how they are used (see Inkinen 1999: 282–283). Thus online digital contexts become normative and evaluative sites with particular rhetorical effects only when they are *made* such through posting and commenting.

It is worth noting that because of the split of emotion and reason – the consequences of which are to be found in the moral thinking of modern societies (Sayer 2011: 24) – 'rhetoric' has a bad reputation, for it is seen to represent the opposite of sincerity, truth and good intentions (Lanham 2006: 19). This separation of 'is' and 'ought' goes back to Plato who attacked rhetoric in general because he saw the 'danger' of emotions when they become more persuasive than reason (see e.g. Benardete 1991). This study holds that 'rhetoric' itself is to be seen as a neutral phenomenon for '[t]he art of rhetoric has never had a single form, nor has it ever stabilized' (Gehrke 2009: 162). Thus the rhetoric of emotivist morality, in which emotions matter more than careful and open moral reasoning, is a specific type of rhetoric that takes place in a particular kairos, through specific persuasive means.

This study is based on a so-called new rhetorical understanding in which everyday communication is approached as a rhetorical phenomenon, especially when dealing with moral issues involving both emotion (feelings or sentiments attached to values) and reason (see Burke 1969; Jonsen & Toulmin 1988; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1951; 2000 [1969]). The new rhetorical approach to morality is derived from Aristotle's model in which rhetoric is 'an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion' (see *Rhetoric* I.ii.1355a: 1). He, moreover, saw these means of persuasion as consisting of *ethos* (the moral character of the speaker), *pathos* (emotions) and *logos* (reasoning) (see *Rhetoric* I.ii.1356a: 3). Through the means of persuasion, the rhetor (the speaker or writer) and the audience (the person or group of people as the target of persuasion or those persuaded by the rhetor's message) form a community (see Miller 1993: 212). In this study, community is understood as the potential of togetherness involved in a rhetor's self-expression as well as the actualized togetherness involved in visible interaction between the rhetor and audience (see ibid.). In online forums, community building does not necessarily involve strong commitments in terms of reasoned interaction but is often based on temporary sharing of preferences. The characteristics of online communities are more thoroughly discussed in Section 2.1.

The rhetorical approach to morality utilized in this study holds that ethos is the central means of persuasion. Ethos can be seen to involve both logos and pathos (see Miller 2004). Logos means distance between the rhetor and audience and is based on the idea that 'you' and 'me' are separate embodied beings and to form a community 'we' need reasoning on a shared basis. Pathos, on the contrary, is the sign of proximity that emotionally connects those who are building a community. Compared with logos-centric communities of the rhetor and audience, communities focusing on pathos are more strongly based on the requirement of sameness between these two rhetorical participants. I understand ethos as the combination of reason (phronesis as logos) and emotions (eunoia as pathos), with the arete component (moral virtue) forming the core of the character. According to Aristotle, phronesis and arete are virtues that have their origin in a character, whereas goodwill is a relativistic part of persuasion (see *Rhetoric* II.i.1378a: 7). For Aristotle, phronesis is a reasoned capacity related to moral practice (acts) (*Nicomachean Ethics* VI.i, VI.v–vii, VI.xii). Compared with phronesis, which is more distant, identification has a stronger function in arete and eunoia. According to Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* II.vi, II.ix), arete is the state of the character that makes a person good, while moral badness is the nature of a speaker who does not say what s/he really thinks (*Rhetoric* II.i.1378a: 6). For Aristotle, therefore, moral 'badness' is associated with rhetors who do not believe their own words. Arete, therefore, can be seen as a person's capacity to act responsibly in

moral relationships. Eunoia, moreover, is to be found in sympathetic intimacy with the audience (Miller, 2001: 270; 2004: 205–213). In general, however, emotions also are separating people. It is because of emotions that people's judgements differ from one another, as Aristotle points out (*Rhetoric* II.i.1378a: 8). This study holds that eunoia as goodwill towards the audience may involve the risk of violence when the rhetor requires intimacy and does not give any choice to the audience (see Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 2000 [1969]: 62). Such intimacy is obvious in rhetoric which contributes to community by dehumanizing 'others'.

To sum up, moral rhetoric consists of the abovementioned persuasive means (phronesis, arete, eunoia) that are utilized in a speech (i.e. written or spoken text) when contributing to a trustworthy ethos. Persuasion is a rhetorical practice that is related to acts: it aims at affecting the behaviour of people, the way they 'ought' to be and 'ought' to treat other human beings (see Burke 1969: 54; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 2000 [1969]: 27–29). Moreover, rhetoric involves the idea that also language use and other social meaning-making practices are acts. The speech (a text, written or spoken) as the rhetors' self-expression is the indicator of their ethos, since 'a speaker runs the risk that the hearer will regard him [sic] as intimately connected with his speech', as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (2000 [1969]: 317) argue. Interestingly, the same notion is to be found in the remarks of Bergmann. He argues that evaluating and making judgements are risky for their users because judgements of people may always lead to 'counter-moralization' in which the moralizers themselves are judged (Bergmann 1998: 287–288). Thus self-expressions involving moral rhetoric are both targets and tools of ethos control. These remarks are in line with the notion that ethos is a collective issue sanctioned in each given community (see Reynolds 1993: 327).

Thus far, I have discussed morality as a rhetorical phenomenon in general terms. Emotivist morality, to which I will now turn, is a specific rhetorical phenomenon in which emotions (eunoia) are highlighted. The use of evaluative language based on liking and disliking that aims at becoming the shared basis of a certain community is at the heart of emotivist morality. Moreover, emotivist morality operates on the borderlines of the private (understood here as closed communication with a limited inclusiveness) and public (understood here as communication with the sphere of influence beyond families, friends or neighbours).

Characteristic of emotivist morality are both the second persona (Black 1970) and the third persona (Wander 1984). While the second persona refers to the audience implied in discourse as the preferred listeners (or readers), as Edwin Black (1970: 111–112) suggests, the third persona, according to Philip Wander (1984: 209), is

the absent group of people that consists of the 'audiences rejected or negated through the speech and/or the speaking situation'. Neither the second persona nor the third persona is a concrete construct; they are more or less ideological constructions of 'us' and 'them'. Wander's idea of the third persona is close to Bauman's (1993: 112–116) remarks on the Third, although they are not entirely the same thing. The Third refers to the existence of 'others' in a society while the 'third persona' means the rhetorical exclusion of these 'others' when contributing to emotional togetherness. In other words, the third persona can be seen as any given group excluded as moral 'inferiors' when defining who 'we' (i.e. the community of the rhetor and the second persona) are. These notions of the moral rhetoric differ from the remarks of the rhetorician Celeste M. Condit who argues that the rhetorical construction of morality in public is more egalitarian than, and a more democratic alternative to, morality in small, private communities (see Condit 1987)[5].

Although the idea of public morality can be seen as egalitarian (see Condit 1987), it should not be taken as an empirical truth – as something that the moral rhetoric in public forums at all times and in all places necessarily is. Indeed, emotivist morality with oppressive tendencies is prominent in various publicly circulated contents that penetrate individuals' everyday lives in persuading them to treat some people as 'others'. Thus the *individualistic* nature of preferences, as MacIntyre's (2003 [1985]) remarks on emotivism seem to hold, no longer applies as such in societies that highlight the role of *shared* sentiments as the basis of morality (see Vivian 2002: 233–237). According to Bradford Vivian (2002: 236) the 'modernist ideal of an autonomous individual, endowed with an essential capacity for reason and agency prior to his or her passage through the gates of society, loses its former ethos in a cultural epoch shaped by unprecedented social heterogeneity and interdependence'. He goes on to say, the 'widespread contemporary experience of such heterogeneity and interdependence cannot be explained by principles of reason, utility, or citizenship, but by the function of a collective aesthetic, a shared sentiment' (ibid.). Emotivist morality can flourish because of such shared sentiments that contribute to a dissonant ethos in which proximity and distance aim at splitting the rhetor. In emotivist morality, shared sentiments come to life through the practice of dividing people into groups and distancing certain people in the name of proximity to the preferred audience. Characteristic of these distanced 'others' is their ordinariness and everydayness.

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[5] Condit (1987) explicitly defends the rhetorical construction of *public* morality. According to her, publicly constructed morality takes place as 'moral crafting' that forces people from various social backgrounds to sacrifice self-interest and find a consensus over and over again.

As the doctrine of shared emotions, emotivist morality focuses especially on eunoia. Emotivist morality, therefore, can be seen as a morality based on epideictic (demonstrative) rhetoric. According to Aristotle (*Rhetoric* I.iii.1358b: 3–6), epideictic rhetoric is persuasion based on praise or blame in the present time. As Burke (1969: 71–72) argues, epideictic rhetoric, as the rhetoric of 'display', aims at winning praise in the love of words for their own sake. In the *New Rhetoric*, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (2000 [1969]: 48), moreover, find a connection between epideictic rhetoric and aesthetics when arguing that an epideictic speech deals with what is beautiful or ugly. It may not aim at changing values as much as reinforcing those already accepted (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 2000 [1969]: 51, 54). Epideictic rhetoric, according to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (2000 [1969]: 47–51), is not necessarily a sign of domination, but it is central when arguing values in general. Epideictic rhetoric also has a pedagogical function for it aims at teaching values and morality to the audience, as in, for instance, religious settings (ibid.; see also Willén 2012: 81).

According to Marcus Willén (2012) an epideictic speech involves characteristics of both public and private rhetoric. In his analysis of the rhetoric of the eighteenth-century Swedish statesman, Reuterholm, Willén suggests that Freemasonry speeches are typical examples of epideictic rhetoric in which both private (friendship-based and emotional) and public (political) aspects are involved. If epideictic rhetoric in public spaces turns into persuasion based on exclusion of particular 'others', it involves characteristics of emotivist morality. Rhetors of such proximity try to please the second persona (a preferred audience) and mock and judge the third persona in order to become socially approved in the eyes of the preferred audience. This is why epideictic rhetoric always potentially involves persuasion based on domination and power.

Celebrity culture can be seen as a fertile terrain for epideictic rhetoric. This is because celebrity culture is the field of symbolic repetition producing celebrities for the rhythms of success and decline based on their own 'metronome beat', which emphasizes 'an eternal present shaped in the past, already shaping the future to be made', as Sean Redmond (2014: 120) argues. This argument is in line with the remarks of Daniel J. Boorstin (1992 [1961]: 45–76) who sees celebrities as human 'pseudo-events', that is, artificial beings made for contemporary preferences through a repetitive technique. The repetitive logic of celebrity culture can be found in the topics of celebrity gossip concerning love affairs and divorces, personal success and addiction, new beginnings and final collapses. Such individual tragedies may seem like they would be authentically confessed by 'inner selves' despite the fact that they are planned for commercial purposes

(see Bauman 2000: 86). Thus celebrity culture represents its own repetitive logic more than the 'individuality' of any particular celebrity.

Moreover, participation in celebrity culture as a rhetorical practice highlights the role of style in community building. According to Barry Brummett (2008: 102–103), in consumer participation surrounded by entertainment industries and popular culture, a shared style is legitimized as the norm that rules the community's judgement and thus ties community members together. As Lanham (2006: 171, 221) also suggests, albeit cleverly distancing himself from the judging tone of his argument, in western entertainment-oriented cultures moral guidance is sought in a loyalty to form by transforming meanings from the field of 'aesthetic' to that of 'moral'. Through this moral doctrine, 'style has become the new basis for moral judgements' for those unsure of their religion and sceptical of traditional politics (Brummett 2008: 102). In such epideictic togetherness, appearances and performances in the present give meaning for the community and for the 'self'. Note that the criticism targeting the switched roles of 'aesthetic' and 'moral' in Brummett's (2008: 102–103) remarks does not mean he sees 'aesthetic', as such, as 'bad' or meaningless.

In rhetorical studies, and this is my interpretation, 'aesthetic' is often synonymously used with 'stylistic' and it refers to what is persuasive and typically emotional in rhetors' speeches. 'Moral' (or 'ethical' because many rhetoricians do not make a distinction between 'moral' and 'ethical'), conversely, is associated with the mental places or 'topoi' representing a community's values and virtues to which self-expressions are related (see e.g. Fisher 1984; Fleckenstein 2007). Fleckenstein (2007) for instance, argues that there is no 'aesthetic' without 'ethical'. By this she means what is good or virtuous does not merely lie in appearances, such as words, gestures or pictures as expressions of the rhetor, but rather ethos 'is dispersed throughout the ecology of speaker, audience, scene, and city-state' (ibid.). This argument is in line with Lanham's (2006) suggestion according to which oscillations between looking AT and looking THROUGH are central to the relationship of style (appearances) and substance (deeper values and purpose). However, Brummett's (2008: 102–103) criticism of the shifting roles of the 'aesthetic' and 'moral' is that there is no oscillation between the two paradigms at all; they simply change places with each other. If 'moral' becomes 'aesthetic' and vice versa, there is nothing 'deeper' for the construction of a community, and moral positioning becomes an emotivist problem.

Moreover, I see here a connection to Bauman's (2000) criticism of 'liquid modernity'. In liquid modernity, particularly individuals' identities become fluid;

they are under constant change and recreation (ibid. 31–32). In rhetorical terms, characteristic of liquid modernity is a relativist ethos that is to be found in the in-between spaces of the rhetor and audience (see Reynolds 1993). The relativist ethos requires proximity, even intimacy, as the relationship of the rhetor and the addressed audience. By 'late' or 'liquid' modernity, I refer to the era of culture and communication where rhetors and their audiences are faced with uncertainty concerning what is 'real' and what should be taken seriously. Thus the struggles and complexities of late modernity are issues of rhetorical ethos. Often 'late modernity' and 'postmodernism' are seen as synonyms. However, I understand postmodernism as a stage in which the aesthetic and superficial has overcome what is serious or deeper. In this study, I prefer 'late modernity' to 'postmodernism' because the relationship between the real (or serious) and aesthetic is still a negotiable source of ethos in media culture, which is evident in online celebrity gossip.

In the late-modern phase, mediated performance 'here and now' is essential. Participation in the online spaces of celebrity gossip can be seen as a prototype of mediated performance for it takes place through intimacy with objects (pictures, videos, texts) representing celebrities (see Graefer 2013). In such 'aesthetic proximity', the 'other' (the Other) becomes a faceless group representing the nearness of the crowd (Bauman 1993: 115; 130–132). Intimacy with objects in aesthetic proximity ignores all concerns of otherness. Both the addressed audience and the 'others' represented by objects get a mere material value to which the 'self' is intimately related. Thus in relation to otherness, intimacy with objects is a distancing phenomenon. MacIntyre's (2003 [1985]) remarks on emotivism closely relate to Bauman's concept of liquid morality and aesthetic proximity. According to MacIntyre (2003 [1985]: 58–59), if human beings have no moral essence, they are no longer functional subjects with a certain life purpose (see also Bauman & Donskis 2013: 37–40). Current celebrity culture contributes to liquidity for it 'presents us with figures to identify with but asks us to see or experience these embodied ties as loose, free-floating' (Redmond 2014: 23–24). Accordingly, celebrity culture is a realm of intimacy at the same time as it also abandons personal commitments and a deeper motive to understand the 'other' or 'others'.

In rhetorical studies, 'liquidity' is discussed when dealing with 'authorless' environments, and it is thus often associated with communication in digital contexts, particularly in comment sections and chats on the Internet (e.g. Miller 2001; Warnick 2004; Fleckenstein 2005; 2007). In such contexts, the role of performance, what is expressed 'here and now' matters (Warnick 2004: 264). I will deal with these rhetorical ideas more closely in Section 2.1 with regard to

ordinary people's online participation, typically more or less anonymous and thereby authorless.

1.4 Articles and the structure of the dissertation

This study consists of five articles in which the research questions are answered. In this thesis, the articles are arranged in chronological order, which demonstrates that this study was conducted as an evolving process of exploration of the self-expressions of celebrity gossip participants in an effort to understand their contributions to distance and proximity. Article 1 was published first, and it deals with autobiographical moralizing as a way online participants of celebrity gossip construct their ethos by referring to the trustworthiness of their moral character (see Eronen 2011). The article concerns the role of arete in online celebrity gossip. The focus of Article 2 is on the values shared by gossip participants through their uses of evaluative language (see Eronen 2014a). This paper deals with the eunoia part of ethos, indicating what is seen as desirable by online participants of celebrity gossip. While Article 2 concerns eunoia as the pathos element of rhetoric, Article 3 involves the analysis of phronesis as forms (logic) of moral argumentation (see Eronen 2014b). The analysis of emotions and values and the study of forms of moral argumentation are combined in Article 4, which focuses on the most typical ways of expressing preferences when evaluating celebrities online (see Eronen 2013)[6]. In other words, Article 4 deals with the specific ways through which the persuasiveness of emotivist morality is constructed both emotionally and logically. Moreover, all four articles involve the comparison of ethos construction in English-language and Finnish online comment sections. Article 5, conversely, focuses on one specific English-language online environment where persuasion based on emotivist morality was supported through ethos control (see Eronen in process). In other words, while Articles 1 through 4 deal with ways of constructing the ethos of the 'self', Article 5 concerns ways that online participants evaluate the ethos constructions of their co-gossipers. The titles of these articles, the time and forum of their publication and the specific research questions of each article are shown in Figure 2.

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[6] Note that the publication process of Article 4 was more rapid than that of Articles 2 and 3. I started the analysis needed for Article 4 after starting to write Articles 2 and 3.

ARTICLE 1
- **Title**: Autobiographical moralizing in celebrity discussions on the Internet: how do discussion participants confess and testify in Finnish and English?
- **Published**: (2011) *Language Use on Net and in Networks. AFinLA yearbook 2011, n:o 69.*
- **Research question(s)**: 2

ARTICLE 2
- **Title**: 'It's so wrong yet so funny': celebrity violence, values and the Janus-faced cultural public sphere online
- **Published**: (2014a) *Celebrity Studies.*
- **Research question(s)**: 3

ARTICLE 3
- **Title**: Moral argumentation as a rhetorical practice in popular online discourse: Examples from online comment sections of celebrity gossip
- **Published**: (2014b) *Discourse & Communication.*
- **Research question(s)**: 1

ARTICLE 4
- **Title**: Digital enthymeme: morality, emotions, and materialism in new media participation
- **Published**: (2013) *New media, audience and emotional connectivity.* Special Issue of *Sociedad de la Información.*
- **Research question(s)**: 1 and 3

ARTICLE 5
- **Title**: Online celebrity gossip, moral disidentification, and ethos: exploring the rhetorical grounds of celebrity mockery
- **Submitted**: (2014) *Enculturation*
- **Research question(s)**: 4

Figure 2.   Research articles of the thesis.

None of these articles alone is sufficient to explore the complexity of proximity and distance in online celebrity gossip, but together they make it possible. In the following section, I situate self-expressions typical of online comment sections in a specific material and temporal kairos. This specific kairos is discussed in Section 2.1. In Section 2.2, I describe the research material, while Section 2.3 focuses on the way ethos is approached in this study through particular methodological choices. Section 2.4 deals with the ways I have explored ethos in online comment sections of celebrity gossip. In Chapter 3, I draw conclusions based on the five research articles. The five research articles are provided as appendices at the end of this thesis.

2   TOWARDS THE ANALYSIS OF ONLINE SELF-EXPRESSIONS

In this section, I will first deal with the specific rhetorical context of time and place (kairos) that has made self-expressions of ordinary people visible in public spaces. After that, I will discuss the research material (online comment sections on celebrity gossip) and methodology (the analysis of evaluative language and rhetorical argumentation analysis applied to online contexts).

2.1   Demotic turn: 'ordinary' people online

Participation in contemporary mediated spaces makes the 'self', the ordinary, a central element of media discourse which tends to be overly technologized and commercial, as Lilie Chouliaraki (2010; 2011; 2013: 15–21) argues. According to her, the self-expressive culture in new media ignores normative questions relating to morality and otherness and highlights the emotionality of the 'self' (Chouliaraki 2013: 15–17, 20). The expressions of ordinary people (those without a public role) become essential contents of public participation because of the demotic turn (Turner 2004: 82–85; 2010). As previously discussed, the demotic turn is the cultural era characterized by the increasing media visibility of the 'ordinary' and the 'popular' through new participatory media contents and platforms, particularly the Internet (Turner 2004: 82–85; 2010). On the one hand, the demotic turn refers to the media contents of entertainment industry, such as reality television shows, in which those not known for their merits or status occupy the public scene (see Turner 2004: 82–84). On the other hand, and this is the perspective from which the demotic turn is seen in the present study, the concept involves the idea of constructing cultural identities (by which I mean ways of constructing ethos) through topics typically categorized as 'trivial' and 'meaningless' if compared with rational and bureaucratic public participation (see Turner 2004: 85). The life and opinions of ordinary people are not new topics in the media, but their media coverage has expanded since the nineties, largely because of the Internet and the increase of celebrity-related content.

Moreover, the public site – the kairotic place – closely related to the demotic turn is the cultural public sphere. According to Jim McGuigan (2005: 435), cultural public sphere is the discursive site for 'the articulation of politics, public and personal, as a contested terrain through affective (aesthetic and emotional) modes of communication'. One example of phenomena occurring within the cultural public sphere was the morality-concerned 'life politics' as a popular debate following the death of Princess Diana (see ibid. 435–436). Another, and a more

recent one, is the *Big Brother* reality television programme as a 'modern morality play' (ibid. 436), which, moreover, is a popular topic also discussed in online comment sections (Graham & Harju 2011). Online comment sections where moral meanings of celebrities and gossip are made have become central sites of the cultural public sphere. Because of the demotic turn as the right time and the cultural public sphere as the right contextual site for celebrity gossip discussions, the celebrity audience's active role as gossip producers has become visible. Thus those who were stuck in the private sphere in their role as the audience have become rhetors: participants actively producing their own content in various new media environments. Accordingly, the demotic turn and the cultural public sphere together form a kairos that legitimizes the media visibility of arguments and opinions of those without institutional public status or social merit.

What makes ordinary people's media visibility a contested societal topic is its potential in both emancipation and oppression (e.g. Turner 2010). The demotic turn, therefore, should not be equated with a 'democratic turn' as the taken-for-granted era of ordinary people (Turner 2010: 171–174). There are two sides of the same 'demotic coin', which I will briefly discuss in the following. On the one hand, as Henry Jenkins (2006: 83–87) claims, there is a real value to the gossip discussed on the Internet because through it people from different social and cultural groups can gather together to share their world views and perhaps also learn how different cultures see the world. For instance, those interested in reality television shows can meet in online discussion forums and discuss important morally loaded topics, such as good parenthood and the well-being of families (Graham & Harju 2011: 29–30). Moreover, some popular genres, such as celebrity gossip blogs, challenge the professional role of media institutions and journalists as the only legitimate producers of celebrity gossip (Meyers 2012). In other words, celebrity gossip, when entering online contexts and their discussion forums, becomes a genre in which meaning-making concerning celebrities is actively practiced by those whose role was previously limited to that of readers, or receivers, of mass-media content (Meyers 2012; see also Jerslev 2010).

In addition, scandals relating to public figures, when discussed online, may involve a problem-solving function through which ordinary people can criticize the acts of those influential in politics (Tileagă 2012). Genres of popular culture, such as gossip discussed online, seem to be free of authoritarian forces that are present in official political debates (see e.g. Jenkins 2006: 83–84; 249–250). Accordingly, compared with the communication that takes place behind the doors of parliament, online communication welcomes stronger and more spontaneous uses of pathos arguments (Koskela & Vik-Tuovinen 2010). As these previous studies indicate, the participation of ordinary people in online spaces relates to the

potential of those without an authorial public status to freely express their opinions and criticize social inequalities in public arenas. These characteristics of communication in online settings derive from the online ethos as trustworthiness that differs from the emphasis on the source or author as the sign of credibility (see Warnick 2004: 263; also Fleckenstein 2005; 2007). In other words, participants in online contexts can rely on the discourse itself, without being obedient to authoritarian forces that regard societal status and merit as signs of credible ethos.

On the other hand, however, there are many ethical and rhetorical challenges related to communication in online contexts, especially in its asynchronous[7] and anonymous forms. Online communication is characterized by short, quick commenting, the temporal separation of the rhetor and audience, contextual ambiguousness (Jones 2004) and the establishment and interpretation of the ethos of the rhetor in the 'here and now' based on minimal textual cues (Miller 2001: 272–273; Warnick 2007: 47–48). Consequently, communication in online environments produces a tension between optimizing the 'self' and the 'other' (see Miller 2001: 267) and switching off those participants who seem too challenging (see Silverstone 2003: 481; also 2007: 138). This tension can be seen as the problem of ethos particularly in online contexts where participation is anonymous or takes place from behind pseudonyms.

Online environments can be made oppressive and strictly exclusive sites of togetherness. According to Miller (2004: 212–213), participants in computer-mediated contexts seek sympathetic feelings and responses from agents who remain unknown but who, nevertheless, share emotions and preferences with them. Consequently, the rhetor's willingness to share emotions and preferences with the audience may become an adequate sign of a trustworthy ethos, an ethos that Miller (2004) calls 'the ethos of sympathy'[8]. Such ethos, according to her, is based on eunoia and takes place particularly in computer-mediated contexts where the rhetor and audience change places and their roles become mixed (ibid. 208–213). Accordingly, the ethos of sympathy can also apply to online participation in celebrity gossip where the same participants act as both rhetors and members of the audience. As Miller (ibid. 212) argues, the ethos of sympathy

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[7] Asynchronous communication is discussion in which interaction is structured into turns but a reply may be posted months or even years after the prior turn (see Kollock & Smith 1999: 5).

[8] Note that ethos of sympathy does not necessarily aim at excluding otherness but it can also be a genuine concern for others as emotional equals. I thank Carolyn R. Miller for this remark. However, when it comes to emotivist morality, ethos of sympathy is a persuasive means of attacking 'others'.

makes it difficult to know the rhetor because communication in online contexts 'continually deflects attention away from the agent and back to the audience'. What is lacking in such sympathetic communication is arete as a cue of the specific moral and personal virtues of the rhetor (ibid. 212–213). In other words, online communication, particularly in comment sections on the Internet, may contribute to insularity in which ethos is constructed on the basis of conformism. Such ethos, according to Laura Gurak (1999), can be called group ethos.

Moreover, Fleckenstein (2005) provides an illustrative metaphor to describe the blurred boundaries of the rhetor and audience in online settings. According to her metaphorical description, the performance of 'cyberethos' comes with the disappearance of the 'self', just as Lewis Carroll's bread-and-butter-fly becomes part of what it eats when its sugar cube head dissolves in the tea (ibid.). For Fleckenstein, this metaphor represents online participants who consume digital contents for their own empowerment and at the same time lose their own autonomy and become part of the contents they consume. This metaphor of liquid participation relates to violence as a rhetorical phenomenon discussed at the very beginning of this thesis. The self-expression of the bread-and-butter-fly involves a tension between individual empowerment and forced sameness. When it expresses itself as consuming liquid (tea), it becomes part of the liquid. Thus the metaphor illustrates a rhetorical situation in which the ignorance of otherness challenges the idea of the 'self' as a fixed subject. Graefer (2013) deals with the same issue in her study focusing on representations on celebrity gossip blogs. According to her, participation on celebrity gossip blogs involves the active role of individuals as well as highlights the agency given to online celebrity representations (ibid. 222–223). Such participation involves an interesting *rhetorical* phenomenon: online participants form intimacy with material objects representing celebrity at the same time when distancing otherness represented by these objects. When consuming digital material for self-empowerment, rhetors give their relationship to pictures, videos or other contextual contents the power of ethos. Finally, in online contexts, such consuming for self-empowerment may become a social issue representing what Gurak (1999) calls group ethos.

It is worth noting that intimacy in online contexts may characterize ordinary people's digital media participation in particular. Conversely, the ethos construction on politicians' blogs is based on their political expertise and status, reinforcing their distance from ordinary people, as Lotta Lehti's (2013) study of French politicians' blogs suggests. According to Lehti (2013: 530), politicians do not 'lower' themselves to the level of ordinary people, which can be seen for instance in the lack of interaction between politicians and blog readers, making politicians' blogs channels of their authorial monologue despite the dialogic

possibilities of the Internet. Thus insularity in digital spaces may be surrounded by the use of elite power that provokes the 'ordinary' to participate in collective action.

Moreover, when self-expressions are the criteria for inclusion of the 'same', they, by the same token, may serve as starting points for excluding the 'different' (see Silverstone 2003: 481; also 2007: 138)[9]. As Silverstone (2007: 138) argues, 'the strengths of such on-line spaces, their ease of access, speed and intensity of connection, are also their weaknesses'. A stranger in these contexts is always vulnerable to the exclusion that 'comes with the click of a mouse or the instant judgements of a web-master' (ibid.). Note that this view of online participation is contrary to that of Jenkins (2006: 84–85) who argues that gossip discussed in online contexts is important because it may help to learn values from *different* social groups. For Jenkins, communication in online environments is togetherness welcoming 'difference', while Silverstone, on the contrary, sees it as togetherness based on 'sameness'. Rather than regarding these two perspectives as contrary, they both can be seen as involved in online communication in which issues of 'local' (those based on specific locations or interests) and 'global' (those enabling heterogeneity and multicultural participation) are ambiguous.

Although online communication may potentially be 'global' because of the participants' heterogeneous social and cultural backgrounds, such communication may still emerge as 'local' as it is restricted to the particular interests of the participants (Wellman & Gulia 1999: 186–187). The highlighted role of specific interests in online communication may derive from the need for intimacy and reciprocity because of the physical distance between online participants, as Silverstone (2003) suggests. Accordingly, the new media technology enables the development of global networks but actual online participation may involve even more limited interests than face-to-face communication. By the same token, it is possible that potentially 'global' online environments are the sites of intense proximity based on aggressive exclusion in the name of intimacy, while those discussion forums connecting people around 'local' topics, such as nationally limited issues, are more characteristically based on an argumentative relationship between online participants.

Moreover, the strength of proximity tends to vary in accordance with each comment section or forum where online communication takes place. Comment

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[9] This is in line with Aristotle's remarks on the rhetorical role of emotions in contributing to disagreement (see *Rhetoric* II.i.1378a: 8)

sections of online newspapers are sites that do not require a login or strong commitment to shared online cultures. Particularly sites of tabloid newspapers are environments that participants leave after they have expressed their own preferences (see Richardson & Stanyer 2011). Unlike online comment sections of newspapers, online environments meant for closed discussions of registered users often make it possible for participants to start new discussion threads with their own posts. Such closed discussion groups involve strong intimacy between participants (e.g. Arpo 2005; Meyers 2010). Compared with the comment sections in online newspapers, sites meant only for registered users seem more likely to build a community. However, community in online contexts should not be understood as a fixed entity that either exists or does not exist. As discussed at the beginning of this thesis, all self-expressions, that is, all subjective posts in online environments, even those that do not succeed in creating intimacy between the 'self' and the 'other', are invitations to form a community. According to Jan Fernback (2007), communities in online spaces are not fixed or stable constructs but rather can be defined as processes of evolving togetherness between participants in cyberspace. As she argues (Fernback 2007: 65),

> [c]ommunity is not always about consensus or intimacy. It is about understanding that humans are bound together by a need to perpetuate society and culture. That need compels humans to work together and to communicate in a continual process of social maintenance or social change. This process is not always efficient or palpable; it can be chaotic and oppositional.

The idea of community as an evolving process of togetherness matches the rhetorical understanding of community as the site of togetherness 'defining a horizon of possibilities for any given audience that realizes it' (see Miller 1993: 212). However weak the obvious signs of interaction are, all self-expressions in online environments aim at sharing perceptions of what is trustworthy and expected. These perceptions are supported or challenged as the community evolves through new contents, new self-expressions, sent by new participants. Characteristic of communities interested in celebrities is the participants' affective, particularly humorous, relationship to objects such as pictures or videos of celebrities (see Graefer 2013: 189). In online spaces of celebrity gossip, as Graefer suggests, community is based on participants' interaction with objects. Such community, therefore, involves the idea of network in which participants are organized around a shared artefact, such as a picture representing celebrity. Thus relationships in such community have a deeply material basis: reasoned interaction between participants is not the prerequisite for the community to exist and evolve. In particular, Graefer (2013) discusses affect-focused participation on online celebrity blogs by utilizing Susanna Paasonen's (2011) remarks on affect

in digital culture. According to Paasonen (ibid.), affect means sensation and intensities of feeling that become visible through the circulation of objects (such as pictures or videos) in digital spaces. Thus affect is a material relationship to objects and, through a networked circulation, it becomes a social phenomenon. Affect has to do with intimacy, not only in relation to media objects, but also in the interaction of those acting in a digital space (see ibid. 232–236).

Intimacy that wipes out problems of otherness between the rhetor and audience may be a solution to build a community in online environments where participants are globally spread-out. This is because ethos of self-expressions may be particularly challenging in text-based, multicultural online communication where there is an absence of nonverbal cues and 'where meaning is so easily inaccurately conveyed and misconstrued, both unintentionally and deliberately' (DuVal Smith 1999: 156). The ease of misconstruction of meaning in online contexts can be seen as relating to the lack of responsibility. Reciprocity, as Silverstone (2007: 173) points out, should not be confused with responsibility. This is because responsibility requires more effort and commitment than mere expressions of liking or disliking in the present. Reciprocity as a substitute of responsibility is enabled by technological communication platforms and spaces, such as the Internet with its comment sections. Such reciprocity is related to intimacy that wipes out distance. According to Darin Barney (2004: 32), online togetherness – free of moral concerns – is 'a perfect technological solution to the problem of community in a liberal, market society'. Barney's criticism of communities in online spaces is close to Bauman's (2000: 96–98) critical remarks on social spaces that are public but non-civil. According to Bauman (2000: 97): '[s]haring physical space with other actors engaged in a similar activity adds importance to the action, stamps it with 'the approval of numbers' and so corroborates its sense, justifies it without the need to argue.'

Communities in online spaces, and particularly those dedicated to global celebrity gossip, are close to the public but non-civil spaces described by Bauman (2000: 96–98). The practice of consuming objects is a globally flexible form of participation because it welcomes and tolerates various individual interests, despite how perverse or oppressive they are. Because consuming is free of particular social norms it can be seen as an emotivist practice. On the Internet, there are a variety of spaces from which an individual can choose the one that matches her or his own taste. When the choice is made, emotivism may turn into emotivist morality. That happens if the exclusion of *particular* 'others' is socially approved in the online space. Exclusion, instead of moral responsibility, becomes the tool to solve the problem of otherness. In the idea of moral irresponsibility of communities in online spaces underlies the notion that the demotic turn is not

necessarily democratic but may actually involve practices through which the freedom of ordinary people can be effectively used in support of the market (see Turner 2010: 171–174). For instance, sites dedicated to popular culture (such as sport, science fiction, fantasy or superheroes) are normative environments through which fandom is domesticated and fans are treated as consumers (Stanfill 2014). As also Graefer (2013: 223) points out, 'celebrity gossip blogs can be seen as part of an economy which modulates affect for the sake of profit'. The affective economy in online spaces of popular culture can effectively exploit individual users if they regard a certain *relationship to objects* as the basis of ethos.

One could argue that online communities are just utopian and not real sites of togetherness because participants on the Internet lack the moral responsibility to deal with conflicting desires and values that have to be negotiated in face-to-face communities. The idea of online communication as anti-normative (e.g. Kiesler et al. 1984; Siegel et al. 1986; Sproull & Kiesler 1986) was typical of research into online contexts in the 1980s when CMC-related studies took their initial steps. In accordance with these early studies in the field, one could ask why quickly typed online comments sent by anonymous participants even matter if 'real' life is lived elsewhere. No one, however, has claimed that cyberspace is any utopian 'no place'; online communication is always surrounded and affected by specific structures of place (Mitra & Watts 2002: 485). Thus self-expressions, even in the 'darkest room' (Arpo 2005: 282–283), are always preceded by the idea of a social being who is related to other beings through distance and proximity. This tension between the individual and social participation makes online environments norm-governed. As Charles Ess (2010) also argues, the era of dualisms according to which 'real' and 'virtual' or 'offline' and 'online' are radically separate is over; the 'self' in digital networks is fundamentally relational and embodied.

Accordingly, even though participation in online contexts may potentially be self-empowering (Chouliaraki 2013: 17–20) and welcome creative personal stories and various identity plays (see e.g. Arpo 2005: 295–296; Paasonen 2007; Östman 2008; 2010; 2011), it is always regulated by the complexities and power relations of the community as long as communication involves human beings.[10] That is to say, online contexts are not free of hierarchies or welcome all forms of individualistic creativity. Digital contexts have been described as highly norm-

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[10] This also relates closely to Silverstone's (1999) way to criticize the idea of 'novelty' concerning the new media. According to him, communication in highly technologized settings, such as on the Internet, is not free of ideologies and issues of power: '[t]he new media, indeed, affect and involve us fully as social and political as well as economic beings' (ibid. 12).

governed and 'deindividuated' sites of communication that are 'real' spaces in terms of social structures and hierarchies (Lea & Spears 1991; Lea et al. 2001; Stromer-Galley & Martey 2009). The idea of deindividuation relates to the tension of self-expression through which individuals show their own choices but do not argue why they have made such choices. Although that sort of participation is based on the freedom of choice on an individual level, on a social level it does not welcome any discussion about otherness. Performance (Warnick 2004: 264) and the ability to share emotional involvement, such as humour (Hübler & Bell 2003; Graefer 2013), are at the heart of constructing a trustworthy ethos in online contexts. In other words, participation in online environments may highlight the necessity to play a certain expected role that challenges the idea of trust and credibility as the sincerity of the 'self' (Gardner 2011: 99–106). According to Ess (2010), the idea of the online self as a disembodied and networking participant risks abandoning the skills and habits of literacy as well as virtues and by so doing attacks the ideals of liberal individualism. His criticism of the fluidity of online expression fits with rhetorical criticism of online ethos (see e.g. Miller 2004; Gurak 1999). If participation is highly repetitive, and hence restricting, it attacks individual freedom as the precondition sometimes associated with communication in the new media.

As already discussed above, the tension between the local and global is essential for understanding the difference between *emotivism* and *emotivist morality* in community building online. Emotivism involves an ethical idea which tolerates 'placelessness'. No human communities, however, legitimize all preferences. That is not to argue that there is not a specific kairos for such a doctrine as emotivism, since emotivism has found its persuasiveness in a particular time- and place-bound context of western culture which has attacked values and norms as practical or 'lived' issues (see MacIntyre 2003 [1985]). However, whenever emotivism is actualized in human communication, it is not the doctrine of 'anything goes' but rather a doctrine that legitimizes *only certain* preferences. It is through this doctrine that certain groups are seen as 'others' to be mocked and moralized. Emotivist morality, therefore, is always restricted to a certain place; it involves inclusions and exclusions dependent on each audience and its choice of who the 'others' are. When communicating in a particular online context, such as in a comment section dedicated to celebrity gossip, anything is not rhetorically persuasive. What is persuasive in online celebrity gossip is up to its participants and their specific preferences.

2.2   Research material and ethical considerations

The research material of the present study consists of 1800 asynchronous online comments here understood as self-expressions and treated as units of analysis. Half of these self-expressions are in English, the other half in Finnish. The comments were collected from the comment sections of popular global (*Just Jared, YouTube, LiveJournal, USA Today, Huffington Post*) and national (*Seiska.fi, Kaksplus.fi, Suomi24, HS.fi, Mtv3.fi*) online environments in which anonymous participants (or pseudonym users) commented on celebrity-concerned issues. A typical comment in the material was a short verbal judgement (less than ten words) posted in response to a gossip story or video concerning celebrities. Some of the comments involved evaluation of visual media elements, particularly pictures of celebrities, but a few comments included pictures posted by online participants themselves. All comments in the research material were publicly visible, and the websites I chose for this study did not require the reader to log in to read or save comments, although some of the sites required users to log in before posting a comment.

The comments in the research material concern four cases of celebrity gossip: 1) domestic violence involving the pop singers Rihanna and Chris Brown (450 comments); 2) domestic violence involving a Finnish former ski jumper Matti Nykänen and his ex-wife Mervi (450 comments); 3) a fight on a TV show involving the media personality Sharon Osbourne and a reality television contestant Megan Hauserman (450 comments); and 4) a fight in a bar involving Finnish entertainment celebrities Martina Aitolehti and Anne-Mari Berg (450 comments). These four cases were chosen for the study because the celebrities are represented as 'tragic' and 'dramatic' characters close to ordinary people having problems in their love relationships or suffering from addictions – themes that make the non-autonomous role of the individual a public issue. These cases, therefore, match the interests of the present study focusing on the tension of self-expressions as comments that involve both individualist and socially dependent elements.

Rihanna and Chris Brown are young, American celebrities not only known for their pop or hip hop music but also for their stormy relationship and rumours concerning their possible addictions. The Finnish former ski jumper and his ex-wife are often represented as heavy alcohol-drinkers and thus seen as representatives of addicted people without a respected socioeconomic status. Note that although Nykänen's celebrity character is a sport hero and is therefore associated with the Finnish national identity, his character constructed for commercial purposes of gossip media is seen as separate from his merits in sport.

In gossip concerning the former ski jumper, the comparison of 'us' and 'them' is not based on a national identity in the same way as in sport-related popular culture in general (see Dahlén 2008: 446). 'We' may also be the group of gossipers who look down on the celebrity, seeing him as a representative of 'others'.

Moreover, Sharon Osbourne and Megan Hauserman, as well as the Finnish celebrities Martina Aitolehti and Anne-Mari Berg, are female celebrities often associated with a low-class lifestyle and undeserved fame. Megan Hauserman, Martina Aitolehti and Anne-Mari Berg are all relatively young, white, 'entertainment' celebrities who are often represented as sexual objects in media representations. Megan Hauserman is a media personality of American reality television. She became a celebrity through her appearance in *Playboy*. Both Martina Aitolehti and Anne-Mari Berg are Finnish celebrities who became well known in Finland because of their 'secret' love affairs. Aitolehti was evaluated as the 'secret lover' (*salarakas*) of a Finnish-Russian soccer player, while Berg was represented as a character having a 'secret' relationship with a former minister of Finland who was reported to have sent her text messages with sexual (sexist) implications. Sharon Osbourne, the wife of heavy-metal singer and songwriter Ozzy Osbourne, is older than the other three female celebrities mentioned above and her character provokes a lot of discussion about whether her fame is self-deserved or whether it was Ozzy who made her famous. Despite their wealth, the lifestyle of the Osbournes is seen as a marker of their ordinariness and working-class lifestyle (Dhoest 2005). Thus Sharon Osbourne is also seen as a character with problems often associated with people without an elite status.

The reason to concentrate on particular topics of celebrity gossip – instead of focusing on various gossip topics within a specific online genre (such as celebrity gossip blogs) – stems from the tradition of rhetorical criticism as a qualitative approach focusing on one or several rhetorical 'cases'. In rhetorical criticism, the persuasiveness of texts is uncovered by first becoming familiar with each case in relation to which the texts have been produced. Consequently, in order to do such a case-bound analysis, I familiarized myself with the general cultural meanings relating to the eight particular celebrities. The case-based analysis is essential when exploring persuasiveness of emotivist morality as a context-sensitive phenomenon and not as something that is based on unexplainable and irrational emotions of those interested in celebrities (see Hills 2007).

Moreover, the websites from where the comments of the study were collected differ from one another in the strength of commitment and intimacy between participants as well as in terms of user activity. I have divided the forums into

media-generated and user-generated. The first group includes *Just Jared* (an English-language website dedicated to celebrity gossip), *USATODAY.com, HS.fi* (a Finnish online newspaper), *the Huffington Post, Mtv3.fi* (the website of a Finnish television channel) and *Seiska.fi* (the website of a Finnish gossip magazine) – gossip sites that are controlled by media corporations. The online comments collected from these forums are reactions to contents produced and posted to the gossip site by the media industry. It also is presumable that these sites are either pre- or post-moderated by media industries. Thus media-generated sites can be seen as more systematically hierarchical compared to what I call user-generated sites, that is, *YouTube*, *Kaksplus.fi* (the online forum provided by a Finnish 'baby magazine'), *Suomi24* (a general Finnish discussion forum) and *the LiveJournal* community (Oh No They Didn't (*ONTD*). By user-generated sites, I mean gossip forums where online participants had the possibility to start new discussion threads by posting digital contents (pictures, videos, texts). Although Kaksplus.fi is a website of a Finnish magazine, the discussion forum enables its users to start new discussion threads by posting celebrity-related contents, such as pictures or videos first published elsewhere. The LiveJournal community and Kaksplus.fi displayed prominent signs of interaction, while participants on Just Jared, Seiska.fi and especially Mtv3.fi seemed to be ignoring their co-gossipers rather than explicitly replying to them. Although the main focus of this study is not to compare the gossip sites, the notion of media-generated and user-generated sites is important when taking the contextual role of rhetoric of self-expressions into account. In general, the ties of participants on user-generated sites were performed as stronger compared with media-generated sites.

Of the gossip spaces analysed in this study, ONTD is meant for the most niche market and it involves relatively strict criteria for membership. For instance, my test profile that did not involve anything specific was not accepted. The explanation for the rejection sent to my email was the emptiness of my profile. ONTD expects its members to somehow perform their intimate relations to objects already in their profile, and most of the profiles, therefore, involve humorous pictures of celebrities or other characters of popular culture. The previous research into online celebrity gossip focuses on more or less niche forums (see e.g. Meyers 2010; Graefer 2013). I wanted to take into consideration forums that are well-known, such as comment sections provided by online newspapers, because they resonate with the interest of the present study in ordinary and everyday online participation. Celebrity gossip, particularly online, touches those who do not necessarily have any specific cultural criticism in mind. However, I also wanted to have ONTD as a case of a more niche celebrity culture, since it involved a lot more explicit ethos control compared with the other gossip sites. Of the forums selected for this study, ONTD involved the strongest

forms of intimacy connecting, but also separating, its participants from one another. The research material of this study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.   Research material.

THE TOPICS OF CELEBRITY GOSSIP	ASYNCHRONOUS DISCUSSION COMMENTS (total 1800)
Pop singers Rihanna & Chris Brown (domestic violence)	*Just Jared*, an English-language website dedicated to celebrity gossip (150) *USATODAY.com*, a U.S. online newspaper (150) *YouTube*, a global, user-generated website for video sharing and commenting (150)
A Finnish ex-ski jumper Matti Nykänen & his (ex-)wife Mervi Tapola (domestic violence)	*HS.fi*, a Finnish online newspaper (150) *Kaksplus.fi*, the website of a Finnish 'baby magazine' including a lot of gossip (150) *Suomi24*, a general Finnish discussion forum with a heavy interest in celebrity gossip (150)
Entertainment celebrities Sharon Osbourne & Megan Hauserman (fight on a TV show)	*The Huffington Post*, a U.S. online newspaper (150) *LiveJournal* (Oh No They Didn't), an English-language community dedicated to celebrity gossip (150) *YouTube* (150)
Finnish entertainment celebrities Martina Aitolehti & Anne-Mari Berg (fight in a bar)	*Mtv3.fi*, the website of a Finnish television channel (150) *Seiska.fi*, the website of a Finnish gossip magazine (150) *Suomi24 (150)*

One of the most important criteria for choosing gossip sites for the study was that they had to provide at least 150 comments on one of the analysed cases. Thus I collected 150 comments per case from one website. In general, if the most commented thread on each site involved more than 300 comments, 75 comments were collected at the beginning and 75 at the end or in the middle of the thread. This is because the timing of posting an online comment may affect the ways celebrities are evaluated. As Meyers (2010: 266) points out, online participants whose opinions cannot be the first ones to appear in a comment section may try to attract attention by commenting on celebrities in more aggressive terms. The need to stand out as an individual participant seems to become stronger towards the end of a thread. However, if a thread involved less than 300 comments, 150 comments at the beginning of it were collected. Some gossip sites involved threads with less than 150 comments. From those sites, comments in several threads were collected until the total number of comments was 150. The Live Journal site (ONTD) was an exception. I collected comments from two separate threads (75 from each) on ONTD because each thread tends to connect only a few participants. This establishes more intimate relationships between participants than is seen on other sites. Moreover, comments posted as mere spams (such as advertisements) were excluded from the research material. All comments were collected from January to October 2010. Table 2 shows a detailed classification of the research material.

Table 2.   Research material and URL addresses.

The cases of celebrity gossip	Websites	Titles of threads and number of comments collected per total number of comments in a thread	URLs and the dates of saving comments
Rihanna and Chris Brown (domestic violence)	*YouTube*	Rihanna ABC Interview -Chris Brown Beating (1) (150/ 1594)	*http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7bASRxNRJkk* (October 5th, 2010)
Rihanna and Chris Brown (domestic violence)	*Just Jared*	Rihanna's Bruised Face Revealed (150/ 756)	*http://www.justjared.com/2009/02/19/rihannas-bruised-face-revealed/* (May 11th, 2010)
Rihanna and Chris Brown (domestic violence)	*USA Today*	Chris Brown speaks, says he's regretful for what 'transpired' (150/ 226)	*http://www.usatoday.com/life/people/2009-02-15-brown-main_N.htm* (October 5th, 2010)
Matti Nykänen and Mervi Tapola (domestic violence)	*Helsingin Sanomat*	Matti Nykäsen epäillään puukottaneen joulupäivänä vaimoaan (150/ 167)	*http://www.hs.fi/kotimaa/artikkeli/Matti+Nyk%C3%A4sen+ep%C3%A4ill%C3%A4%C3%A4n+puukottaneen+joulup%C3%A4iv%C3%A4n%C3%A4+vaimoaan/1135251734479* (January 7th, 2010)
Matti Nykänen and Mervi Tapola (domestic violence)	*Kaksplus*	a) Matti Nykänen yritti tappaa Mervin – huitoi veitsellä ja kuristi (50/ 50) b) Mervi Tapola ruhjottuna oikeudessa (40/ 40) c) No Masahan se on taas repäissyt (24/24) d) Matti pääsi vapaaksi (36/47)	*a) http://kaksplus.fi/keskustelu/plussalaiset/mitas-nyt/1606397-matti-nykanen-yritti-tappaa-mervin-huitoi-veitsella-ja-kuristi/* (October 5th, 2010) *b) http://kaksplus.fi/keskustelu/plussalaiset/mitas-nyt/1610386-mervi-tapola-ruhjottuna-oikeudessa-katso-kuva/#post18680243* (October 5th, 2010) *c) http://kaksplus.fi/keskustelu/plussalaiset/mitas-nyt/1606775-no-masahan-se-taas-repassy-perinteiset-joulun-kunniaksi/#post18624974* (October 5th, 2010) *d) http://kaksplus.fi/keskustelu/plussalaiset/mitas-nyt/1607213-matti-paasi-vapaaksi/* (October 5th, 2010)
Matti Nykänen and Mervi Tapola (domestic violence)	*Suomi24*	Nykäsen Masa se vaan jaksaa (150/ 155)	*http://keskustelu.suomi24.fi/node/8723180* (January 7th, 2010)
Sharon Osbourne and Megan Hauserman (fight on a TV show)	*Huffington Post*	Sharon Osbourne Lashes Out At Reality Show Contestant Megan Hauserman (VIDEO) (150/ 341)	*http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/01/05/sharon-osbourne-lashes-ou_n_155203.html* (October 5th, 2010)
Sharon Osbourne and Megan Hauserman (fight on a TV show)	*LiveJournal (ONTD)*	a) Megan shows her head after attack by Sharon Osbourne, remains butterface while doing so (75/ 407) b) Sharon O. attacked me! (75/ 335)	*a) http://ohnotheydidnt.livejournal.com/30692807.html* (May 11th, 2010) *b) http://ohnotheydidnt.livejournal.com/30638970.html* (July 19th, 2010)
Sharon Osbourne and Megan Hauserman (fight on a TV show)	*YouTube*	Rock of Love Charm School REUNION FIGHT (Megan vs Sharon) (150/ 534)	*http://youtube.com/watch?v=3xCAR57x7Xw* (October 5th, 2010)
Martina Aitolehti and Anne-Mari Berg (fight in a bar)	*MTV3*	a)Anne-Mari ja Martina oikeudessa: Väite: repi hiuksista ja raapi niskasta (54/ 54) b) Martina, Esko ja Anne-Mari käräjille: Käsittelyssä pahoinpitely (96/ 121)	*a) http://www.mtv3.fi/viihde/uutiset/muut.shtml/1058854/anne-mari-ja-martina-oikeudessa-vaite-repi-hiuksista-ja-raapi-niskasta* (May 11th, 2010) *b) http://www.mtv3.fi/viihde/uutiset/muut.shtml/1058342/martina-esko-ja-anne-mari-karajille-kasittelyssa-pahoinpitely* (May 11th, 2010)
Martina Aitolehti and Anne-Mari Berg (fight in a bar)	*Seiska*	a) Martina ja Anne-Mari käräjille: Hiuslisäke varasti shown (31/ 31) b) Kohukaunottaret käräjillä juuri nyt – sähellystä jo alkuun (54/ 54) c) Kohukaunotarten kissatappelu jatkuu: Martina ja Anne-Mari taas käräjille (65/ 72)	*a) http://www.seiska.fi/viihdeuutiset/_a107571/martina+ja+annemari+karajilla+hiuslisake+varasti+shown/* (May 11th, 2010) *b) http://www.seiska.fi/viihdeuutiset/_a107505/kohukaunottaret+karajilla+juuri+nyt++sahellysta+jo+alkuun/* (May 11th, 2010) *c) http://www.seiska.fi/viihdeuutiset/_a106963/kohukaunotarten+kissatappelu+jatkuu+martina+ja+annemari+taas+karajille/* (May 11th, 2010)
Martina Aitolehti and Anne-Mari Berg (fight in a bar)	*Suomi24*	a) Martina kävi Bergin kimppuun (107/ 107) b) Martinalle ja Eskolle vuoden mittainen lähestymiskielto (43/ 58)	*a) http://keskustelu.suomi24.fi/node/6404066* (May 11th, 2010) *b) http://keskustelu.suomi24.fi/node/6506900* (June 21st, 2010)

As can be seen in Table 2, the research material consists of comments from several different threads. Some discussion threads I had chosen for the study were removed from the Internet a few years after they were collected, which means that some of the URLs shown in the table may not work anymore.

When analysing the research material and dealing with the study's criteria for ethical research, I was faced with the problem of what to do with those comments that had been omitted for moral reasons. Can they be cited if they involve language use that is hostile and aggressive towards a particular identifiable celebrity? Finally, for ethical reasons, I decided not to cite the most hostile, albeit playful, comments that involved a competition of who can find the most creative way to kill a celebrity. Despite not citing those comments, they were nevertheless included in the analysis. However, I did not find any reason to protect the reputation of any particular media corporation by concealing all traces of harsh language used in the comment sections they provide to online participants. On the contrary, I considered it wrong in terms of rhetorical criticism to censor the material. Rhetorical texts, such as online comments, should be analysed as persuasive artefacts produced in actual situations. In other words, citing the comments with all the expletives and derisive tones included is essential for rhetorical criticism.

The most difficult issue I faced when pondering research ethics related to the contradictory roles of copyright and privacy protection. The philosophy behind the emphasis on copyright relates to the view that discourse itself is an individual property that can be copyrighted. Someone 'owns' the words. On the contrary, the emphasis on privacy protection relates to the view that online communication is a more or less communal property. This aspect involves two perspectives. On the one hand, online communication is practiced by people with private identities in private communities of which pseudonyms as identity markers may give an unsolicited hint. Another, contrary premise behind the motive to omit the pseudonyms of the participants from citations is the possibility that a researcher, in revealing the username of a participant, may somehow interfere with the group dynamics and community of the online participants. Such a premise, interestingly, follows from the idea that the online 'self' is no less real than the self in face-to-face settings (e.g. Turkle 2011: 16) and thereby nicknames or pseudonyms would need protection in the same way as real names. I finally decided to stress the copyright and reveal the pseudonyms or usernames of each commenter whose post is cited in this study. This decision is based on the way of understanding ethos construction as self-expression that openly evaluates celebrities but conceals the identity of an individual. Only a pseudonym or nickname can be seen as the marker of the individual's signature.

During the process of doing this research, my way of dealing with online gossipers changed. At the beginning, I was overcautious and sent a message to the online threads included in the material of this study, and whenever that was not possible, I contacted the moderator or the online media behind each gossip site to ask a permission to cite the comments and let online participants know of my research. I was particularly overcautious with comments I treated as autobiographical moralizing because I saw them as more personal or sensitive than others. In later phases of the process, I realized that this was unnecessary because self-expressions are rhetorical and although they are made by individuals, they are not private at all. Thus the authenticity of these self-expressions is more or less questionable. Interestingly, the questionable authenticity can be seen as a symbolic connection between online gossipers and celebrities. Celebrity culture highlights individualism as much as it masks the actual individuals behind self-expression.

In those rare cases in which online participants revealed their autobiographical experiences concerning domestic violence or alcoholism – whether such things really happened or were discursively created – did I see it as appropriate to conceal the pseudonyms or usernames of participants. As part of online celebrity gossip, autobiographical narratives were told as serious stories showing specific trust in some particular co-participant(s) and some of these comments were 'signed' with personal indicators, such as a full name that could even be the real name of a participant.

2.3   Methodological considerations

This Section (2.3) concerns the methodological considerations of the study. By methodological considerations, I mean the philosophy of the methods and the synthesis of research tools utilized in the analysis. A more detailed and concrete description of each method is to be found in the research articles 1–5. In methodological terms, my study is based on two methods: argumentation analysis of moral rhetoric (e.g. Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1951; 2000 [1969]; Jonsen & Toulmin 1988) and the analysis of evaluative language (particularly Martin & White 2005), which has its roots in the appraisal theory of systemic-functional linguistics. Systemic-functional linguistics is a branch of language studies that considers language use with its social purposes (see e.g. Halliday 1973). This approach, therefore, goes beyond the linguistic vacuum of words and grammar. The argumentation analysis of moral rhetoric suggested by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca has been criticized because it tries to generalize and does not recognize the importance of exploring how moral argumentation works in specific

contexts and cases (Leff 2009). Within rhetorical studies, social perceptions that serve as shared conceptual 'places' in communication are called *topoi* or 'topics' (literally 'places') (e.g. Miller 2000; Leff 1983; 2006). According to Miller (1987), the focus on rhetoric as a universalised theory of argumentation is connected to the 'academicizing of rhetoric' that ignores the special (specific) topoi of rhetoric as the persuasive materials of specific communities and cases (about specific topoi, see e.g. Grimaldi 1972: 124–133). The analysis of evaluative language, on the contrary, ignores such 'universalism' and focuses on words and phrases as specific persuasive materials in contexts. The difference between evaluative and argumentative rhetoric can be understood as follows: while evaluation concerns the choice made by the rhetor, argumentation deals with the linguistic practices through which the rhetor takes into account that the audience may potentially make a choice that differs from her or his own. I argue that these aspects should be seen as points of view from which proximity and distance in self-expressions can be fruitfully explored. In this study, therefore, each self-expression is analysed from the perspectives of both evaluative and argumentative language.

Of the three means of persuasion, argumentation analysis focuses on phronesis (logic) in moral argumentation but leaves out the more specific realizations of arete (moral virtue) and eunoia (emotions). I explored ways of contributing to arete and eunoia with the help of the linguistic analysis of evaluative language that operates on the micro level of language where semantic meanings of words and word combinations and their relation to objects can be found. Recently, social scientists, also inspired by linguistic approaches to communication, have shown interest in the study of words in moral rhetoric, particularly as a computational method of studying text (e.g. Sagi & Dehghani 2014). The analysis of similarity (and thus proximity) of two words in a corpus leaves out distance in the rhetoric of self-expressions. I therefore maintain that neither the analysis of evaluative language nor the analysis of forms of moral argumentation *alone* is sufficient when exploring the rhetoric of proximity *and* distance in public and mediated contexts. Both methods are needed when approaching self-expressions as rhetorical acts of community building. The combining of these methods is in line with the idea of rhetoric as the art of persuasive acts in which aesthetic (by which I mean the choices of evaluative words in my material) and argumentative (logical) practices are intertwined with each other (see e.g. Fisher 1984).

The ways rhetorical and linguistic theories of language differ from each other have been discussed by Jeanne Fahnestock (2011: 12–13). She argues that rhetorical theory has focused on functional uses of language as specific choices based on general resources, whereas observations on how language 'works' in

general and the analysis of words' origins and their distributions in functional categories have traditionally been the interest of linguists (Fahnestock 2011: 12–13). What Fahnestock is claiming becomes obvious when comparing the analysis of evaluative language with rhetorical argumentation analysis. The analysis of evaluative language starts with specific categories of attitudinal words and their relations (see Martin & White 2005; also White 2003), whereas rhetorical argumentation analysis of moral rhetoric focuses on arguments as rhetorical units (e.g. Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1951). Roughly put, the analysis of evaluative language focuses on proximity as the emotional togetherness of the rhetor and audience, while rhetorical argumentation analysis concerns distance between the rhetor and audience, and comes to life in forms of moral argumentation. In rhetorical criticism focused on communication as action, both of these methods are relevant.

Although argumentation-focused and systemic-functional approaches to language traditionally deal with different aspects, they do not contradict each other in a philosophical sense because they both focus on interpersonal (social) meanings shared in specific contexts. They both deal with human relationships in language and communication within a particular context. Particularly in studies conducted by European scholars of language, rhetorical and linguistic approaches are often combined (e.g. Reisigl & Wodak 2001; Virsu 2007; 2012; Volmari 2009). Recently, linguists using critical discourse analysis have shown interest in argumentation analysis as a method to approach evidentials of knowledge, that is, textual markers by which language users indicate how they have come to know what they are claiming to be true (e.g. Bednarek 2006; Hart 2011; Oswald 2011). For instance, the critical discourse analyst Paul Chilton (2011) stresses the importance of moral logic as the starting point of criticism in linguistic studies. Accordingly, the argumentation analysis of moral rhetoric fills this gap because it focuses on the logical practices through which the 'self' (the rhetor) forms a relationship to the 'other' (the audience). In this study, the rhetorical and linguistic approaches supplement each other. The analysis of evaluative language, particularly in new media settings and digital spaces, is necessary because language use in online comment sections is not argumentative in a traditional sense, but it often highlights words and their meanings as choices creating intimacy as an instant form of proximity to both digital objects and the addressed audience. It is sometimes hard to track the grounds of someone's self-expressions online because of the lack of articulated reasoning (see e.g. Grabill & Pigg 2012). One online comment may be one evaluative word (such as 'LOL', 'OMG', 'bitch') without any rational form of distance from the audience.

While Articles 1 and 2 are based on the analysis of evaluative language and Article 3 on argumentation analysis, these methods are combined in Article 4, which approaches the rhetoric of emotivist morality as the union of specific forms of argumentation and emotional utterances. Compared with the other four articles, Article 5 involves a more holistic approach to ethos in the online self-expressions of celebrity gossip participants. I will first discuss the analysis of evaluative language (see Sub-section 2.3.1) because I started my analysis of self-expressions in online comment sections using this method. After that, I will discuss argumentation analysis of moral rhetoric (see Sub-section 2.3.2).

2.3.1   *The analysis of evaluative language: words and their meanings*

In this dissertation, the analysis of evaluative language is used to explore arete and eunoia as components of ethos. According to Jim R. Martin and Peter R. R. White (2005: 1), the appraisal theory of language concerns 'the construction by texts of communities of shared feelings and values, and with the linguistic mechanisms for the sharing of emotions, tastes and normative assessments'. The language of evaluation, moreover, has been of 'longstanding interest for functionally and semiotically oriented approaches and for those whose concern is with discourse, rhetoric and communicative effect' (Martin & White 2005: 1). I found this approach particularly applicable when considering the idea of emotions as relations to objects (see Ahmed 2004) and as evaluative expressions that indicate what is seen or not seen as valuable (see Sayer 2006: 457).

In the analysis of evaluative language, emotions are treated as socially meaningful sentiments. According to Martin and White (2005), evaluative expressions are meanings of attitude that can be categorized into three groups: *affect* (positive or negative feelings in general), *judgement* (attitudes towards the behaviour and moral character of people) and *appreciation* (evaluation of things and phenomena). The starting point of the analysis of evaluative language is the idea that evaluative expressions always have a target. Thus evaluative expressions are ways of positioning oneself in relation to something or someone. When using the analysis of evaluative language, I took into account those expressions in which online gossip participants described human beings as either moral agents or 'things' whose moral worth was denied. Note that for Martin and White (2005), 'affect' is a general group of evaluative expressions and does not focus on bodily reactions in particular (cf. Paasonen 2011: 22–23, 54–55, 232–236; also Graefer 2013). From the viewpoint of this linguistic categorisation, I characterized reactions to 'things' (such as voyeuristic pleasure as a reaction to a celebrity's picture) as 'appreciation'. From the viewpoint of previous research into online

celebrity gossip, 'affect' is close to what Martin and White call appreciation. As Graefer (2013: 60) suggests, affect is aesthetic evaluation that it is freely attached to objects and therefore may change the meaning of what is seen as 'good' and 'bad' over time. In online celebrity gossip, affect as a freely-moving content finally becomes a social phenomenon – a shared way to react – which makes it part of collective norms, particularly those relating to consumption and commercialism (Graefer 2013). This is line with Martin's and White's (2005: 45) notion that there is no such thing as 'pure' affect: it is always related to social systems of evaluation.

In the analysis of arete, I focused on celebrity gossip participants' autobiographical moralizing in which they described themselves and private people around them as moral beings. Of the three categories of attitude suggested by Martin and White (2005), the analysis of autobiographical moralizing concerned the category of judgement. Since the objective to present oneself in a better light often goes hand in hand with the evaluation of other people as immoral actors (Bergmann 1993: 128), I also took into account the ways that online gossip participants evaluated people in their everyday lives. Moreover, presenting oneself in a better light may also take place through critical self-reflection in which language users narrate their learning process, which indicates that 'now I know better'. In rhetorical terms, rhetors who tell autobiographical experiences may position the 'self' in the place of other people and thereby aim at constructing a virtuous impression of their own moral character. Bearing this in mind, I made a distinction between confessions and testimonies as types of autobiographical telling. While confessions are autobiographical stories (or fragments of stories) targeting the moral character of the 'self' (see Foucault 1990 [1978]: 53–73), testimonies deal with the moral character of private individuals whose acts the rhetors describe as personally witnessed (see Foucault 1990 [1978]: 59; Felman & Laub 1992).

The analysis of evaluative language can be seen as an applicable method to explore emotions (eunoia) as a rhetorical issue. It concerns 'shared feelings and values', as Martin and White (2005: 1) describe. The combination of emotion and its target indicates values. Values, moreover, represent goals serving as guiding principles in life, both individually and socially (Schwartz 1992). Values are often more abstract and hidden than concrete evaluations (Sayer 2011: 25–28). This is because their meaning is based on the combination of the evaluative expression and its target (referent). In other words, evaluative language has a rhetorical function beyond a literal understanding, since it reflects the goals of evaluators and their community (Thompson & Hunston 2000: 6, 13, 21). These goals as values of communities can be, moreover, seen as specific (special) topoi. In the

theory of rhetoric, specific topoi are often regarded as material contents of argumentation that indicate time, place, circumstances and emotional involvement (see Grimaldi 1972: 124–133; also Miller 1987). Specific topoi refer to what matters to rhetors and their audience(s) in a particular kairos.

Of the categories of evaluative language suggested by Martin and White (2005), affect (such as 'I like her') is at the heart of evaluative language and it can be seen as central in the language of children who are learning to express what they want and desire (see Painter 2003). In everyday language of adults and young people, however, affect is transformed into 'institutionalized feelings' of judgement or those of appreciation, as Martin and White (2005: 45) argue. Thus 'pure' affect, as they seem to suggest, is rare in the language use of adults or young people (see ibid.; see also Martin 2000; Painter 2003). The categories of judgement and appreciation are particularly interesting in terms of values and power because they take place on the level of communities as 'institutions' of evaluation in which desires are transformed into social meanings.

I see the idea of 'institutionalized feelings' suggested by Martin and White (2005: 45) to fit in with Lanham's (2006: 166–176) 'motive spectrum'. Judgement as the linguistic realisation of moral norms resonates with the idea of a socially shared moral *purpose*, whereas appreciation as the evaluation of things, such as a picture of a celebrity, can be seen as the sign of *play* in which evaluation is motivated by the pleasure of things. The third category, namely *game* (see Lanham 2006: 166–176), may be involved in both purpose and play because both of them can be used in persuasion. Bearing these ambiguities in mind, this study holds that there are two basic ways of using evaluative language that contribute to emotivist morality. Firstly, those persons considered 'others' are described by choosing words from the category of judgement to disguise game (power) with purpose. Common to sexism, ageism, racism, anti-Semitism, classism, etc. is that game comes in the guise of moral purpose expressed in the form of categorical, present-tense claims in which moral 'badness' is associated with people seen as representatives of a certain group (see Dijk 1993; Reisigl & Wodak 2001; Pälli 2003: 218, 220; Enberg 2011).

Because sexist domination is prominent in celebrity gossip discourses online (see Fairclough 2008; Meyers 2010; 2013), I take it here as an example of emotivist morality. For instance, saying that 'women provoke men to violence' is an example of evaluative use of language in which the idea that women should be obedient to moral norms (purpose) is utilized to reinforce sexist preferences (game) in the guise of the vocabulary of judgement. On the contrary, a self-expression according to which 'she looks like an ugly, fat pig' is a way of

contributing to sexist domination (game) according to which women are aesthetic objects to be judged in the guise of a playful, appreciation-based evaluation (play). In appreciation, people are considered entities, not agents who behave (see White 1998: 36). Figure 3 illustrates the categories of evaluative language (affect, judgement, appreciation, see Martin & White 2005) and their relation to values classified in three rhetorical motives (for more on game, play, purpose, see Lanham 2006: 166–176).

- evaluation of human beings as moral agents
- potential values: purpose or game in the guise of purpose
- examples: good, bad, moral, immoral, sincere, corrupt

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evaluation of human beings
- evaluation based on positive or negative emotions (affect)
- potential values: game, play, purpose
- examples: love, hate, happy, sad, like, dislike

- evaluation of human beings as things
- potential values: play or game in the guise of play
- examples: beautiful, ugly, real, fake, interesting, boring

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Figure 3.   Evaluative language (see Martin & White 2005: 45).

As Figure 3 shows, evaluation of human beings is transformed into either meanings of judgement or appreciation. Although the category of judgement may seem more natural than appreciation for the making of moral meanings, this study holds that the evaluation of human beings as material things is emotivist morality in its most extreme form because it explicitly aims at denying the functional role of certain human beings (for more on evaluating human beings as mere objects, see MacIntyre 2003 [1985]: 58–59; Ahmed 2004: 195; Bauman & Donskis 2013: 37–40). Especially where celebrities are concerned, their worth is often equated with their physical appearance. This is evident when treating young female celebrities belonging to certain ethnic groups as stereotypical 'others' to be sexualized. For instance, the pop singer Shakira is treated as the cultural object of sexual desire in various media contents through which the stereotype of Latina identity as overly sexual is supported (Orgad 2012: 112–113, 115). In such media contents, Shakira is dehumanized by using the vocabulary of appreciation in which game comes in the guise of play. In rhetorical terms, the evaluation of Shakira as a sexualized object is an example of eunoia connecting the rhetor and audience on the basis of shared sentiments which contribute to a sexist and racist characterization of the 'third persona' (see Wander 1984).

2.3.2   *Rhetorical argumentation analysis: the logic of act and person*

This section deals with logic as distance in which the relation between the evaluation of the act and that of the person is central (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1951; 2000 [1969]: 293–321; Leff 1983: 24–25). According to Michael C. Leff (1983: 24; 2006: 205), the topoi of act and person is one of the most essential topical systems in the theory of argumentation. Moreover, the evaluation of acts and person (or a group of people) doing these acts can be seen as the pairing of claim and reason that forms an enthymeme, that is, a rhetorical figure in which an idea is connected with reasons for believing it (see Walker 1994). According to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1951; 2000 [1969]: 293–321), there are three different techniques of act and person in argument; namely, separation technique (either act or person), curbing technique and act-person interaction (see Figure 4).
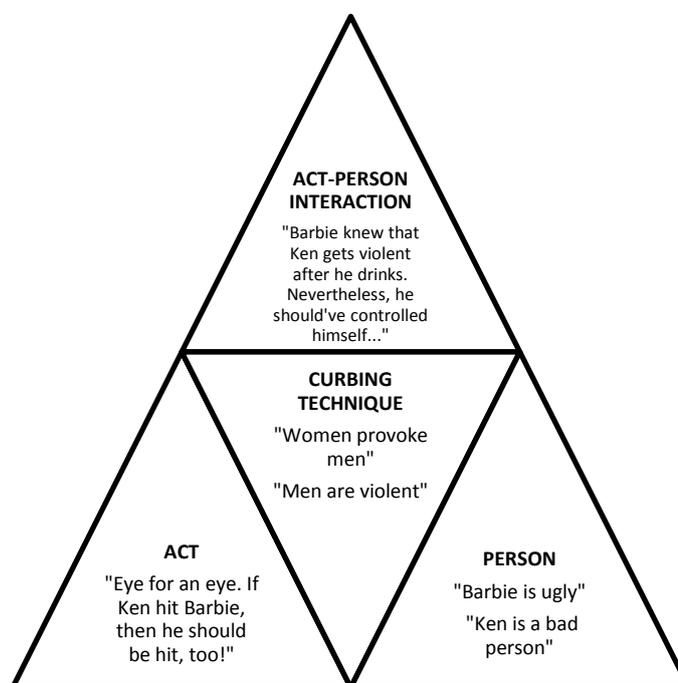
Figure 4.   Forms of moral argumentation (cf. Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1951).

As Figure 4[11] illustrates, separation technique[12] concerns two types of act-person separation: 1) either acts are evaluated deductively only in relation to abstract

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[11] Note that I have made up the examples of Barbie and Ken to demonstrate what I mean by the forms of moral argumentation in this study.

[12] In *A Treatise on Argumentation*, separation technique relates to 'dissociation of concepts' (see Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 2000 [1969]: 411–459).

moral norms (e.g. 'Eye for an eye. If Ken hit Barbie, then he should be hit, too!') (see Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1951: 264) or 2) people are evaluated independently of their acts and moral norms (see ibid. 256) ('Barbie is ugly', 'Ken is a bad person'). In the first type of separation, acts are evaluated outside of context. This fits in with the idea of conventionalism as rationalized moral reasoning (Sayer 2011: 24, 33). For conventionalism as a rational, context-external moral doctrine, the idea of rhetoric focusing on personal issues forms a dangerous threat. In the conventionalist form of argumentation, reasoning is theoretical and equated with mathematical calculation in which a rule is not applied in a context (see Jonsen & Toulmin 1988: 34). However, when conventionalism claims to be a non-rhetorical moral positioning, it merely highlights its own rhetorical power to judge. Conventionalism involved in the separation technique resonates with Walter Fisher's (1984: 4–6) remarks on 'the rational world paradigm' which he criticizes as a worldview that is based on self-evident propositions and rational proofs. Such a paradigm can be seen to provoke moral argumentation as moralistic judgements (ibid. 12), such as 'eye for an eye' in Figure 4. In the example, the rhetor positioning oneself above other people criticizes their behaviour and indicates that rules should be obeyed just because they are rules and because of the fear of punishments.

Interestingly, the separation of act and person in argument, as Leff (1983) argues, started already in the late Roman era that stressed the topic of the act, but ignored the role of person and specific circumstances in moral reasoning. According to Leff (1983: 42), such a treatise of argumentation 'tends to slight the special, material circumstances that surround issues of public debate, and unless tightly controlled, it gravitates toward a logical formalism wholly alien to practical argumentation'. This separation, moreover, was prominent in the end of the seventeenth century when textbooks of argumentation represented arguments as deductive forms (Jonsen & Toulmin 1988: 278). Thus arguments focusing on acts without any notion of person or circumstances as their explanations can be seen as products of the Enlightenment project in which the rhetor utilizes the power to judge. All in all, the way of focusing on acts instead of the person makes the argument rationalistic (see Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1951: 264; also Leff 1983). Accordingly, whenever concrete circumstances and the role of people involved in these circumstances are ignored, moral argumentation becomes the form of mere distancing in which the demonstration of formalistic rules matters.

Emotivist morality, on the contrary, stresses the evaluation of people. Here we have two techniques to deal with: 1) separation focusing on the person (people) and 2) curbing technique. The separation technique focusing on people without any notion of their acts is a way of treating people as objects who are considered

not morally responsible. According to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (2000 [1969]: 293–294), the focus on mere people tends to expand the category of people to the material and static world of things. Even though mistakenly indicating that western culture is to be seen as the opposite of primitive otherness, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (2000 [1969]: 293–294) aptly argue that the physical world of bodies, their shadows and artefacts, as attached to the concept of person, contributes to a 'thinglike' perception of the object of evaluation:

> The argumentation of primitive people would use a much wider concept of the person than ours. They would doubtless include in it all its *appurtenances*, such as shadow, totem, name, and detached fragments of the body...[T]his stability of the person, which makes him [sic] somewhat resemble an object with his properties fixed once and for all, is opposed to his freedom, to his spontaneity, to the possibility of his changing.

This kind of separation technique, therefore, can be seen as the form of argumentation playing a central role when contributing to emotivist morality in which 'moral inferiors' are those who are dehumanized and not seen as functional beings, but as static objects, mere things (see MacIntyre 2003 [1985]: 58–59; Bauman & Donskis 2013: 37–40). Perelman's and Olbrechts-Tyteca's remarks above indicate that the argumentative practices of moral rhetoric, such as separation technique, concern the whole issue of ethos. Thus separation technique treating human beings as 'thinglike' objects characterizes intimacy with the material world of artefacts through which otherness is excluded. In online celebrity gossip, this materialistic relationship becomes obvious when participants address the audience through their own relationship to pictures or other representations of those celebrities whom they are mocking. The object of such mockery is a specific construct of third persona dependent on the preferences of each audience and community. Although Graefer's (2013) research reveals that objects mocked through humorous posts are celebrities seen as representatives of privileged people, it is perhaps more common that those treated as mere materialistic objects are 'others' seen as 'swayed by their emotions' (Ahmed 2004: 195). Othering occurring through the construction of thinglike human objects is evident for example in the Shakira case discussed in the previous section (see Orgad 2012: 112–113, 115).

The other form of moral argumentation essential for emotivist morality is the curbing technique. This form concerns people's manners (e.g. 'Women provoke men', 'Men are violent') and links the evaluation of acts and the person together in a mechanical and unchangeable fashion 'as if our person had been arrested at a certain stage of its development' (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1951: 266). The curbing technique, albeit associative, can be seen as an artificial way of gluing

two separated pieces of the broken whole of the act-person topos together. In other words, the curbing technique would not be possible unless act and person in enthymeme were not separated from each other.

Both the separation technique, focusing on the evaluation of people, and the curbing technique, as a form of evaluating people through their manners, can be effective ways of contributing to social domination, such as sexism, ageism, racism or classism. In these techniques, certain characteristics of people (such as gender, skin colour or clothing style) are 'triggers' provoking certain reactions. Note, moreover, that Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1951; 2000 [1969]) do not explicitly discuss the domination of specific social groups when dealing with separation and curbing techniques. They suggest, however, that the connection between persons and their acts can be regarded as a prototype of a series of links that give rise to other, similar types of argumentation, such as those involving the relationship between a group and its members (see Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1951: 268; 2000 [1969]: 321–322). Associating the separation and curbing techniques with rhetoric that attacks certain groups is a contribution of the present study.

Finally yet importantly, act-person interaction is one of the connections of coexistence belonging to the structures of reality or 'commonplaces' (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1951: 253). In act-person interaction, both people and their acts are evaluated in enthymeme (e.g. 'Barbie knew that Ken gets violent after he drinks. Nevertheless, he should've controlled himself...'). The act-person interaction enables the negotiation of moral issues in which '[s]uccessive evocation of the act and the person, then of the person and the act, does not leave the mind at the point at which it started' (ibid. 261). Such moral argumentation resonates with the idea of practical reasoning as the way of solving contextual moral dilemmas by applying moral norms to the particularities of each case (Jonsen & Toulmin 1988: 35). Act-person interaction, moreover, is the form of argumentation I assumed to find also in autobiographical moralizing in which people deal with their experiences through confessions and testimonies, thereby evaluating themselves as moral beings who act in certain contexts.

To sum up, act-person separation (exclusively focusing on either the act or the person), curbing technique and act-person interaction represent different logical forms of moral argumentation through which the 'self' contributes to a community. Although the study of argumentation suggested by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca has been criticized because it is regarded as an abstract, decontextualized classification of argumentation techniques (e.g. Leff 2009), I see their remarks on act and person in argumentation particularly useful because they

deal with the diversity of logic in moral rhetoric. In other words, the strength of this rhetorical approach is its descriptive understanding of moral reasoning that is not normatively limited to mathematical, deductive reasoning as the only noteworthy form of logic. Because Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1951) include the seemingly non-argumentative or irrational person arguments in the theory of moral argumentation, their theory resonates with the idea of 'ultimate' concepts according to which a concept includes its apparent opposite as a special case (see Burke 1969: 19–20). Accordingly, the form of separation technique focusing on person without any notion of acts is a special case of distance between the rhetor and audience. By applying the analysis of act and person in argument to the study of online comments, I was able to analyse self-expressions of celebrity gossip participants as specific ways of contributing to moral logic in rhetorical action.

2.4   The analysis of ethos online

In this study, ethos refers to the construction of trustworthiness of the 'self' (rhetor) in a community to which the 'self' contributes. Community in this study is understood as a rhetorical construct based on the togetherness of the rhetor and audience (see Miller 1993: 212). Ethos as the locus of togetherness is an essential persuasive means in any community. I have analysed online comments on celebrity gossip sites as self-expressions in which ethos is both individual and collective at the same time. Such understanding of self-expressions, as argued at the very beginning of this thesis, goes back to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (see also Fleckenstein 2005; 2007).

Unlike radical approaches to constructivism, rhetorical criticism does not emphasize that communal belief systems are *constructed* out of nothing by *mere appearances*, such as words or symbols, in human communication. Nor should the idea of topical thinking central in rhetoric be seen as the opposite of invention; on the contrary, it is the practice of finding something that may be surprising and can be put to novel use even though it is not completely unexpected (Miller 2000: 143). Consequently, ethos construction does not, even in 'new media' contexts such as on celebrity gossip sites, create something completely new; instead it may be constructed based on surprising choices of *already existing* resources and restrictions in terms of trustworthiness. In the methodology of this study, I have considered the idea that both proximity and distance are involved in self-expressions in online celebrity gossip. In rhetorical terms, the ethos of the rhetor in online contexts does not merely lie in persuasive speeches but relates to values and norms beyond the screen, beyond rhetoric online. This means that in rhetorical criticism applied to new media contexts, classical concepts (such as

phronesis, arete and eunoia) should not be replaced with entirely new ones but rather should be given the possibility to surprise with novel uses.

As Warnick (2001) suggests, those who analyse online discourse cannot take traditional concepts of rhetoric and rhetorical criticism, such as ethos or text, for granted, but rather they need to apply these concepts to new media environments by taking into account the specific interactional and multimediated context of persuasion.[13] This study holds that not only online participants are faced with the problem of limited cues; researchers of online communication must also deal with this problem. The key problem of online participants, as well as of researchers who explore online participation 'stems from the fact that we often only have access to fragments of discourse related to the identities of those we study' (Grabill & Pigg 2012: 105). We rarely have access to individuals' reputations, motivations or their particular cultures outside of these fragments (ibid.). As researchers, we are left alone with the 'messy rhetoric' of online participants whose ethos can be analysed only based on what they have revealed in those fragments (see Grabill & Pigg 2012).

Moreover, an essential aspect of rhetoric online is the interplay between verbal (written or spoken texts) and visual elements (pictures and videos), as well as hyperlinks, in persuasion (e.g. Warnick 2007). Thus self-expressions are not speeches consisting of mere words; they may also include visual elements or hyperlinks. The verbal contents of self-expressions were the core interest of this study, but I also took into consideration the visual elements and hyperlinks they involved. I explored these non-verbal elements as referents to which verbal self-expressions related. For me as a researcher, pictures, videos and hyperlinks provided useful contextual material in the analysis of self-expressions. Thus it was relevant in this study to take into consideration, for instance, which celebrity was in a photograph that was evaluated with humorous and mocking tones. A detailed study of visual rhetoric with specific methods of visual analysis was, however, beyond the scope of this project.

In online digital settings, it is obvious that ethos is intertwined with the idea of community (see Fleckenstein 2007). According to Fleckenstein (2007), 'the digital author position is distributed not merely across lexia or lex-icons, but

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[13] Rhetorical approach to texts and interaction in new media environments is also called *digital rhetoric,* particularly in the U.S. (e.g. Zappen 2005; Losh 2009: 47–95). However, I prefer calling the approach of my study simply rhetorical criticism because by self-expressions I refer to expressions of embodied beings who do not construct their online ethos in a digital vacuum.

across the system of interlocking loops that constitute cyberspace communities'. Bearing the idea of 'messy rhetoric' in mind, I dealt with one online comment as one text, as one self-expression, and thus as a cue of an online participant's ethos. However, I also took into consideration that these texts become meaningful only when seen in relation to other comments on each given site and to the particular time- and place-bound settings surrounding communication in comment sections. Picture 1 shows what I mean by self-expressions as collective expressions. The comments in Picture 1 come from the Just Jared online comment section following the gossip news story 'Rihanna's Bruised Face Revealed'.

jjsu @ 02/19/2009 at 9:39 pm   # 12

I hope CB spends time in jail…but I have a feeling he won't.

@reply | flag this

yaya @ 02/19/2009 at 9:39 pm   # 13

Shame on Chris Brown!
He should be put in jail!!!

@reply | flag this

tanya @ 02/19/2009 at 9:39 pm   # 14

omg…she looks so sad…omg..i knew it was bad..but i didn't expect it would be like this…stay strong rihanna!

@reply | flag this

SAYINI @ 02/19/2009 at 9:40 pm   # 15

We need to boycott that ******* of Chris Brown! How could he do that? He is a monster.. Poor Rihanna

@reply | flag this

Clarissa @ 02/19/2009 at 9:40 pm   # 16

Oh my gosh, Chris Brown should be ***** slapped.

@reply | flag this

Picture 1.   Examples of self-expressions.

There are five self-expressions in Picture 1. These self-expressions relate to the gossip topic concerning domestic violence involving the pop singers Rihanna and Chris Brown. Each self-expression (such as 'I hope Chris Brown spends time in jail...but I have a feeling he won't') can be seen as the cue of the rhetor's ethos involving evaluative language (see Martin and White 2005) and forms of moral argumentation (see Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1951). In terms of evaluative

language, these comments involve both judgement (e.g. *Shame on*, put in *jail*, *monster*) and affect (e.g. *omg*, *Poor* Rihanna, *Oh my gosh*). Affect in these self-expressions, moreover, is transformed into meanings of appreciation as the reactions of 'shock' and dismay to Rihanna's picture on the site also indicate voyeuristic pleasure. As forms of moral argumentation, these comments are based on act-person separation: they focus on explicit judging of Chris Brown without distance from the audience. In this example, judging Chris Brown in harsh terms is the sign of trust, which is collectively supported.

As can be seen in Picture 1, self-expressions are typically signed with a male or female first name. However, like pictures of celebrities, also online participants' signatures provided a useful background material for this study, rather than being the focus of it. When citing online comments as examples, I have discussed the female or male signatures or usernames and pseudonyms of participants whenever they played an essential role in online participants' ethos construction, especially when they were not just names, but involved language of evaluation. Moreover, when such signatures were part of Finnish comments, I translated them into English.

Despite the 'messy rhetoric', online comments are fruitful targets of rhetorical criticism because these fragments can be seen as obvious and authentic indicators of what is considered persuasive in addressing the audience in celebrity gossip. In this sense, ethos is to be found between the rhetor and audience (see e.g. Reynolds 1993; about group ethos in online contexts, see Gurak 1999). Since the online rhetors and their audiences constantly change places with each other, the persuasiveness of particular ways of constructing ethos is easily observable. An online comment, therefore, has a double role: it is both a persuasive self-expression by the rhetor, and at the same time, it is a response from the audience to other rhetors and their self-expressions. When the ways of constructing ethos are shared by rhetors and their audiences, it indicates that online gossipers contribute to the common idea of trust. Consequently, in addition to the qualitative analysis of ethos, I have also paid attention to quantitative measures, especially numbers and percentages, to explore the popularity of each type of evaluation and forms of moral argumentation as persuasive ways of contributing to ethos in online celebrity gossip.

3   DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the rhetoric of celebrity gossip participants in online comment sections contributed to emotivist morality in which self-interested relationships to distanced 'others' became the basis of rhetorical ethos. Firstly, self-expressions rarely included autobiographical moralizing, and if they did, gossipers avoided critical self-reflections (arete) (see Article 1). Secondly, online celebrity gossip was heavily based on the eunoia component of ethos, which emerged as a contribution to preferences for power and domination in the guise of play and purpose (see Article 2). In other words, online participants of celebrity gossip aimed at addressing 'the second persona' (Black 1970) by evaluating 'the third persona' (Wander 1984), a selected group of ordinary 'others', as moral inferiors. Although celebrities were the common targets of mockery and moralizing, the participants occasionally attacked one another as well. Thus self-expressions in online celebrity gossip were not merely 'friendly' ways of creating intimacy with all online gossipers on the site. Thirdly, the most common argumentative ways in online celebrity gossip were act-person separation as the logic of what I call *digital enthymeme* (see Articles 3 and 4) and the curbing technique as an argument called *categorical enthymeme* in Article 3 (for techniques of moral argumentation, see Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1951). While digital enthymemes were expressions that took place as shared, 'crowding' preferences evaluating celebrities without any notion of their acts (such as 'she deserved it!', 'what an ugly, fat pig'), categorical enthymemes were arguments stressing that a certain group of people is known for certain manners (such as 'women should be blamed because they provoke men to violence'). Fourthly, the undermining of arete and the sharing of preferred sentiments as emotivist means of persuasion were also supported through ethos control (see Article 5). By such ethos control, I mean types of normativity through which online gossip participants criticized self-expressions involving moral identification with celebrities. This last case study was motivated by the other four case studies, which made it relevant to focus on one specific forum (ONTD) only.

Despite the prominence of mockery and condemnation contributing to the emotivist morality, online gossip participants also showed moments of resistance. The ways participants created and resisted self-expressions of emotivist morality are discussed in Section 3.1. In Section 3.2, I discuss contextual differences, particularly those relating to the language and cultural background of the celebrity gossip participants. Section 3.3 deals with the contributions this study makes and discusses the opportunities this study leaves for further research. Finally, Section 3.4 is a brief conclusion on emotional self-expressions as rhetorical practices in online contexts.

3.1   Ethos in online celebrity gossip

In this section, the results concerning each research question are discussed. I have classified the following sub-sections in the same order as the research articles so that the first sub-section (3.1.1) deals with autobiographical moralizing (understood here as the potential rhetoric involving arete), the second one (3.1.2) emotions and values (eunoia), the third one (3.1.3) moral argumentation (phronesis) and the last one (3.1.4) ethos control. The findings of Article 4 are discussed in Sub-section 3.1.2 and 3.1.3, since the paper deals with both eunoia and phronesis of emotivist morality. I have summarized the findings in Figure 5.

ARTICLE 1
- **Title**: Autobiographical moralizing in celebrity discussions on the Internet: how do discussion participants confess and testify in Finnish and English?
- **Published**: (2011) *Language Use on Net and in Networks. AFinLA yearbook 2011, n:o 69.*
- **Findings:** Autobiographical moralizing was utilized to create a virtuous impression of the rhetor. In many comments, the 'sincerity' of the rhetor was a rhetorical means of justifying mockery and condemnation of other people. In general, autobiographical moralizing, both in English and Finnish, was rare.

ARTICLE 2
- **Title**: 'It's so wrong yet so funny': celebrity violence, values and the Janus-faced cultural public sphere online
- **Published**: (2014a) *Celebrity Studies.*
- **Findings:** By sharing evaluative expressions, online participants contributed to values of game in the guise of play and purpose. Playful self-expressions were more characteristic of English-language celebrity gossip than celebrity gossip in Finnish, which, in turn, involved more serious comments focused on moralizing.

ARTICLE 3
- **Title**: Moral argumentation as a rhetorical practice in popular online discourse: examples from online comment sections of celebrity gossip
- **Published**: (2014b) *Discourse & Communication.*
- **Findings:** The separation technique (digital enthymeme) focusing on the evaluation of people without reasoning and the curbing technique (categorical enthymeme) explicitly attacking groups were characteristic of online celebrity gossip, both English and Finnish. English-language gossip was more intimately emotional, whereas celebrity gossip in Finnish, compared with English, involved more explicitly argumentative and hierarchical forms.

ARTICLE 4
- **Title**: Digital enthymeme: morality, emotions, and materialism in new media participation
- **Published**: (2013) *New media, audience and emotional connectivity.* Special Issue of *Sociedad de la Información.*
- **Findings:** There were two types of digital enthymemes, namely, moralistic (serious) and amoralistic (playful). The amoralistic ones were characteristic of English-language celebrity gossip, which involved more digital enthymemes in general than online celebrity gossip in Finnish.

ARTICLE 5
- **Title**: Online celebrity gossip, moral disidentification, and ethos: exploring the rhetorical grounds of celebrity mockery
- **Submitted:** (2014) *Enculturation*
- **Findings:** Ways of treating celebrities as moral beings were criticized because of the naiveity of such identification (arete). Celebrity mockery, paradoxically, was a way of showing one's phronesis, which was linked to media-savvy readings of gossipers arguing that they are aware of the artificial and media-made nature of celebrities. The means of ethos control found in the material were virtual, voyeuristic, playful, disparate and aesthetic normativity.

Figure 5.   Articles and the research findings.

As can be seen in Figure 5, the findings of the research articles are interrelated with one another. In other words, the rejection of arete as critical self-reflection and the use of eunoia, phronesis and ethos control as rhetoric attacking 'others' work together in contributing to emotivist morality, which involves both proximity and distance. Despite the popularity of emotivist morality, some moments of resistance were also involved in online celebrity gossip. Typical of such resistance was its ambiguous nature (see also Meyers 2010: 228, 309, 320). The findings of each article are discussed in detail in what follows.

3.1.1   *Autobiographical moralizing*

In the comments involving autobiographical moralizing, online participants of celebrity gossip implicitly constructed the idea of the 'good me' and thereby aimed at presenting themselves as morally 'virtuous' (Eronen 2011). In general, online comments involving autobiographical telling were not common in the research material of this study. Of the Finnish comments, 3.2 % contained autobiographical moralizing, while the percent of autobiographical comments in the English-language material was 4.3 %. These findings support the idea that arete as the articulated moral virtue of the rhetor is the lacking or undermined component of ethos online (see Miller 2004: 212–213). The lack of arete is in line with the idea of 'deindividuation' (Lea & Spears 1991; Stromer-Galley & Martey 2009) and ethos performance (Warnick 2004: 264). Moreover, the undermined role of autobiographical moralizing also reinforces Orgad's (2012: 132, 195–196) argument that online discourse rejects a narrative structure when it allows 'no ending' and no moral explanations. In online contexts, the role of the individual rhetor is secondary to the group ethos (see Gurak 1999; also Warnick 2001: 63).

What was striking in the comments involving autobiographical moralizing is that although these comments involved private-life considerations, these considerations, particularly those in English, tended to be intertwined with the online participants' construction of 'the third persona' (Wander 1984). In other words, although some comments analysed in the study involved personalized stories concerning relatively sensitive issues, such as domestic violence, these stories contributed to the rhetoric of othering. This relates to Orgad's (2012: 170) remarks on how ideological and thus collective meaning making frames autobiographical online discourse and serves as the context of stories told as personal. For instance, a participant in Example 1 (see Eronen 2011: 49) compared the morally virtuous 'me' or 'us' ('Here things are sorted out in our own way, no authorities are needed for that') with the 'immoral' female celebrities who are wasting taxpayers' money in court. In comparison with the

'virtuous me', the female celebrities are represented as 'others' and thus evaluated as the third persona ('(I) am so ashamed for all these women, these are what women are today, mere decorations'). Interestingly, the participant uses a female pseudonym (A Woman with big W!!!), which indicates that in this case such rhetoric of emotivist morality can be associated with a female ethos. By the same token, representatives of 'taxpayers' and thus members of a social class above the particular female celebrities were represented as moral 'superiors'. The upper social class, therefore, was seen to be in a legitimized position from which condemning judgements could be made.

Example 6 (see Eronen 2011: 53) was an even more striking case characterizing how the seemingly personal may turn out to be a way of contributing to emotivist morality. In this example, an online participant shared his[14] personal experiences of domestic violence by telling how his girlfriend tried to provoke him to act violently ('she just went on and on in the car. nonstop, trying to provoke me'). Later in the same story, the participant associated the experiences he told as his own with the domestic violence involving Rihanna and Chris Brown ('when she finally realized she would not get me to engage her [which is why Rihanna kept yapping] in any discussion [which is why she would not shut the fuck up]'). In other words, the participant situated the experiences he told as his own in an ideological agenda. When being overcautious at the beginning of this study project, I also contacted this particular online participant through YouTube to ask the permission to cite this autobiographical comment. The reply was striking: the participant did not seem to remember (or did not want to say) that the particular comment was his. I consider the YouTube participant's reply as significant for this study. This case illustrates something deeper, namely, the absence of the morally-concerned 'self' in online celebrity gossip seems to go hand in hand with othering. When contributing to emotivist morality, the participant aimed at making domestic violence against (black) women seem natural and accepted, somehow 'objective' and thus impersonal if seen from the viewpoint of individual responsibility.

Although self-reflection as a way of identifying with celebrities was not common in online celebrity gossip, it was found in a few comments showing resistance to the idea of distancing certain 'others'. Example 4 in Article 1, for instance, narrates a rhetor's learning process (see Eronen 2011: 50–51). By pointing out through his self-experience discourse that alcoholism is not a moral issue but rather an illness, the online participant of Example 4 indicates his readiness to

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[14] I associated the ethos of the participant with a male identity.

identify with those having problems of alcohol use. Moreover, the gossip participant of Example 5 in Article 1 identified with the Finnish female celebrity by encouraging her to leave her violent husband (see Eronen 2011: 53). However, the same comment also contributes to othering of men who have problems with alcohol, which makes the self-expression emotivist. The fact that online gossip participants can never personally know celebrities appearing as media-made commodities makes identification with them similar to identification with faceless groups. Such faceless groups may become targets of preferences in terms of sexism, racism and classism.

3.1.2 Emotions and values

The results of Article 2 (eunoia and values) and Article 4 (digital enthymeme as a particular, extensively emotional form of moral argumentation) indicate that online celebrity gossip is based on preferences in evaluating 'others' among 'us' and like 'us'. In Article 2, I found that the serious moral purpose of stressing obedience to communal rules and the playful mockery as humorous self-expression share the common goal of contributing to self-interested, often sexist, meanings. In such rhetoric, game comes in the guise of purpose or play (for more on game, play and purpose, see Lanham 2006: 166–176). While I associated purpose with evaluations based on the vocabulary of 'judgement', play involved evaluations of celebrities in terms of 'appreciation' (see Martin & White 2005). My reason for evaluating the cultural public sphere surrounding online celebrity gossip as *Janus-faced* in Article 2 comes from the notion that play and purpose as concepts seemingly oppositional to each other were utilized as rhetorical tools to legitimize the domination of particular groups.

In terms of othering, women as victims of domestic violence were seen as moral 'inferiors' who deserved their victimhood. Some participants also saw these celebrities as representatives of race or class in addition to gender. While for some participants Rihanna represented racial otherness, Mervi Tapola was seen as a representative of 'others' in terms of class. Although Tapola is a millionaire heir, in online comment sections she was described as an alcoholic and thereby was given a certain class identity, often indicating that the celebrity is not seen as a representative of 'classy' women. In Finland, alcoholics are typically seen as idle people characterized by their exclusion from productive working life. By evaluating alcoholics through celebrity gossip, online participants made classist judgements. Part of such evaluation was that rich women using a lot of alcohol were seen as deviant cases of upper class people who are not behaving in the 'classy' way that they are expected to.

Particularly striking in the online gossip comments justifying violence as a response to provocation was that domestic violence was seen as a natural problem of certain groups. In other words, although othering attacked female celebrities in particular, it also attacked particular groups of men as moral 'inferiors'. By doing so, participants implied that it is natural for a black man (Chris Brown) and a man with an inferior socioeconomic status (Matti Nykänen) to use violence against their spouse. Through such self-expressions, online gossip participants contributed to social domination in terms of racist and classist domination. Central to these comments was wrapping the discourse of game (power) inside the rhetorical cover of purpose (moralizing).

Not all comments on domestic violence involving celebrities contributed to obvious stereotypes. Both English-language and Finnish material of this study also involved comments in which domestic violence against women was condemned by demanding that men should be punished, such as when saying that 'I hope CB spends time in jail', 'He is a monster…' (Picture 3 in Article 4, see Eronen 2013: 47). On the one hand, such comments can be seen to resist the oppression of women involved in many other comments concerning online celebrity gossip. On the other hand, however, the lack of contextual moral reasoning in the comments may leave room for the audience to interpret these self-expressions as contributions to sexism, as if men would be naturally evil. The rhetorical way of dehumanizing men into monsters may contribute to a discourse according to which 'sex is power' and which makes sexism, in general, seem natural (see Höglund 2009).

Another ambiguous way of evaluating celebrities took place when commenting on the beaten face of a female celebrity, Rihanna (see Examples 7–10 in Article 2, see Eronen 2014a: 167). On the one hand, posts indicating the emotional reaction of shock from seeing the injuries were not obviously sexist. Such posts did not aim at justifying domestic violence against women. On the other hand, however, these self-expressions evaluated the female celebrity as an object of voyeurism. Value discourse of voyeurism, as discussed in Article 2, can be seen as online participation based on motives of self-interest. In such online participation, a female celebrity was dehumanized, that is, she was seen as a mere thing to be looked *at* and evaluated in online comment sections.

Compared to celebrity gossip regarding domestic violence, in discourse concerning fighting between female celebrities, the evaluation of women as amoral objects was even more common. In such evaluation, fighting female celebrities were seen as funny and entertaining, often sarcastically erotic. Such evaluation came to life in humorous rhetoric in which online gossip participants

ridiculed the celebrities. The humorous and openly mocking self-expressions were concrete ways of reinforcing intimacy between gossipers. Such derisive rhetoric contributed to 'affective stickiness' of interlocutors who shared their reactions as a means of social interaction (see Paasonen & Pajala 2010; Paasonen 2011: 232–236; Graefer 2013). By using Martin's and White's (2005) terminology, celebrity mockery involved affect that was transformed into appreciation targeting human beings as things. In contrast to the rhetoric of obedience, the rhetoric of mockery was a way of contributing to domination in comments that seemed innocent and harmless. In these comments, game was disguised as play. On the one hand, the playful comments were ways to resist the serious meaning of gossip (see also Hermes 1995: 121, 133; Meyers 2010: 31, 53, 309). On the other hand, the playful mocking of celebrities, despite its potential to resist serious interpretations, still contributes to emotivist morality with oppressive tendencies (see also Meyers 2010: 317).

What made the fights of the female celebrities meaningful was the fact that they were seen as frivolous. This is in line with the findings that celebrities, particularly young, white females are not seen as morally responsible human beings but rather represent moral 'inferiors' whose 'bad' habits make them 'things' to be laughed at (see Tyler 2008; Williamson 2010; on the working class woman as a moral 'inferior', see Skeggs 2005). Accordingly, online gossip participants, both English-speaking and Finnish, gave such female celebrities (particularly Hauserman, Aitolehti and Berg) derisive titles, such as 'attention whore', 'bitch' or 'bimbo' indicating a humorous and playful tone of commenting.

Particularly the sharing of intense bodily reactions of disgust, shock or pleasure can be seen as ways of strengthening intimacy between online participants (see also Paasonen 2011: 232–236). In online forums of commenting and sharing, self-interest (such as voyeurism), which may satisfy merely individualistic goals somewhere else, becomes a socially shared and supported phenomenon. Hence, the reactions that indicated the celebrities were seen as dehumanized and 'thing-like' were obvious ways of contributing to emotivist morality in online celebrity gossip, particularly on English-language gossip sites where participants overcame the assumed geographical and social distance by contributing to a discursively created proximity. Such an extreme form of intimacy contributed to 'moral blindness' in which the positioning of the 'self' in relation to those being gossiped about was characterized by amoral curiosity and pleasure, not a moral concern (see Bauman & Donskis 2013). In accordance with the logic of 'ultimate' concepts (see Burke 1969: 19–20), moral blindness as a rhetorical practice is to be

seen as a special case of moral positioning in which values of self-interest become rhetorically tempting ways of addressing the audience.

Accordingly, what is striking in the findings of Article 4 is that most of the comments I have characterized as 'digital enthymemes' involved values of achievement and individual power. These comments, despite the expressions of individual power, formed clusters of comments, which indicated gossipers' proximity to one another. Each participant commented from behind his/her personal digital device with the objective of sharing his/her likes and dislikes. As Turkle (2011) has famously argued, participation in and through digital media is a way of being 'alone together'. In the offline, physical world, conversely, people also need to share material resources, such as food, shelter or money. The sharing of these material resources requires a sacrifice of self-interest for the common good. In digital contexts, sharing content has a different meaning. It is a means to a convenient togetherness (Fernback 2007) that does not entail any sacrifice of self-interest, since in the endless reproduction of content 'we can eat our cake, still have it, and give it away too' (Lanham 2006: 12). Digital enthymemes have the potential to be social and anti-social arguments at the same time (Eronen 2012: 166). Such rhetoric of collective self-interest was particularly prominent in persuasion through which celebrities were treated as public commodities to be consumed and collectively mocked. Since the comments that mocked celebrities were provocative and relatively short, they also contributed to the profitability of the media industry which depends on the number of clicks and comments on their site. These findings reinforce Graefer's (2013: 223) remarks on the commercial benefit of object-focused participation in online celebrity gossip.

In terms of rhetorical criticism, evaluation in online celebrity gossip highlighted the eunoia part of ethos as trustworthiness emerging from the intimacy between the rhetor and audience (see Miller 2001; 2004: 205–212). Intimacy, as Silverstone (2007: 123) argues, is a central means of contributing to trust in contemporary mediated spaces of appearances, which he calls the mediapolis (see Silverstone 2007). Perhaps the need for intimacy in online comment sections is so strong that distance as the idea of one's difference from the addressed audience would seem dishonest. Emotional reactions to violence such as LOL! OMG! dayuum, were performed, not reasoned, making them effective ways of contributing to intimacy with co-participants of online gossip. In online celebrity gossip, the intimacy between the rhetor and audience was so intense that it was hard to tell the difference between these two rhetorical roles. This relates to Miller's (2004: 212; see also 2001) remarks that in online communication, participants contribute to the ethos of sympathy that 'continually deflects attention away from the agent and back to the audience'. Because of such online

rhetoric that calls for a continuous response from the audience, the boundaries of the rhetor and audience become blurred and these two traditionally distinct roles in rhetorical practices become one.

Meanings of gender and class were so deeply involved in online discussions about celebrity violence that counting how many comments involved gender or class domination turned out to be too complicated a task. In the quantitative part of Article 2, only those comments that involved more or less explicit evaluation of class and gender were included in the analysis. This means that the quantitative results did not include those comments in which classist and sexist connotations were to be found in the subtext, not on the level of the words or phrases.

3.1.3   *Forms of moral argumentation*

In this study, I approached forms of moral argumentation in online comment sections through the topoi of act and person in argument (see Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1951). In rhetorical terms, the relationship between the meanings of two separate concepts, such as 'act' and 'person', forms an enthymeme (see Walker 1994). This relationship, moreover, is based on logic and it indicates ways that distance between the rhetor and audience is included in rhetoric. Four enthymemes based on different act-person relationships were found in the analysis: *theoretical* (comments focusing on acts through deductive reasoning), *practical* (comments involving act-person interactions through practical reasoning), *categorical* (comments based on curbing technique and highlighting acts as manners of a person or group) and *digital* (comments focusing on the evaluation of people without any consideration of their acts). I treated both categorical and digital enthymeme as obvious ways of contributing to emotivist morality in which proximity is created at the expense of those considered moral 'inferiors'. In accordance with the idea of 'ultimate dialectic' (see Burke 1969: 19–20, 189), I saw proximity involved in these two enthymemes as a special case of distance.

As the results in Article 3 indicated, digital enthymeme was the most common form of moral argumentation in online celebrity gossip, regardless of the language, topic or website considered. Digital enthymemes that highlighted the evaluation of people without any notion of their acts can be seen as effective ways of creating intimacy as an instant form of proximity to the addressed audience. One explanation for the lack of discussion concerning celebrities' behaviour is that celebrity gossipers indicated that they 'know' celebrities so well that reminding others of celebrities' behaviour would be redundant. Thus those evaluating celebrities without any notion of their acts show that they are well-

aware of the latest gossip. For instance, everybody is expected to know what Chris did to Rihanna. Such unreasoned self-expressions, therefore, also derive from intimacy with media objects such as pictures of celebrities or gossip stories.

Digital enthymeming in its most extreme and intimate form, which I have evaluated as 'amoralistic', was gossip participants' way to treat celebrities, particularly females, as merely sexual or funny objects, as the findings of Article 4 suggest. As already discussed in Section 3.1.2, the way of sharing emotional reactions, such as sexual or voyeuristic pleasures or reactions of excitement, effectively contributes to intimacy between online participants of gossip. The reason I describe digital enthymeme as 'crowding' behaviour is that its logic does not lie in the online participants' independent capacity to reason; rather it is cumulative and manifests itself in the way comments relate to one another as consecutive posts, such as in Examples 13, 14 and 15 in Article 3 (see Eronen 2014b: 289–290). Typically such 'crowding' occurred as shared reactions to visual contents, such as photographs or videos of celebrities. Visual objects can be seen as relational, since they function as common ground for online participants. A photograph that everybody is assumed to see occupies the 'space' between people (Edwards 2005: 27), and thus reinforces the intimacy between online participants. Because of this aesthetic focus, digital enthymemes have a lot in common with what Robert Hariman (1992; 1995: 51–94) calls 'courtly style'. According to him, courtly style is a persuasive form of discourse that highlights inequalities through public spectacles focusing on the human body and body parts (see ibid.). Courtly style, moreover, resonates with the stability of rhetoric which is exclusively based on the person and its 'appurtenances' (see Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 2000 [1969]: 293–294). As a rhetorical form, digital enthymeme does not include critical reasoning, but is closer to aesthetic performances and spontaneous reactions typical of courtly style. Although digital enthymeme lacks careful reasoning, particularly the 'amoralistic' type of it may be a sign of a critical audience aware of the artificiality of celebrity. I will discuss this topic more thoroughly in the next section.

Moreover, the reason I call digital enthymeme 'digital' relates to Lanham's (2006: 12) remarks that digital contexts enable the never-ending sharing of self-interest through repetitive consumption. Although not all digital enthymemes contributed in an obvious way to power, those that did were in particular the online comments that mocked celebrities out of self-interest. One could of course argue that mockery, as a collective phenomenon, was not born in digital contexts. For instance, school bullying is an example of collective mockery that, at least in its traditional form, takes place in limited face-to-face contexts. Compared with mockery through digital enthymemes, bullying as a face-to-face phenomenon is

temporally and spatially a more restricted phenomenon and often considered more serious. It involves a directly physical threat of violence: it is clearly a threat against one's body. Conversely, mockery in online contexts is easily 'copied' and may get more visibility and involve more participants than in face-to-face settings. The 'lightness' of violence in such rhetorical practices may be the reason why mockery in online contexts is not considered serious. As a researcher using rhetorical criticism as my approach, I see mocking self-expressions as serious and real because they are expressions made by embodied beings who struggle to find their own place by positioning themselves in relation to other agents.

Although most digital enthymemes were comments evaluating female celebrities as mere objects or things, some comments categorized as digital enthymemes involved encouraging a particular celebrity (such as 'Go Martina! Try to beat that fucking annoying person' in Example 15 of Article 3, see Eronen 2014b: 290). Such comments othered one celebrity at the expense of another as if the preferred celebrity herself would be participating in online gossip discourse. Despite the para-social interest in celebrity, these comments, however, were also ways of contributing to emotivist morality, since they were ways of creating proximity at the expense of distanced 'others'. Moreover, the picture of Rihanna's injured face, in particular, provoked many comments that were sympathetic to Rihanna. However, these, too, created proximity between gossipers at the expense of 'others', since the participants were in fact contributing to rhetoric distancing Chris Brown who, in some other posts, was seen as a prototype of a black rapper prone to violent behaviour. Thus digital enthymemes that involved intimacy with media objects, such as with pictures of Rihanna, have a connection to categorical enthymemes based on stereotyping. This is because categorical enthymemes also are based on the separation of act and person in argument. Categorical enthymemes would not be possible without such separation to occur in the first place.

Accordingly, categorical enthymeme was another frequently utilized way of participating in online celebrity gossip. In contrast to digital enthymeme, in categorical enthymeme the group of moral 'inferiors' was made more obvious, for example by contributing to racism by listing crimes committed by black male rappers (Example 9 in Article 3, see Eronen 2014b: 288), by expressing classist opinions when describing the 'violent' and 'dishonest' nature of alcoholics (Example 10 in Article 3, ibid.) or by expressing sexist stereotypes according to which young women are superficial and annoying (Examples 11 and 12 in Article 3, ibid.). In these comments, proximity was created at the expense of 'others', the 'inferior' groups that celebrities were seen to epitomize. Characteristic of these comments was that moral argumentation was utilized as a means of oppressing a

particular group, the third persona, by sharing emotions with co-gossipers. Categorical enthymeme, like the digital one, is based on intimate reactions to media objects. Unlike digital enthymeme, categorical enthymeme involves moralizing as a quasi-rational rhetorical practice. Thus the object-focused relationship of self-expressions based on categorical enthymeming is rhetorically hidden under the guise of moral argumentation. Moreover, categorical enthymeme found in online celebrity gossip is an explicit – and easily observable – rhetorical indicator that celebrity culture is a field in which meanings that concern groups are made. Compared with the audience of digital enthymemes, the audience of categorical enthymemes was more prominently an ideological construct, the second persona chosen by the rhetor (see Black 1970). This is because the sexist ideology of digital enthymemes was not so obviously involved in any individual comment but rather was collectively constructed in the crowd of online participants.

In online celebrity gossip, the rhetorical function of theoretical enthymeme was to defend rationalism and discipline, demonstrate that violence is wrong and call for social sanctions. For Article 3, I chose to uncover only the most typical and obvious examples of theoretical enthymeme, because of the limited space. In the following, I will both summarize and revise my previous remarks on theoretical enthymemes. In general, theoretical enthymemes were used for the criticism of those who were seen disobeying norms (such as 'provoking is wrong' or 'violence is wrong'). Often the rhetoric of such enthymemes, despite their seemingly universalistic condemnation of violence, legitimized violent revenge and these enthymemes, therefore, were more or less hypocritical in their persuasive means. In online celebrity gossip, there were just a few comments in which conventionalism was a way of condemning violence in general. Theoretical enthymemes were by no means objective ways of contributing to justice; rather they were utilized to legitimize the condemnation of particular celebrities as moral 'inferiors'. Accordingly, the moralizing function typical of conventionalism may also become a way of emotivist moral positioning. Often this form of argumentation took place as comments calling for social sanctioning based on the logic of reciprocity, which indicated that a celebrity has broken a rule and should therefore be punished (such as 'eye for an eye'). In such examples, online gossipers took the voice of the state as the judge holding the right to sentence. In other cases, theoretical enthymemes were voices of highly media-critical gossipers who argued that they want something more from celebrity culture than gossip about staged fights or domestic violence (see also Meyers 2010: 320). Such theoretical enthymemes also involved judgements of celebrities or gossip participants who were criticized for their lack of knowledge and media criticism.

This type of theoretical enthymeming highlighted that the 'self' has the power to teach the 'other'.

Accordingly, there were three types of theoretical enthymemes in online celebrity gossip. In the first type, violence was condemned on a universalistic basis. Such universalistic comments, however, were rare in online celebrity gossip and when they were used, they indicated, more or less explicitly, condemnation of a celebrity who was considered behaving immorally (such as 'Abuse is abuse. Chris Brown cannot justify the abuse he caused', a comment by *ChokiePanda* on YouTube). In the second type, the togetherness of 'us' as 'legitimate' judges was more explicitly created at the expense of celebrities by calling them names or making other harsh judgements. This second type was the most typical theoretical enthymeme in my material, and for that reason I chose Examples 1–4 for Article 3 (see Eronen 2014b: 285–286). In the third type, rhetors were arguing that they know better and are concerned of the moral decline of society for which they blamed celebrity culture. Thus the third type of theoretical enthymeme involved 'media-savvy' interpretations which gave a free hand to the mockery of celebrities (see Article 5). Interestingly, therefore, the emphasis on distance in the moral tones of theoretical enthymemes was a way into the playful (aesthetic) proximity of digital enthymemes involving mockery of celebrities as artificial products. This process-like nature of distance and proximity shows how close to each other these two relational concepts are in the rhetoric of self-expressions.

To sum up, the first type contributed to conventionalism on a more practical basis (when indicating that violence in general produces ill-being), while the second type was emotivist morality in the guise of conventionalism. The third type, on the contrary, was a more direct form of conventionalism in which the power of the rhetor who 'knows better' was central. Such type, as discussed above, also was hypocritically rational when legitimizing the mockery of celebrities, a topic I will discuss in more detail in Section 3.1.4. Overall, theoretical enthymemes emphasized the idea of the authority and thus reinforced, more or less hypocritically, the 'rational' aspect of self-expression. Like categorical enthymemes, also the most theoretical enthymemes were based on the rhetoric of moralizing when blaming 'others' for their 'immoral' or 'stupid' behaviour. The difference between these two forms was that categorical enthymemes involved emotional togetherness based on explicit stereotyping of some groups, while theoretical enthymemes were more focused on demonstrating rules of behaviour as the message of self-expression.

Practical enthymemes, conversely, involved resisting the derisive and moralizing function of emotivist morality, albeit many of them with more or less ambiguity.

For instance, Example 5 in Article 3 involved a 'forgiving' function ('His publicist certainly could have done a better job at making him at least sound remorseful [...] This story is just a reminder that despite being a celebrity, at this age controlling one's emotion takes maturity he obviously hasn't yet acquired. Praying for you, Chris and Rihanna!') (see Eronen 2014b: 286). The reason why I saw this example as a practical enthymeme was based on rhetorical criticism: the rhetor articulates subjective moral considerations by providing the audience with several contextual perspectives, not just one 'right' way of dealing with the case. Practical enthymemes are not infallible or neutral but compared with digital or categorical enthymemes they are more open to criticism. For that reason, practical enthymemes also were relatively long comments. Although practical enthymemes were not fixed narratives, they can be seen to involve some kind of narrative evaluation in discussing the moral character of celebrities. This example also shows that practical and categorical enthymemes form a continuum. Also practical enthymemes concerning celebrities deal with the behaviour of groups. Although practical enthymemes were not as relativist as digital or categorical ones, also they were highly dependent on each audience and its ways of interpreting self-expression.

I hypothesised that reasoning based on norms and social hierarchies would be less obvious on English-language gossip sites when compared with Finnish-language ones, as on the English-language sites participants from different social and cultural backgrounds are able to meet. According to my findings, digital enthymemes were more typical of English-language sites, while Finnish participants used more categorical and theoretical enthymemes. The use of practical enthymemes was almost equal for both groups. The comparison between English-language and Finnish sites is discussed in detail in Section 3.2.

Moreover, I divided the research material into user-generated and media-generated websites, based on the possibilities of online gossipers as producers of content. By user-generated websites, I mean online gossip sites where individuals had the power to choose the topic, start new discussion threads and perhaps also post pictures or videos. By media-generated websites, I refer to sites that were likely to be controlled by an agent representing a media corporation and where online comments were responses to a story or video produced by the (celebrity) media industry which often had the copyright to the website's content. Compared with media-generated websites, user-generated sites were less likely to be pre- or post-moderated by the media industry. A good example of a user-generated website is the LiveJournal gossip community ONTD that is characterized by the active role of online gossipers as producers of content and as moderators of

gossip discussions. The comment sections of online newspapers, such as USA Today or Helsingin Sanomat, are examples of media-generated websites.

According to my findings, digital and categorical enthymemes were more typical of user-generated than media-generated websites. Because of the derisive tones typical of digital and categorical enthymemes, this may indicate that digital and categorical enthymemes posted on media-generated websites, particularly USA Today and Helsingin Sanomat representing 'serious' broadsheet papers, were more likely to be pre- or post-moderated than comments posted for example on YouTube. Moderation practices were not analysed in detail in Article 3, but according to a previous study, there are more post-moderated comments on racial and religious topics on the websites of broadsheets than on entertainment-focused sites (see Richardson & Stanyer 2011: 993–994). One explanation for the prominence digital enthymemes on user-generated sites, such as on ONTD, is that self-expressions based on emotional contribution without theoretical or practical reasoning indicate that participants want to feel more intimate togetherness by sharing opinions and attitudes intensively. In other words, those interested in user-generated content are focused on intensive engagement in expressive and performative forms of participation instead of more theoretical discussion of social and political issues (see also Östman 2012: 1018). Thus user-generated websites, in particular, may be attractive to those who are interested in posting their emotional reactions as self-expressions.

In addition, the topic of celebrity gossip can also be seen to affect the form of moral argumentation through which online participants evaluated celebrities. Digital enthymeme was more common in gossip concerning female celebrities' fights than in comments on domestic violence. Female celebrities' were typically seen as funny and entertaining, not as morally responsible. In digital enthymemes, the worth of female celebrities as mere objects of entertainment industry was obvious. This object-focused relationship was based on intimacy with the digital context involving visual and verbal representations of these female celebrities at the same time when distancing these celebrities as 'inferior others'. Accordingly, when celebrity gossip concerned a female celebrities' fight, and thus a discussion topic that did not involve an obvious juxtaposition between men and women, sexist discourse was still common in the comments. Reacting more seriously to domestic violence than to staged fights involving female celebrities can also be seen as a sign of online gossipers' phronesis. In that case, online participants would have used their media criticism as practical thinking when posting their self-expressions on gossip sites. That is to say, they made a distinction between topics they considered 'serious' and 'frivolous'. The mocking reactions involved in the amoralistic digital enthymemes in particular can be seen as ways through

which online gossipers both resisted and reinforced the idea of celebrity culture participants as emotivists (see Hills 2007). Celebrity gossipers are well-aware of the persuasion of celebrity industry. Ironically, however, gossipers mocking celebrity culture took the voice of emotivists, which was somehow 'given' to them through the frivolous topic of gossip. Accordingly, gossipers contributed to emotivist morality because they were given the 'right' to treat celebrities as their fair game.

To sum up, the comparison of different contextual variables in the distribution of the forms of moral argumentation indicated that digital enthymeme was the most frequent form in contexts I saw as 'non-hierarchical'. By non-hierarchical contexts, I mean English-language, user-generated websites where violence involving female celebrities was the topic of gossip. In these contexts, the individual subject was freely contributing to contents in the digital space but at the same time facing social pressure to post only contents that perform a strong affective relationship to digital objects, such as pictures or videos representing celebrities as well as digital interactions concerning these celebrities. The findings of Articles 3 and 4 indicate that although obvious signs of hierarchy are missing on celebrity gossip sites, online gossip participants may actively reinforce their own role as mere consumers of gossip provided for them by the mass-media industry (see also Meyers 2012: 1024, 1028; Graefer 2013: 223). In the next and final section summarizing the research results, I focus on the online gossip site ONTD as a seemingly non-hierarchical gossip environment, which, however, demonstrated explicit means of ethos control as signs of domination targeting both gossipers on the site and the young female celebrity representing the (lower) middle class.

3.1.4   Ethos control

Article 5 focused on one specific gossip site, namely ONTD. On that site, participants utilized normative means of control, attacking specifically those who identified with celebrities. This article was the last case study in my project and when analysing online comments for this case study, I already knew that emotivist morality is the most typical way of moral positioning in online celebrity gossip. I wanted to focus on the rhetorical struggle between serious and frivolous participation in gossip based on the remarks of previous research into (online) celebrity gossip. These two ways of reading celebrity gossip were found by Hermes (1995) whose study concerned gossip magazines' readers and their reading habits. I took as a starting point that the serious and frivolous ways of

reading and interpreting celebrity gossip would provoke rhetorical struggles in online celebrity gossip.

As analysed in Article 5, self-expression as a means of criticizing serious participation contributed to the idea of frivolous gossip. The frivolous gossip represents the meaning making practice of a critical audience that resists taking celebrity-related phenomena seriously (see Hermes 1995: 121, 133; Meyers 2010: 31, 53, 309). Thus such ethos control could be seen as the resistance of the moralizing function of gossip that also took place in that specific forum. In the frivolous readings, gossipers resisted the focus on celebrities as representatives of moral individuals (cf. Hinerman 2006: 456–458). Like the gossip participant in Example 11 argues, 'it's a paycheck and publicity and we watch them bitching at each other for entertainment'. Such self-expressions show that online participants reject the 'artificial' celebrity ethos. Interesting in this rejection is the intimacy with the media objects showing celebrities 'bitching at each other'.

Because of the intimacy with media objects representing celebrities, the object-focused participation on ONTD favours group ethos (see Gurak 1999) in treating not only celebrities but also online participants as 'amoral' individuals to be not identified with. In such comments, shared emotions (eunoia), instead of the sincerity of the self, is the sign of trust among online gossip participants. These results are in line with Miller's (2004: 205–212) remarks according to which arete is the lacking or undermined component of online ethos. In addition to these notions, my findings in Article 5 indicated that arete was not just the lacking or undermined component in online celebrity gossip, but rather the part of ethos that was *actively* rejected by co-participants in gossip discourse. When rejecting the serious self-expressions of co-participants, online gossipers supported voyeuristic pleasure or *Schadenfreude* as the enjoyment of watching the escapades of 'stupid' female celebrities. This way of positioning the 'self' in relation to the 'other' involved the critical audience aware of the media-made nature of celebrities, particularly that of (lower) middle class females who were seen as moral 'inferiors' to be made fun of (see also Tyler 2008; Paasonen & Pajala 2010; Williamson 2010). Thus the rhetorical grounds of celebrity mockery can be found in the contradictory relationship of phronesis and arete.

In frivolous gossip readings, it becomes obvious that participants reject identification with individuals but identify with ethos that involves intimacy with media objects. Such rhetoric encourages the mockery of celebrities whose worth is directly associated with media objects (such as pictures or gossip stories). When that shameless intimacy with objects was challenged by online co-participants, individual reactions turned into a more explicitly interactive mode

(direct accuses) with the purpose of defending the pleasure of consuming 'frivolous' contents. These findings both reinforce and challenge Bauman's (2000: 97) notions of public spaces as environments based on consumer action but ignoring interaction. ONTD is a public space based on consumer action and that action is rhetorically supported through interaction as the participants control one another's ethos. Thus interaction involved in ethos control is a central mode of online celebrity gossip that maintains object-oriented rhetorical action as a collective phenomenon. Such interaction shows that relationships *to* contents representing celebrities are relationships *with* co-participants in a digital space.

To go back to Meyers' (2012: 1023) argument that online gossip sites, such as celebrity gossip blogs, make visible the role of the active audience, the findings in Article 5 indicated that content produced by online participants of celebrity gossip may also reinforce their role as members of a passive audience. As Meyers (2012: 1024, 1028) also argues, the idea of an active audience does not necessarily mean the autonomy of celebrity gossip fans; it may also concern participation that reinforces the power of the celebrity media industry in the production and circulation of meanings (see also Graefer 2013: 223). Through ethos control involving virtual, voyeuristic, playful, disparate and aesthetic normativity (see Article 5), online gossip participants actively accepted their own role as a passive audience that consumes female celebrities and sees them as mere targets of mockery.

Overall, the findings in Article 5 are in line with the remarks discussed in the other four research articles of this study. Firstly, ethos control undermined the role of arete through the rejection of autobiographical moralizing. Secondly, it contributed to voyeurism and sexist domination as eunoia connecting interlocutors in gossip. Thirdly, it reinforced the persuasiveness of 'crowding' behaviour as the particular logic of online gossip participants who are joined together to consume media contents.

3.2   Comparison between English-language and Finnish sites

In this section, I will briefly go through and explain the differences and similarities in self-expressions of English-speaking and Finnish participants of celebrity gossip. Comparisons of these two corpora were made in Articles 1–4, whereas Article 5 focused on only one English-language forum (ONTD). I will first summarize the main findings based on the comparison of English-language and Finnish gossip sites. After that I will explain the differences and similarities.

The reason why the comparison of English-language and Finnish comment sections of celebrity gossip is relevant lies in the fact that celebrity gossip in English welcomes participants from a variety of cultural and national backgrounds; whereas Finnish gossip sites limit the potential participants to those who share Finland as their national or cultural home. Thus Finnish-language participants were connected to one another through a stronger sense of offline proximity based on their shared national background. National background is a symbolic form of togetherness as well but it is somehow more 'fixed' compared with the contextual 'liquidity' of online communication. English-language participants, accordingly, had a stronger need to create their proximity to co-participants rhetorically in and for the closed online environment. The majority of these English-language participants were most likely Americans (because the celebrities were Americans) and therefore members of a collective where different cultural and national backgrounds are joined together. Moreover, the English-language gossip sites may potentially welcome participants from other parts of the globe because of English as the lingua franca on the Internet and the global well-knownness of American celebrities. I regarded the English-language gossip sites as environments involving more global and heterogeneous potentiality when compared to the Finnish-language sites. In line with what was assumed at the beginning, this did not mean that English-language gossip sites would be more global than Finnish ones in terms of heterogeneity, since discursively created proximity in the English-language material also was fundamentally exclusive.

Firstly, findings of Article 1 indicated that autobiographical moralizing in general is very marginal in online celebrity gossip, both in Finnish and English. Self-expressions involving autobiographical moralizing, however, were slightly more common to English-language gossip sites than to Finnish ones. Many of these comments, as discussed in Section 3.1.1, were self-expressions that contributed to the oppression of those represented as moral 'inferiors'. Thus autobiographical moralizing as both confessions and testimonies can also be seen as the rhetoric of emotivist morality. Many English-language self-expressions categorized as autobiographical moralizing came from a YouTube comment section related to a video in which the pop singer Rihanna tells about her experiences as a victim of domestic violence. Although autobiographical moralizing was more common to English-language sites, this did not mean that arete as the self-reflective component of ethos was more characteristic of online gossip in English than in Finnish. Autobiographical moralizing on YouTube, in particular, was a way to contribute to the object-focused relationships characteristic of emotivist morality. YouTube, in general, is unmoderated and 'welcomes' self-expressions with highly oppressive motives.

According to the findings of Article 2, comments contributing to moral values were more common on Finnish gossip sites than English-language sites. In other words, obedience to certain norms of society or culture was frequently brought up in Finnish comments on celebrities. Thus self-expressions of Finnish participants were closer to the moral project of Enlightenment highlighting strictly normative moral positioning (see Chouliaraki 2013: 15–21). This also indicates that Finnish participants took distance from one another through their norm-based evaluation, while English-language participants contributed to stronger feelings of intimacy in their online gossip discourse. For instance, hedonistic values characterizing playful togetherness between online gossip participants were slightly more typical of English-language gossip sites than Finnish ones. When commenting on violence involving female celebrities, English-language participants criticized celebrities as characters of a 'frivolous' reality television show, while Finnish participants criticized celebrities for their fame-seeking behaviour. Particularly ways of referring to a norm according to which women should be humble and not strive for personal success were prominent in Finnish online celebrity gossip. There were both similarities and differences in the construction of 'others' in English-language and Finnish comment sections. In both contexts, women were seen as moral 'inferiors' to be mocked or moralized. These findings are in line with those of Meyers (2010; also 2013), whose study uncovers sexist contributions to online celebrity gossip.

Considering the specific groups that were oppressed, there were also differences between Finnish- and English-language corpora. While the 'others' to the Finnish participants were more obvious representatives of non-wealthy people, English-language participants saw 'others' more frequently as a certain racial group. These results cannot be generalized, however, because all the Finnish celebrities involved in the gossip topics were white. The results might have been different if the Finnish celebrities were seen as 'others' because of their ethnic background. This indicates that online celebrity gossip is 'framed' in accordance with each topic of gossip, and the construction of 'others' may vary along the given topic and celebrities involved in it. Consequently, self-expression in online celebrity gossip is a highly contextual phenomenon.

In terms of comparison, the findings of Article 3 are in line with the findings of Article 2. Comments representing digital enthymemes were more common to the English-language gossip sites: in the research material of this study, there were 464 English-language comments and 344 Finnish-language comments that I categorized into digital enthymemes. This means that comments without articulated moral reasoning were more typical of sites whose participants were not necessarily connected to one another through their national background. Thus

also the findings of 'phronesis' indicate that in English-language comment sections, proximity was more concrete and more intensively emotional, created in and for online communication. Theoretical and categorical enthymemes strictly referring to moral norms were more prevalent in Finnish celebrity gossip. Thus ways of referring to shared norms connected Finnish participants to one another. In terms of 'ultimate dialectic' (Burke 1969: 189), therefore, rules as forms of distance became forms of proximity for Finnish online gossip participants. Consequently, a specific national culture, such as that of Finland, serves as the common ground for online gossip participants who can be assumed to have a certain ethos beyond their online self-expressions.

In general, English-language gossip participants contributed to a more 'liquid' rhetoric compared with Finnish participants for whom the shared national and cultural background served as the serious, 'rationalistic' framework within which they evaluated celebrities and their behaviour. In terms of this seriousness, a Finnish woman, for instance, 'should' be humble and pursue selfless goals. Conversely, playfulness, particularly in English-language celebrity gossip, is a way of reducing distance between gossipers and challenging the seriousness of celebrity ethos. According to Silverstone (2007: 125), 'what counts in play is essentially a betrayal of the rules'. On the other hand, as Silverstone (ibid. 126) also suggests, media consumption can be seen as a way of playing a game in which the players trust one another to play in accordance with certain rules but do not take responsibility for the game itself. Such playful communication contributes to intimacy without any burden of moral reasoning. Play takes place 'here and now' by creating its own norms that the players are expected to obey. Thus play as a rhetorical motive is 'light': it focuses on creating new rules in new contexts by calling for new individuals to participate. Play distinguishes itself from all 'heavy' concerns and ignores, therefore, moral problems relating to physical violence. Through playfulness, online gossip participants showed their lack of moral concern. The highly contextual nature of play became evident when celebrity gossipers participated in word plays and competed with one another in 'making the most inflammatory comment' (see Meyers 2010: 266). Playfulness as a rhetorical motive fits with online spaces that are individualist but still rely on global consuming, for *playfulness* (not a particular *play* with its specific rules) is always flexible to the interests of individuals coming from various cultural backgrounds. The apparent flexibility to individuals' interests may explain why playful rhetoric was so common to English-language, more global, online spaces involving gossip about celebrities well-known all over the world.

Accordingly, the ethos of Finnish gossip participants was more explicitly associated with an ideological construction of proximity through moralizing,

while the ethos of English-language participants highlighted playful online discourse as the sign of trustworthiness and contributed to a more instant form of proximity between gossipers. By ideological construction of proximity, I mean the construction of the second persona (the preferred audience, see Black 1970) versus the third persona (the excluded others, see Wander 1984) as the audience representing 'others'. While English-language participants contributed to the ethos of online performance as a light-modern construct, the ethos of Finnish participants, deriving from their national identity, was closer to a heavy-modern idea of discourse-external authority, such as the state and its right to sentence its individuals by limiting their physical freedom (for more about the two phases of modernity, see Bauman 2000). Thus the ideological construction of gossip explicitly involved in categorical enthymemes was more typical of Finnish comments, while the English-language ones contributed to sexism through the crowding behaviour that is characteristic of digital and less obviously hierarchical enthymemes. Despite the interest in emphasizing the role of the state in the treatment of individuals, the categorical enthymemes of Finnish-language participants also had their individualist side. Such comments were still object-focused self-expressions characterizing individuals' choices of liking and disliking. In the Finnish context, however, individual intimacy with objects was considered a rhetorically shameful relationship and moralizing, as a rhetorical guise, played a persuasive role.

Overall, there were many similarities between the two corpora. Both English-speaking and Finnish celebrity gossip participants contributed to emotivist morality in their self-expressions. Thus togetherness was created at the expense of distanced 'others', groups represented by the celebrities. Typical 'others' in both language groups were women who represented moral 'inferiors' to gossipers. Accordingly, what seems to be 'global' in online comments on celebrity gossip is not any particular type of self-expression but the tension in which distance from 'others' is simultaneous with proximity not simply connecting the 'self' to the 'other' but building that rhetorical relationship through intimacy with objects representing celebrities. Such proximity objectifies, that is, materializes, otherness in general. This explains why practical enthymemes as self-expressions based on moral problem-solving (see Jonsen & Toulmin 1988: 35) were rare in both English-language and Finnish online celebrity gossip. Practical enthymemes involving means of identification are ways of treating distant 'others' as acting beings, not as dehumanized objects. The general contributions, as well as the limitations, of this study will be discussed in a more detailed way in the following section.

3.3   Contributions, limitations and suggestions

The aim of this study was to better understand how the rhetoric of self-expressions in online celebrity gossip characterizes proximity and distance. While proximity can be defined as a relationship of sameness and identification, distance stands for difference and disidentification. Moreover, in accordance with 'ultimate dialectic' as a philosophical principle of rhetorical studies (see Burke 1969: 1969: 19–20, 184–189), I understood proximity and distance as flexibly polar concepts that are not either-or ways of positioning but are simultaneously present in self-expressions. Thus proximity can be a way into distance and distance can be a way into proximity. Moreover, I distinguished intimacy as a specific type of proximity in which an embodied closeness to objects, such as to pictures, videos or texts representing celebrities, is essential (for more on intimacy in online celebrity gossip, see Graefer 2013). I hypothesised that intimacy with objects complicates the relationship of proximity and distance in online celebrity gossip. Thus, potentially, a self-expression may create intimacy with an object representing celebrities at the same time when distancing or even completely excluding otherness that the object represents.

I took rhetorical ethos, the trustworthiness of character, as the core concept to deal with self-expressions as rhetorical 'speeches' which online participants had posted in comment sections of gossip sites. The starting point of this study was to understand ethos as a fundamentally relational concept: it is a means of persuasion based on a character's relation to the addressed audience as well as to 'others', often distant or distanced. I was particularly interested in the tension between individual and social aspects of online self-expressions that represent the individual interest of participants and at the same time are invitations to form a community with the addressed audience. Such a tension can be found in acts of rhetorical violence that are self-expressions of individuals aggressively producing more and more sameness. Although violence as a rhetorical and hence a freely chosen option of participation seems like a paradox (see Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 2000 [1969]: 54–59, 62), it represents the extreme end of rhetoric that becomes persuasive in the era of 'liquid' modernity in which individual relationships to objects become collective practices aiming at distancing or even completely excluding otherness. Unlike 'heavy' or 'solid' violence that directly attacks the human physical body, violence in its 'light' or 'liquid' form seems socially persuasive because it comes in the guise of individual freedom. I focused on online comments on physical violence involving celebrities because violence as a theme of celebrity culture brings to the surface issues of power and domination of groups (see Fiske 1989: 127–130). Thus media representations of physical violence may persuade the audience of celebrity gossip to post self-

expressions that involve rhetorical violence justifying physical violence against particular 'others'.

By focusing on ethos construction and ethos control, the study has systematically explored the rhetoric of self-expressions in online celebrity gossip. The findings suggest that self-expressions in online celebrity gossip do not take place in a vacuum; they are expressions of social positioning in which individuals invite their audience to form a community with them. Thus online comments, however individualistic they may seem, always have a social dimension. Moreover, I have uncovered the means of persuasion of 'ordinary' people, that is, those who do not refer to their authorial social status but rather are characterized by their anonymity (or pseudonyms) in public spaces. Although the present study explored self-expressions from the viewpoint of rhetorical criticism, the findings can also be seen as a contribution to media studies and the study of digital culture interested in the role of online participants in contemporary media culture.

The findings can be regarded as *empirical* proof that proximity to the addressed audience is highly important for establishing trust in self-expressions online. In online celebrity gossip, ethos was an emotionally exclusive construct because the rhetoric of proximity took place at the expense of distanced 'others'. Characteristic of such relationships was intimacy with mediated objects through which online participants treated certain celebrities as examples of 'inferior' beings. Thus the intimate object-oriented relationship to pictures, videos and texts representing celebrities became the central locus of ethos in a digital space. This means that relationships to objects became a rhetorical phenomenon – a way of positioning oneself in relation to the 'other'.

Accordingly, the findings show that moral positioning based on personal preferences is not merely an individualistic issue of emotivism (cf. MacIntyre 2003 [1985]: 6–35; also Sayer 2011: 24, 32–35); in online celebrity gossip, preferences become *collectively* shared. In this study, rhetorical practices of moral positioning based on individual preferences for objects were seen as ways of contributing to emotivist morality. Emotivist morality is what happens to emotivism when individual preferences for objects legitimize othering and become the core of ethos. That is to say, emotivist morality was not only based on collective liking or disliking as reactions targeting certain celebrities; it also was a sign of ideological proximity. In rhetorical terms, both the second persona (see Black 1970) and the third persona (see Wander 1984) were involved in the rhetoric of self-expressions. This is because online celebrity gossip concerns groups and their struggles (see Meyers 2010; 2013; Graefer 2013). Moreover, online celebrity gossip does not only concern struggles of social groups but it

takes place as a struggle of finding one's own place in the complex relationships of proximity and distance. Self-expressions in online celebrity gossip are voices of those who use rhetoric for the purposes of social mobility for them and for the group they identify with. In such rhetorical practices, the tension of proximity and distance is central.

The rhetorical struggles of proximity and distance took place on two levels of emotivist morality: 1) either celebrities were treated as symbols of the ideological meanings a gossip participant promotes through moralizing 2) or the authenticity of celebrity as a moral individual was denied and celebrity gossip discourse itself was seen as the main goal of gossip. On the first level of emotivist morality, moral positioning was serious and took place as moralizing in the form of categorical and theoretical enthymemes and autobiographical moralizing. Thus what seems to be an example of conventionalism or practical morality in online celebrity gossip may be utilized as a rhetorical means of emotivist morality. In the serious gossip, both the discourse of the seemingly sincere 'self' and that of a rationalistic moralizer were used for the proximity of 'us' at the expense of 'others'. In such rhetoric, therefore, moralizing was persuasive and online gossipers treated moral values and reasoning as rhetorically attractive. Rhetorical practices based on categorical and theoretical enthymemes were more common to Finnish than English-language self-expressions. In addition to female celebrities often treated as representatives of class and race, moralizing attacked male celebrities and also co-occurred with classist categorization and racist stereotyping. Autobiographical moralizing, slightly more common to the English-language gossip than to the Finnish one, tended to be a sexist discourse in which the 'sincerity' of the rhetor was put in a rhetorical use. Such rhetoric, by stereotyping women or men, reinforced the discourse in which 'sex is power' (see Höglund 2009). Despite the seemingly serious moral concerns, moralizing in online self-expressions of celebrity-gossip participants was a rhetorical way to hide intimate relationships to mediated objects. Moralizing was only seemingly focused on acts for its main purpose was to evaluate 'others' as morally static and unable to change. Moralizing, therefore, was a rhetorical sign of object relationships that were hidden under the guise of morality-concerned evaluation.

Compared with the first level, emotivist morality on the second level was more spontaneous and shamelessly intimate and did not involve ways of hiding the object relationship under the rhetoric of moralizing. Moral positioning on the second level, therefore, becomes mere mockery, which abandons all moral concerns. The targets of such mockery were almost exclusively (lower) middle class women who are known as low-status celebrities having no cultural or social capital related to higher education and profession. Such female celebrities were

dehumanized into sexual and frivolous objects. This type of emotivist morality was involved in amoralistic digital enthymemes and it was more common to English-language gossip compared with that in Finnish, although it was used by Finnish participants as well. For Finnish participants, some celebrities represented national figures and the gossip about them provoked moral considerations of being a good citizen. As discussed above, this may indicate that evaluating celebrities in moral terms is seen as more persuasive in nationally limited online contexts than in online contexts with more multicultural potentialities. One particular Finnish celebrity seen as a national moral figure was the former sportsman Matti Nykänen. Although Nykänen was othered in gossip discourse, he was clearly seen to belong to the moral community of Finns. These findings support the view that celebrities associated with sport are seen as national figures that are part of 'our tribe' and its responsibility (see Dahlén 2008: 446).

One explanation for the popularity of playful celebrity mockery, which was particularly typical of English-language online gossip, lies in the contradiction of arete and phronesis, a topic which I have discussed in Article 5. Because online gossipers want to present themselves as media-savvy participants, they refuse identification with celebrities whom they see as highly artificial and media-made. Accordingly, mockery may function as a way of challenging the construction of mass-media audience as passive recipients of mediated monologues, albeit doing it at the expense of certain celebrities and groups. Such 'clever' celebrity criticism typical of online celebrity gossip (see Graefer 2013) is not exclusively a characteristic of online celebrity gossip but can be seen as a general phenomenon in contemporary celebrity culture (see e.g. Ahva et al. 2014: 194–195). The specific characteristic of online celebrity gossip is that celebrity mockery as a sign of media criticism is a collective discourse of rhetors who are faceless and mediated to one another. In celebrity mockery, the rhetor's shameless intimacy with a picture, video or text representing celebrities becomes the basis of a trustworthy ethos that is utilized as a rhetorical choice to attack all morally serious interpretations. Such participation is characteristic of social spaces that are publicly visible but non-civil and highlight participants' action, not a reasoned form of interaction (see Bauman 2000: 97). At the latest when the object-centric ethos of celebrity culture loses its rhetorical shame, proximity in the interaction of gossipers reveals its nature as a relationship that is possible only through mediated objects. Moreover, the intimate object-focused relationship may be an obstacle to a direct social relationship that would encourage interlocutors to understand one another. This also shows that proximity in its most intimate form may lead to distance and exclusion of otherness.

By focusing on ethos as a rhetorical character through which an individual becomes part of a community, this study has contributed to the research into community building of online participants. I took as a starting point that community in an online space should not be seen as distinct from offline togetherness, since all self-expressions, however 'alone' they seem to be, are always invitations to build a community. Thus online comments, even as seemingly separated, individualistic expressions, carry with themselves the idea of social relationships. As already discussed above, the type of community that can be found in online celebrity gossip is not that of mutual understanding or moral commitments but a form of togetherness that highlights proximity to the faceless audience as the 'nearness of the crowd' (Bauman 1993: 130). In other words, such a community consists of participants whose individuality is ignored. Consequently, the findings of this study are in line with the idea that online communities favour a group ethos instead of an ethos based on individual freedom (e.g. Gurak 1999). This also resonates with the remarks that online participants play a certain role and their role expectations become a substitute for their sincerity (see Gardner 2011: 99–106).

What I consider the most important finding of this study is that the highlighted role of individualism as the rhetoric of online celebrity gossip calls into question the very idea of 'free' individual. What is personal or self-expressive may also be impersonal and self-attacking. In accordance with the logic of 'ultimate' or transformative dialectic (see Burke 1969: 189), self-exclusion may be the end point of self-empowerment. I have discussed this rhetorical tension in relation to the bread-and-butter-fly metaphor. The metaphor characterizes the ethos of participants in digital networks who consume for their own self-interest, but as they consume they themselves become part of digital contents, like the bread-and-butter-fly whose sugar-cube head dissolved in the tea it was drinking (see Fleckenstein 2005). The bread-and-butter-fly effect characterizes intimacy with the material the 'self' is consuming and it is prominent in online participants' self-expressions contributing to emotivist morality.

Firstly, such intimacy excludes all concerns of otherness, since media objects are consumed only for self-empowerment. Only those rhetorical practices are welcomed that do not cause any challenge or risk to the intimate relationship to objects. Secondly, bearing in mind that gossip may always turn against the gossipers themselves because of the tendency for gossipers to trade places with the targets of their gossip (see Bergmann 1993: 45–70), celebrity gossip may also attack its participants. Because celebrities as 'others' are proximate, like 'us', their otherness is constantly exaggerated in rhetorical struggles. Compared with private-sphere gossip, which, despite its accusing tones, also involves negotiation

of morality as situated meanings (see Bergmann 1993: 130–134), online celebrity gossip is a more explicitly condemning and excluding moral genre. By distancing and excluding celebrities as 'others' like 'us', and doing it for the sake of intimacy of 'us', celebrity gossipers may ironically distance and exclude themselves. These findings, accordingly, reinforce the notion that because of the urgent need for intimacy, togetherness constructed in online comments may contribute to 'deindividuation' (see also Lea & Spears 1991; Stromer-Galley & Martey 2009). Such rhetorical acts can be seen as practices of 'light' or 'liquid' violence that attack the very idea of being an *in-dividual*. Unlike violence in physical attacks, violence in its 'light' form cannot directly hurt the body of the 'other'. By individual rhetorical choices, rhetors question their own freedom and surrender to the power of context. Accordingly, the self-harming effect of self-expressions analysed in this study challenges the idea of the rhetor's independence.

The findings of the present study, however, cannot be generalized without taking into account the limitations. Firstly, I focused on four topics of celebrity gossip that were well known mostly in American and Finnish cultures. Although I assumed that English-language comment sections are spaces where participants from different cultural and national backgrounds are able to make meanings together, it is likely that these online environments were more or less limited to the American culture and its conception of celebrities. Overall, both corpora analysed in this study represented western celebrity culture in which the public visibility of an individual is part of the everyday media content. The shared western culture may explain why English-language and Finnish online celebrity gossip had so much in common. As Marshall argues (2006: 6–7), celebrity culture tends to represent a form of ideological colonization through which western culture is made global. It would be fruitful to compare English-language online comments on celebrities with online comments that represent the reception and interpretation of celebrity culture beyond the west.

Secondly, since online comments on celebrities were highly ambiguous, the categories into which I have classified them tended to overlap. This is because of the 'messy rhetoric' in online contexts where self-expressions of online participants are fragments of speech whose meaning lies in interaction (see also Grabill & Pigg 2012). This means that the quantitative findings of this study, particularly those concerning evaluative language and values, are highly complex and can be interpreted differently from different perspectives. For instance, many of the comments I saw as individualistic self-interest in Article 2 were, in fact, ways of contributing to sexist and classist domination, as the findings of Article 4 more clearly indicated. A digital text, such as a comment in a discussion forum,

often does not have its own origin but rather is part of a network of texts (e.g. Fleckenstein 2007). Thus the repetitive and 'crowding' online participation I called digital enthymeming may contribute to particular meanings that are not explicitly present in each comment as an individual post. It is worth noting, however, that the asymmetry between those gossiping and those gossiped about played a role in favouring digital enthymeming that judges and mocks 'others'. The findings on digital enthymemes may be different in online contexts that are not so strongly based on ways of distancing 'others', but would favour more symmetrical means of emotional participation.

Thirdly, a deeper contextual understanding of self-expression in different kinds of online spaces where participants contribute to celebrity gossip is a gap to be filled. It would be particularly interesting to more closely focus on the technological and social potentials of different types of forums in relation to the tense function of self-expression. Accordingly, in the future it would be relevant to explore what kinds of circumstances in online forums are the most fruitful for the bread-and-butter-fly effect. It would be particularly interesting to more thoroughly compare forums that are based on the circulation of pictures or videos with forums that are more focused on merely written expression. Such a study would be illuminating from the point of view of rhetorical criticism because particularly a visual object, such as a photograph, holds a strong aesthetic power in serving as proof that is taken as self-evident (see Finnegan 2001). Relating to a better contextual understanding of online self-expression, the means of persuasion contributing to proximity and distance in the rhetoric of the media or journalists is also worth studying more closely. As Silverstone's (2007: 25–55) concept of 'mediapolis' suggests, online participants are not alone; rather they are acting with media corporations and journalists, those in charge of media-generated content in the shared social and public space. In this study, I did not analyse the rhetorical content of mass-media texts (such as gossip stories or videos from the entertainment industry). In the future, it would be fruitful to analyse in what ways positioning based on proximity and distance is shared between online participants and the mainstream media also creating content online.

Generally speaking, because this study was a collection of articles that were also independent pieces of research, each article necessarily simplified the complexities of online celebrity gossip. However, I needed the case studies in order to focus on each aspect of ethos (autobiographical moralizing, emotions and values, reasoning, ethos control) and to form a holistic picture of proximity and distance in self-expressions of gossipers. Also, letting the research material speak for itself was an essential part of this project. This study, therefore, has a methodological contribution to rhetorical and communication studies whose

common interest lies in questions of otherness in language use and in other symbolical practices (see e.g. Gehrke 2009: 153; also Orgad 2012: 15–51). In order to approach such issues as 'who gets to speak' and 'what options are available for living and relating within our communities', rhetoricians and communication scholars need to see *beyond* mere forms of persuasion (see Gehrke 2009: 165). I responded to this call by combining the linguistic analysis of evaluative language with argumentation-analytical approaches to communication. This combination of the two methods was useful because online communication is highly emotional, but it also has a relation to forms of argumentation in a more general sense. Rhetoric of self-expressions becomes meaningful through the analysis of both evaluation and argumentation.

Applying highly abstract concepts, particularly distance, proximity and ethos, to the empirical analysis of online rhetoric enabled the holistic study of self-expressions. The richness of the concept of ethos utilized in this study lies in its inclusiveness of both distance (difference) and proximity (sameness) understood as ways that self-expressions contribute to social meanings. I argue that the idea of ethos as both an emotional and a logical construct of character is a useful and relevant approach whenever exploring self-expressions online. However, making something abstract more concrete, as I have done with 'distance', 'proximity' and 'ethos' in this study, involved a lot of simplifications, edits and overlaps. Thus these concepts in this study are deductively derived from neither Aristotle's *Rhetoric* nor Bauman's *Postmodern Ethics*. The way of combining the rhetorical idea of ethos with Bauman's ethical theory is, from Aristotle's and Bauman's perspective, an application rather than a theoretically faithful deduction.

The most complex component of ethos to be empirically analysed was arete or moral virtue. Phronesis and eunoia can be more easily applied to the level of empirical analysis than arete. This is because both (argumentative) distance and (emotional) proximity are obviously *relational* concepts in human communication, also in mediated contexts (see Silverstone 2007). Because of the linguistic signs of relationality, rhetoricians have a direct access to reasoning and emotions through the self-expressions of language users. Arete is a much more complex target of empirical studies than phronesis or eunoia, because good characters that act based on their goodwill and self-controlled characters that act against their will may both act in the same way (see Urmson 1973: 223). This means that virtues, if understood as merely internal states of a 'good' character, cannot be accessed on the level of rhetorical practices. In rhetorical studies, conversely, arete is a concept related to action (see e.g. Fleckenstein 2007). I saw autobiographical telling as the potential discourse of arete because it involved self-expressions based on rhetors' thoughts of themselves as moral beings who

act in relation to other people. These expressions included confessions and testimonies in which rhetors 'narrating' their own character referred to their experiences. Some of the online gossipers expressed self-reflections through autobiographical moralizing, with the purpose of identifying with disdained celebrities. As the comments analysed in this study indicated, however, autobiographical moralizing also can be used as a rhetorical means of emotivist morality. This was obvious in the highly sexist type of autobiographical moralizing in which women were represented as provocative. Such rhetoric implied that men's violence as a response to women's provocation would be a 'natural' reaction. Moreover, as Article 5 indicates, arete as a 'sincere' self-expression contradicts with phronesis as the sign of 'media-savvy' gossipers. As already discussed, some gossipers regarded as naive those celebrity-culture participants who identified with celebrities by treating them as moral individuals. Such participants were seen as gossipers who lack media criticism concerning the fact that celebrities are made for the purposes of media industry.

In the future, making sense of the rejected arete in online celebrity gossip could be theoretically improved by deepening the focus on Jean Baudrillard's (1994) concepts of the second and third order of simulacra[15], which I have briefly discussed in Article 5. Central in the serious readings of celebrity gossip is online gossipers' identification with their favourite celebrity, which can be seen to take place as the second order of simulacra in which the celebrity is seen as a representation of a moral person. In the frivolous readings of gossip, on the contrary, the relationship of celebrity and a real person is no more seen as meaningful. The frivolous participation contributes to the third order of simulacra in which ethos is constructed in repetitive online performances without a moral concern. The third-order simulacrum, as critically analysed, might be a useful starting point for future studies approaching ethos in online celebrity gossip as rhetorically created intimacy that takes place as the playful mockery, and hence distancing, of 'others'.

However, in contemporary media and communication studies, the idea of completely virtual media participation has been challenged by the view according to which participants are embodied selves (e.g. Ess 2010; also Silverstone 2007:

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[15] The second and the third order of simulacra characterize relationships between reality and its representations (see Baudrillard 1994). In the second-order simulacrum, copies try to mimic reality, such as celebrity images that represent the individual living in western society. In the third-order simulacrum, the relationship between reality and symbols is no longer seen as relevant. What is aesthetic or performed is regarded as the only reality. According to the third order, it would be irrelevant whether celebrities are morally good or bad as individuals.

5). In accordance with the approach to the embodied self, a self-expression is a moral positioning and a contribution to the ethos of rhetor even when it is playful and does not involve any moral concern for other people. This is because the rhetor of self-expression is a particular mind-body combination of history and memories that also has the ability to make choices. Rather than believing that a completely virtual reality is possible, I suggest that the third order could be seen as media participation based on playful mockery and continuous interaction of embodied beings that choose to deny their own authenticity. Considering that English-language celebrity gossip is an older type of mass-media text than celebrity gossip in the Finnish context, one may ask whether the openly 'liquid' and mocking participation is a growing trend in celebrity culture. Interestingly, recent celebrity studies suggest that the 'liquid' celebrity that interacts with fans has become a new trend in celebrity culture where the second order has been challenged (e.g. Redmond 2014; see also Holmes and Redmond 2014: 224). It would be fruitful to explore whether the 'liquid' celebrity and the mockery of celebrities may be aspects of the same rhetorical and cultural trend that highlights intimacy with the addressed audience and abandons the persuasiveness of 'authority' in communication.

3.4   Conclusion

Distance as the cornerstone of the modern public space has been challenged by the persuasive call of proximity, that is, the rhetoric in which emotional expressions are at the heart of persuasion. In rhetorical terms, epideictic rhetoric as the persuasion 'here and now' has found its kairos in the 'demotic turn' (see Turner 2004: 82–85; 2010) that highlights the active role of ordinary people in mediated, public spaces. In this era, ethos is constructed and controlled in continuous self-expressions of individuals willing to form a community. These self-expressions highlight rhetoric itself, not the name or status of a participant, as the sign of trust. It is the 'speech' itself that matters, not the reputation of the 'speaker', to refer to Aristotle's descriptive idea of ethos (*Rhetoric* I.ii.1356a: 4). By the same token, it is the meaning-making practices around celebrities – not the status of celebrities or media participants – which play the biggest role in online gossip.

Asynchronous and anonymous communication in online comment sections is a particularly telling example in which the characteristics of the demotic turn become visible. Firstly, because there is a time delay between posting and reading an online comment, the sense of presence is never obvious but it is created in and through continuous self-expressions. Secondly, online participants are spread-out

in terms of their physical, geographical and social locations. In order to contribute to togetherness they try to overcome distance by constructing emotional intimacy. This era of emotional participation is a manifestation against the rules of distance, rules that used to separate the rhetor and audience in public rhetoric. The emotional style of new media participation revealing spontaneous reactions instead of articulated reasoning may seem emancipatory because it resists the rationalistic rules of writing and communicating as the locus of power and authority (see e.g. Soffer 2012). In a wider sense, emotional participation also contributes to the cultural public sphere that challenges the monopoly of political and authoritarian public participation as the only legitimate form of public discourse (McGuigan 2005).

The sharing of emotional reactions, however, should not be seen as liberating just because of the desire to overcome distance between the rhetor and audience. As also Turner (2010: 171–174) argues, 'the demotic turn' does not automatically mean 'the democratic turn' as the triumph of ordinary people. By the same token, the mere possibility to post contents on websites should not be associated with the idea that the ordinary people, such as celebrity-gossip participants, make meanings independently from the hegemony of gossip media industry (see Meyers 2012: 1024, 1028; Graefer 2013: 223). Proximity as the flagship of the demotic turn may also take place at the expense of those sharing the digital space of expression. Participation in online celebrity gossip and other digital genres and forums of self-expression may involve the problem of closed worlds requiring trust in interlocutors who remain unknown and never reveal themselves (see Miller 2004: 212–213). Accordingly, sharing self-expression with the 'other' whose otherness is actively hidden contributes to individuals' immersion in a faceless crowd (see Bauman 1993: 115; 130–131; 155). The cost of shameless, uncritical sharing of intimacy is that individuals become part of what they do not and cannot know in person. A relationship in which the shameless intimacy with objects is the sign of a trustworthy ethos finally attacks the rhetor as an agent whose existence is dependent on the relation to the audience representing the 'other'.

Moreover, celebrity gossip analysed in this study makes visible something deeper in the current media culture, namely, the re-layered role of ethos. By the re-layered role of ethos I mean that characters produced by the media industry become objects of re-interpretation and re-persuasion by audience members who contribute to the idea of a trustworthy character. Gossip as a genre of communication that is continuously modified can be regarded as the prototype of rhetorical re-layering through which the 'authentic' or 'original' is made more and more questionable each time when new layers are added. In online celebrity

gossip, media contents are covered with new self-expressions of individuals who find new ways of covering everything that would be the sign of their own personality. In the rhetorical re-layering, impersonal and unauthentic reactions to impersonal and unauthentic media characters become the sign of a trustworthy self-expression.

The rhetorical re-layering described above can be seen as a means of empowerment of the 'self' who is in a reciprocal relationship with the surrounding context. In such reciprocity, celebrities are represented as 'fair game', from which follows that they become 'fair game' over and over again. Celebrities are not individuals whom gossipers could personally know; rather they are objects made for the purposes of the gossip media industry. To express themselves as media-savvy participants, online celebrity gossipers do not identify with celebrities as moral individuals, but rather show intimacy with media objects representing celebrities. In such rhetoric, everybody is playing a role for their own self-empowerment. Thus role-playing becomes the sign of a trustworthy online ethos, since the ethos of online co-participants with which the 'self' forms a community may not be more authentic or personal than the media-made characters as targets of playful mockery. In the role-playing, however, there is a real individual, an embodied being, behind all the layers. Accordingly, evaluating a celebrity as a 'chav', 'bitch' and an 'attention whore' is a *self*-expression and rhetors' attempt to find their own place in the complex network of relationships in which proximity to something or someone is a way into distance from something or someone else and vice versa.

The struggle of self-expression is a rhetorical struggle of identifying with a trustworthy ethos. Ethos involves the idea of the relational self, which can be found Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in which he argues that 'a person would present himself [sic] as being of a certain sort from the same sources that he would use to present another person' (see *Rhetoric* II.i.1378a: 7). Consequently, the means of persuasion contributing to ethos play an essential role in struggles through which rhetors as relational selves try to find their own voices. The rhetorical struggle of finding one's own voice through means of persuasion is not a new idea but has strong historical roots in the expressions of anonymous people who have the desire for social mobility. For instance, rhetorical struggles became the key issue of free speech fights in the U.S. among industrial workers at the beginning of the 20th century (May 2013). These workers did not 'own' a status or economic capital as a powerful property to improve their position in society. They used rhetoric for their own empowerment (see ibid.).

Relating to the struggles of finding one's own voice, I want to raise the rhetorical issue of *agency*. By agency I mean the common and shareable capacity of rhetors and their audiences to respect other people as responsive beings and identify with them, be they close or far. In rhetorical studies, there are two distinct ways of understanding agency. On the one hand, agency is understood as a discursive force of interaction, located between the rhetor and audience. According to Miller (2007), agency is 'kinetic energy' and an attribution from another agent. As she argues, agency is 'the property of a relationship between rhetor and audience' (Miller 2007: 150). On the other hand, Marilyn M. Cooper (2011), in her criticism of agency as mere interaction, defines agency as an emergent property of embodied individuals who know that their actions are their own. According to Cooper (2011), moreover, this internal model of agency calls for the individual's responsibility.

I suggest that these two ways of dealing with agency should be regarded as supplementing rather than contradicting each other. Agency, as both Miller (2007: 153) and Cooper (2011: 443) argue, is more than self-empowerment. While agency as the property of relationship can be seen as pedagogical interaction, the self-internal agency is the stage of more independent agents who have learned to use their own voices as means of persuasion. Agency in relationships supports the internal agency and vice versa, like oscillation between company and independence is important for experiencing oneself as both socially real and personally sincere (see Lanham 2006: 110). Such oscillation as interaction between contrasts dynamizes rhetorical expression because it involves a deeply practical dimension: a relationship that is not stuck in the form of discourse (ibid.). The continuous oscillation between agency in relationships and in personal discretion, between social proximity and distance from it, is a way of finding a balance in communication and taking responsibility for rhetorical actions. Responsibility taken by the rhetor is not possible without personal awareness of the 'self' that is both related to and distinct from other selves, be they present or absent. As Bauman (1993: 85) argues, responsibility 'is the *a priori* measure of all commitments'. The ability to take responsibility for one's own actions in relation to other people, as a way of being close but not too close, is essential to proper distance (see Silverstone 2003; 2007: 47–48). Moreover, being close is the way of reinforcing ties of trust but it also is risky because in the state of proximity the temptation to escape responsibility is the strongest (Bauman 1993: 88–89).

Responsibility is undermined if the environment of rhetorical speeches is completely 'authorless' (see Warnick 2004: 264), if it is 'not an author' but 'the context that writes' (see Fleckenstein 2007) and if networks 'define our

possibilities for action' (see Paasonen 2014: 13). I argue that agency is to be seen as a fundamentally rhetorical struggle of ethos. From this perspective, relationships in digital and networked spaces are issues of rhetorical *choice* relating to the question of trust. Thus agency is a rhetorical struggle of ethos calling for the responsibility of both rhetors and their audiences who make choices. Ethos based on intimacy with objects is a self-interested choice that ultimately attacks the very idea of the 'self' that needs otherness for its own survival as an agent. Responsible agency in digital contexts comes with the ability to criticize self-expression in the media participation of both oneself and other people through seeing the available means of persuasion. As this study has shown, the art of self-expressions is central for the new media literacy of those who act alone together, not only on celebrity-gossip sites, but also in other digital spaces.

To go back to my interest in little figures, the self-expressions of anonymous online participants are similar to miniatures. Academically they may seem too insignificant, frivolous, even naive to be analysed. This study, however, has uncovered the means of persuasion that make these self-expressions socially meaningful and fundamentally greater than themselves. To borrow Lanham's (2006) terms of looking AT and looking THROUGH, the holistic analysis of self-expressions requires a researcher to look AT them both closely, in their proximity, and from a theoretical and rational distance. This is the only way of seeing THROUGH their rhetoric.

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Autobiographical moralizing in celebrity discussions on the Internet – how do discussion participants confess and testify in Finnish and English?

This paper deals with autobiographical moralizing in celebrity-concerned Internet discussions. Autobiographical moralizing is categorized as confessions (when discussion participants moralize themselves) and testimonies (when they moralize people within their private sphere of life). The aim of this paper is to find out the linguistic means and rhetorical function of confessions and testimonies as a part of celebrity-concerned Internet discussions. The research material consists of 900 comments from Finnish and 900 comments from English language forums and discussion boards. Methodically, the study utilizes the analysis of evaluative language. According to the results, in both Finnish and English language discussions about celebrities, it is typical of confessions to be realized as implicitly positive means of moralizing, whereas testimonies usually involve implicitly negative means of moralizing. An indirect comparison between 'the good me' and 'the bad others' is a way to make oneself seem credible and establish *ethos*.

Keywords: celebrity, confession, ethos, testimony

1   Introduction: the new era of autobiographical telling

Telling and hearing narratives is a significant part of human nature: before the development of literacy, it was the most prevalent way of maintaining cultural traditions and transmitting values from one generation to the other. Nowadays experiences and feelings are increasingly shared in situations in which a teller and an addressee do not ever meet face-to-face. We have stepped far away from the times when mainly famous people, who were "somebody", had the right to publish their own experiences and feelings for a wide audience (see Linde 1993: 37–42). Today everyone can tell what s/he has gone through and bring out an opinion or emotional state in front of an unlimited number of people whom s/he might not know. Social media environments, such as *LiveJournal*, *Twitter*, *Facebook*, and different online newspapers are key factors in this new era of autobiographical telling.

Sharing something that tellers have done, or witnessed themselves, or heard from others is a common criterion for the concept of *narrative,* regardless of its various definitions (see e.g. Labov 1972: 359–374; Linde 1993; Cortazzi & Jin 2003; Bruner 2004). In addition, prescriptive evaluation of human behaviour, that is, the use of moral language (see Hare 2003 [1952]), is a significant element in narrative telling (see Labov 1972: 359–374; Linde 1993: 72–81; Cortazzi & Jin 2003). It is the moral aspect that makes a story worth telling (Bergmann 1998: 281).

My paper is based on the idea that celebrities serve as every-day moral examples whose good and bad behaviour makes the audience discuss moral norms relating to their own lives or society at large (see Hermes 1999). Although moralizing in celebrity discussions on the Internet has been analyzed previously, autobiographical moralizing as a part of those discussions has not been taken into account (cf. e.g. Jerslev 2010). By **autobiographical moralizing** I mean the evaluation of human behaviour in narrative telling in which the tellers evaluate themselves or people around them (such as friends, neighbours and family members) as moral actors and bring out what these moral actors have done (or would do). Autobiographical moralizing does not necessarily relate to complete narratives in the Labovian sense since it is not always structured with temporal clauses ("At first…then/

after that…") (cf. Labov 1972: 359–374) but may also occur as a short evaluation of 'the self' and people around it. Nevertheless, like more complete narratives (see ibid.), also autobiographical moralizing is a way of sharing personal experiences and values with others: to show what kind of person one is. Participants in computer-mediated communication are not an exception: they also need to know whether characters behind the words are trustworthy and similar to themselves, or strange, challenging, and dominating (see Miller 2001: 273).

The present paper deals with autobiographical moralizing in celebrity discussions on the Internet. The aim of the study has been to find out what **linguistic means** discussion participants use to evaluate themselves or people around them as moral actors and what **rhetorical function** autobiographical moralizing serves in the discussions. The rhetorical function refers to a social reason to use autobiographical moralizing. The discussions are in Finnish and English, and they relate to two cases of domestic violence (involving a Finnish ex-ski jumper Matti Nykänen and his wife Mervi, and globally known pop singers Rihanna and Chris Brown) and to two cases of fighting, involving celebrity females (Finnish entertainment celebrities Martina Aitolehti and Anne-Mari Berg, and a British-American media personality Sharon Osbourne and an American Playboy-model and reality-TV personality Megan Hauserman). Celebrity violence can be seen as a topic which easily leads to moralizing.

In the study, I have also compared the Finnish and English language discussions with each other. The comparison is based on the assumption that discussion participants on the English language forums and discussion boards come from different countries and various cultural backgrounds, which may increase moral uncertainty (see Luckmann 2002: 27–28). It is hard to understand the way others moralize if you do not know the moral norms and personal experiences affecting their intentions. Two hypotheses following the assumption are proposed. Firstly, compared with Finnish discussions on the Internet, participants in English language discussions may have a stronger need to argue for their trustworthiness by giving an impression that morality matters in their lives. Secondly, hiding safely behind anonymity may create a stronger temptation to overtly condemn particular private

people. The more multinational and multicultural a forum is, the less likely it is that the moralizer behind the words and the particular private person being moralized would be identified. Consequently, compared with Internet discussions in Finnish, it can be assumed that in the English language discussions, there is more need for autobiographical moralizing and also a lower threshold for explicitly negative moralizing of particular private individuals.

2   Material and methods

The research material consisted of 1800 comments from ten different discussion forums or discussion boards containing asynchronous Internet discussions.[1] A *discussion forum* is a website that is dedicated to a general (such as *Suomi24*) or more topic-specific Internet discussion (such as *Oh No They Didn't* on *LiveJournal*), while the term *discussion board* (such as *YouTube*) refers to the possibility to post a comment after a video or an article, published in the social media or on a newspaper website. All discussions included in the study were publicly available and provided the possibility to use pseudonyms or usernames. Of the research material, 900 comments were in Finnish and 900 in English. There were 450 comments relating to each four cases of celebrity violence. 450 comments per case were gathered from three different online media environments in such a way that 150 comments came from one discussion board or forum, and if possible, from one discussion thread. The research material can be seen in Table 1.

Every comment in my research material was a part of an Internet discussion relating to a video, a comment, or a gossip article about one of the four cases of violence involving celebrities. Methodically, the study utilized **the analysis of evaluative language** based on discourse analysis (see e.g. Martin & White 2005). By first identifying the linguistic means of autobiographical moralizing, it was possible to take the rhetorical function of confessions and testimonies into consideration.

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1   In asynchronous Internet discussions, interaction is structured into turns but compared with real-time text chats, a reply might not appear instantaneously but be posted months (or sometimes even years) after the prior turn (see Kolloch & Smith 1999: 5).

TABLE 1.   Research material: Celebrity-concerned Internet discussions.

The cases of violence involving celebrities	Asynchronous discussion comments (total 1800)
Pop singers Rihanna & Chris Brown (domestic violence)	Just Jared (150), USATODAY.com (150), YouTube (150)
Ex-ski jumper Matti Nykänen & his wife Mervi (domestic violence)	HS.fi (150), Kaksplus.fi (150), Suomi24 (150)
Entertainment celebrities Sharon Osbourne & Megan Hauserman (fight in a TV-show)	The Huffington Post (150), LiveJournal (Oh No They Didn't) (150), YouTube (150)
Entertainment celebrities Martina Aitolehti & Anne-Mari Berg (fight in a bar)	Mtv3.fi (150), Seiska.fi (150), Suomi24 (150)

All comments following a video, a gossip story, or the first comment in a main thread, form a discussion. However, I analyzed one comment as one text and focused on the linguistic means it contained. There may be some overlap in the results because one comment may contain several linguistic means. Firstly, I took into consideration whether the evaluation of 'the self' and people around it were positive (justification or praise) or negative (condemnation and disdain) (see Martin & White 2005: 52–56). Secondly, I examined whether evaluative utterances were explicit (contained evaluative lexis) or implicit and could not be seen on the level of the lexis but rather on the level of phrases, sentences or texts as a whole (see Martin & White 2005: 61–68). Thirdly, from the rhetorical point of view, it was essential to be aware of the fact that evaluative utterances (words, phrases or sentences) analyzed in the study were autobiographical moralizing, not just any kind of moral discourse. For example, the autobiographical utterance "Here things are sorted out in our own way, no authorities are needed for that" (see Example 1 below), is a way to implicitly compare 'the good me' with 'the bad others'. By this kind of moralizing discussion participants try to make themselves seem convincing in the eyes of others.

3   Confessions and testimonies as autobiographical moralizing

Confessions and *testimonies* are two basic types of autobiographical telling since autobiographical presentations are always based either on the acts or desires of the tellers themselves or people whose acts they have witnessed (see Kujansivu & Saarenmaa 2007: 10–11). In what follows, these two concepts will be discussed in more detail.

3.1   The concept of confession

Confession can be defined as the ritual of discourse in which the speaking subjects also function as the subjects of their statement, revealing their acts or desires that can be assumed to have a truth value (Foucault 1990 [1978]: 53–73). In confessions as autobiographical moralizing, the confessors tell something significant about themselves as moral actors, and, even if they do not explicitly evaluate themselves, they imply to the hearers or readers how the confessed statement should be judged. According to Michel Foucault (1990 [1978]: 58–59), contemporary Western society is a confessing society in which confessions serve as significant techniques for producing truth in various public and private contexts, like in justice, medicine, education, family and love relations. Confessing is often seen as revealing something that would otherwise be difficult to talk about, such as a crime or trouble.

I argue that a moral aspect is present in confessions in two ways. Firstly, the topic of the narratives of one's own life is not so much of interest as the way the narrators construct themselves (see Bruner 2004: 702). According to Linde (1993: 105–106, 122–123), in the own-life narratives, 'the self' is treated as 'the other' by establishing its moral value. As Mead (1934: 154–163) argues, representing oneself in a positive light is essential to being a social self. Thus the basic moral proposition in first-person narratives is "I am a good person" (Linde 1993: 123). Secondly, there is a moral aspect relating to the truth value of confessions. According to Foucault (1990 [1978]: 58–59), confession is a significant technique for producing truth. Consequently, the readers or hearers of confessors consider whether their acts have already been done or would really be done in future and whether they are persons they claim to

be. However, confessions made on the Internet may be deliberately told as unbelievable stories: playing on the borderlines of fact and fiction is evident (Paasonen 2007: 211–214).

3.2   The concept of testimony

While confessors tell about their own acts or desires, testifiers report what they have seen, heard about or experienced within their private sphere of life. Thus *testimony* can be defined as a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject reveals acts s/he has witnessed. (See Foucault 1990 [1978]: 59; Felman & Laub 1992.) Although testifying always refers to a third person as a moral actor, the acts testified about are a part of the teller's life since they have been experienced by him/her in some way, and they, therefore, have a role in his/her own sphere of experience. However, celebrity sightings (i.e. occurrences in which someone has eye-witnessed a celebrity doing something) are not dealt with here because moralizing people such as celebrities, who are known by all discussion participants, relates to the genre of gossip (see Bergmann 1993).

Moreover, there is a close relation between the concepts of testimony and *narrative* since testifying is based on witnessing which is often represented in a narrative form (see Lothe 2007). It is also typical of testimonies that they are seen to relate to the narratives of people who have survived from horrific and traumatic events, such as the narratives told by Jews who have survived from concentration camps (see e.g. Felman & Laub 1992).

4   Autobiographical moralizing in celebrity discussions

In this section, I will introduce the findings concerning autobiographical moralizing. Of the Finnish discussion comments 29/ 900 (3.2 %) contain autobiographical moralizing, whereas the number of comments containing autobiographical moralizing in English language discussions is 39/ 900 (4.3 %). Although the numbers are small, they can be seen to support the hypothesis that in English language discussions on the Internet, there is more need for autobiographical moralizing because in multinational and multicultural contexts, participants need to show how moral norms matter in their lives.

From a research ethical point of view, both the copyright issue and the privacy protection are taken into account (see e.g. Bruckman 2002). Due to the copyright issue, the original pseudonyms and usernames can be seen in the examples if they were included in the original posts. However, if the comments contain very sensitive material (such as a reference to experiences of domestic violence or overt hostility towards other people), the pseudonyms or usernames have been omitted. Moreover, all profile owners cited in the study were contacted personally. The moral utterances with a confession or a testimony have been bolded in the examples.

4.1   Confessions in celebrity discussions

In celebrity discussions on the Internet, confessing is typical of autobiographical moralizing: in Finnish discussions 20/ 29 (69.0 %) and in English language discussions 34/ 39 (87.2 %) comments of autobiographical moralizing contain confessing. Figure 1 shows the distribution of positive and negative moralizing in confessions.

Confessions in Finnish discussions

■ POSITIVE 18
■ NEGATIVE 2

Confessions in English discussions
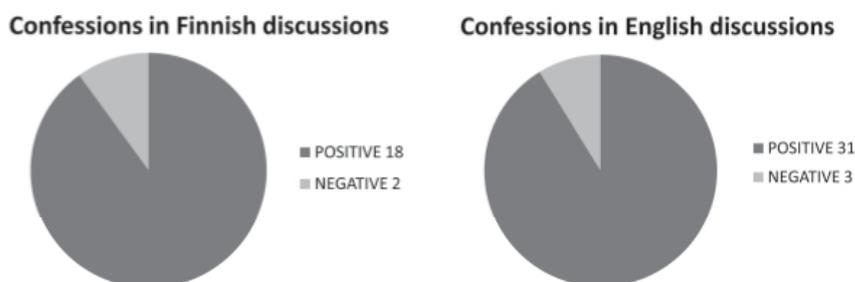
■ POSITIVE 31
■ NEGATIVE 3

FIGURE 1. Positive and negative moralizing in confessions.

As can be seen in the figure above, confessions usually include a positive self-evaluation, which supports Mead's (1934: 154–163) remarks on the positive evaluation of the (social) self. In Finnish celebrity discussions, 18 comments contain confession as a positive self-evaluation, while only 2 confessions are negative and indicate regret and feeling sorry for one's own behaviour. In English language celebrity discussions, 31 comments contain confession as a positive and 3 comments as a negative self-evaluation.

Example 1 is a confession from a Finnish Internet discussion concerning a bar fight involving two celebrity women, Martina Aitolehti and Anne-

Mari Berg. The discussion participant implicitly describes that she wants to be treated as a better and morally more respectable person than the two celebrities who just had had a trial concerning their fight.

> (1)   Voi jee, selvittäisivät bimbot keskenään sotkunsa. Tähänpä sitten me-
> nee taas veronmaksajien rahoja ja kallista aikaa käräjillä… **Meillä päin
> asiat selvitellään omalla tavalla, siihen ei viranomaisia tarvita**.
> Kyllä hävettää ihan kaikkien naisten puolesta, tällaisia nää nykysin on,
> koristeita…
> **Nainen isolla N:llä!!!**
>
> Oh gosh, those bimbos should settle the dispute by themselves. This is
> a waste of taxpayers' money and expensive time in court… **Here things
> are sorted out in our own way, no authorities are needed for that**.
> (I) am so ashamed for all these women, these are what women are to-
> day, mere decorations…
> **A Woman with big W!!!** (*Nainen isolla N:llä!!!, Seiska.fi*)

In Example 1, there is a comparison between the discussion participant as a moral actor and the two celebrity women as moral actors. The discussion participant disdains the celebrities because their fight was dealt with in court which, according to her, uses a great deal of taxpayers' money. Moreover, she presents herself in a positive light also in an explicit way by describing herself as "A Woman with big W", which indicates that she sees herself as a more respectable, "a true", woman. Example 2 is from an English language discussion concerning domestic violence involving the pop singers Rihanna and Chris Brown. The discussion participant of Example 2 highlights his non-violent nature by describing his own behaviour.

> (2)   […] stop replying to me you sadistic twisted asshole. It is clear some
> woman burned you and instead of moving on you sit online all day
> stereotyping & hating all black women. My lady slapped the shit out of
> me when she caught me cheating **but I didn't add injury to insult by
> hitting her back**, and she is not black, neither am I you racist tool. […]
> (*username removed, YouTube*)

In Example 2, the language user participates in a moral discussion concerning domestic violence by emphasising that although his partner hit him, he did not use violence against her. Moreover, he evaluates himself in an indi-

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rect way since there is no attitudinal lexis involved (see Martin & White 2005: 61–68). It is also interesting in Example 2 that cheating is not seen as a moral act at all because it is referred to only in passing. On the contrary, slapping as a reaction to cheating is condemned: he could have hit her back had he only wanted to. The theme of the confession in both examples can be seen as generally justified since the language users do not confess to committing a crime or causing trouble that might be regarded as very problematic among other discussion participants (see Foucault 1990 [1978]: 58–59).

Examples 3 and 4 contain confessions that can be seen as more problematic and something that may be more difficult to reveal in public. Example 3 is from a discussion concerning a reality-TV fight in which Sharon Osbourne attacked the Playboy model Megan Hauserman after Hauserman had insulted her by calling her husband, Ozzy Osbourne, names.

(3)   Honestly, not that I think Sharon is a class act or anything, but if someone insulted someone I love dearly on national t.v that way **I can't say that I would not flash back to my high school self and react physically**. [...] (*elisabet 85, LiveJournal – Oh No They Didn't*)

A discussion participant in Example 3 adopts Sharon Osbourne's perspective for her own moralizing and claims that she would also react physically if someone insulted her loved ones the way Hauserman did. It is noteworthy in Example 3, that by denying the possibility of non-violence, the language user takes a so-called heteroglossic perspective (see Martin & White 2005: 92–98, 118–120) on moralizing. This may indicate that because the discussion participant sees her own moral view to be in contradiction with that of others, she needs to deny the shared norm that violent reaction would always be wrong. Moreover, by defining the physical reaction as a defence, she reveals her desire to be understood as a morally virtuous person. Example 4 is from a Finnish discussion concerning domestic violence and alcohol use of the Finnish ex-ski jumper Matti Nykänen and his wife Mervi. Previously, the discussion has concerned alcohol use as a moral issue or disease.

(4)   **Alkoholismi ON sairaus**
       En tätäkään muuten tietäs,mutta yritin 10 vuoden ajan juoda itseäni hengiltä,kun en onnistunut edes seitsemän haimatulehduksen jäl-

keenkään, **hain apua AA ryhmästä,ja olen pysynyt yli 25 vuotta raittiina, EN ole yhtään parempi enkä huonompi ihminen siitä huolimatta,kyseisissä palavereissa olen käynyt enemmän kuin 5000, mutta vähemmän kun 10000 kertaa**, joten olen muutaman kokemuksen kuullut, että em. **sairaudesta voi toipua**, jos ON OMA HALU. [...]

Alcoholism IS a disease
I wouldn't know this otherwise but I tried for 10 years to kill myself by drinking, when I didn't manage to do it even after seven pancreatitises, **I searched for help from AA group, and I have been sober for over 25 years now, nevertheless I'm NOT a better or worse person, I have attended those meetings over 5000 but less than 10000 times**, so I have heard a few experiences that you will **recover from this disease** if you ONLY WANT SO. [...] (*pseudonym removed, HS.fi*)

At first sight, it might seem that Example 4 does not contain autobiographical moralizing since the language user seems to moralize only those who regard alcoholics as responsible for their own alcohol use. In that sense, he[2] disputes that alcoholism would be a moral issue. The reason why he does not regard alcoholism as a moral issue seems, however, to be his self-defence: he tells about how he is not morally responsible for his alcohol use (which he calls "a disease"), and is not, therefore, a bad person. With this kind of self-defence, he takes part in autobiographical moralizing implying the positive moralizing of 'the self'.

Table 2 shows the linguistic means of confessing in Finnish and English language Internet discussions. As can be seen in the table, in both languages, the most typical way of moralizing oneself is to implicitly evaluate 'the self' as morally justifiable (80 % of Finnish and 88 % of English language confessions are implicitly positive).

TABLE 2.   Linguistic means of moralizing in confessions.

Linguistic means in confessions	POS n (%)		NEG n (%)	
	Finnish	*English*	*Finnish*	*English*
Implicit moralizing	16 (80 %)	30 (88 %)	1 (5 %)	1 (3 %)
Explicit moralizing	3 (15 %)	2 (6 %)	1 (5 %)	2 (6 %)

n = the number of comments containing linguistic means of confessing
% = the percentage of linguistic means in the comments containing a confession

2   The discussion participant uses a male pseudonym.

As mentioned earlier, a negative moralizing of 'the self' is exceptional. In addition, Table 2 shows that also an explicitly positive evaluation of 'the self' is very rare. It is typical of neither Finnish nor English language discussions that discussion participants would explicitly manifest "I am a good person with respectable moral values" because that kind of utterance might be regarded as self-congratulatory, and the language user, therefore, would seem unconvincing.

4.2   Testimonies in celebrity discussions

The numbers of testimonies are even smaller than those of confessions: in Finnish discussions, 11/ 29 (37.9 %) comments of autobiographical moralizing contain a testimony, while in English language discussions, the number of autobiographical comments containing a testimony is 12/ 39 (30.8 %). Figure 2 demonstrates the distribution of positive and negative moralizing in testimonies.
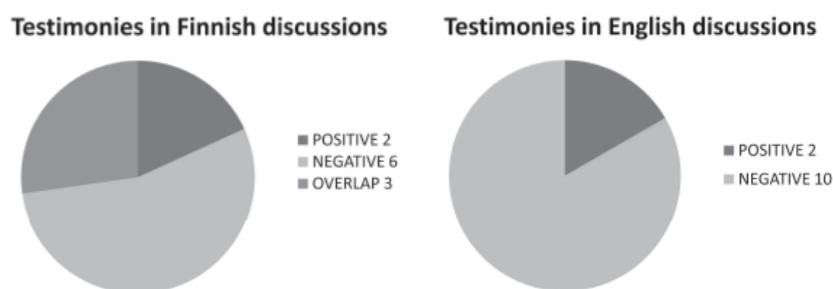
FIGURE 2. Positive and negative moralizing in testimonies.

Figure 2 indicates that positive moralizing may not be so typical of testimonies as the negative one. In Finnish celebrity discussions, 5 comments of autobiographical moralizing contain a positive testimony, while 9 of them are negative (note the overlap of positive and negative moralizing). In the English language discussions, 2 comments of autobiographical moralizing contain a positive testimony and 10 contain a negative one. In Examples 5 and 6, discussion participants testify about violent behaviour of their partner, and at the same time, embody their own role as a victim. Example 5 is from a Finnish discussion concerning both alcohol use and domestic violence involving the Finnish ex-ski jumper Matti Nykänen and his wife.

(5)   [...] Kun alkoholi hallitsee elämää kaikki muu on toisarvoista. **Myös itse olin naimisissa alkoholistin kanssa yli 20 vuotta. Vasta siinä vaiheessa älysin lähteä kun selvisin viime tipassa kuristamisesta. Olen harmitellut sitä miksi pilasin elämäni tollasen kanssa.** Kaikille niille jotka elävät tälläisen "matti nykäsen" kanssa, kerätkää tavaranne ja lähtekää. Tämä on myös sinulle Mervi! Teitä odottaa varmasti parempi elämä.

[...] When alcohol dominates your life everything else is secondary. **I was also married to an alcoholic for over 20 years. It was only when I was nearly strangled that I had sense to leave him. I have regretted ruining my life with a man like that.** To all of you who live with this kind of "matti nykänen", pack your stuff and leave. This is also to you Mervi! A better life is surely waiting for you.(*pseudonym removed, Suomi24*)

Although negative testimony is obvious, the way the discussion participant in Example 5 condemns her ex-husband is implicit. This is also one of the rare comments in which discussion participants evaluate themselves negatively: she should have left her man earlier. Moreover, in Example 5, celebrities are not seen as good or bad moral teachers or someone, offering options for dealing with social norms (cf. Hermes 1999: 71). On the contrary, the discussion participant tries to give Mervi advice based on her own experiences. Example 6 is from an English language discussion concerning domestic violence involving Rihanna and Chris Brown. A discussion participant tells what happened when he was taking his girlfriend home by car.

(6)   **[...] she just went on and on in the car. nonstop, trying to provoke me. and i did not respond. i kept driving. when she finally realized she would not get me to engage her** [which is why Rihanna kept yapping] **in any discussion** [which is why she would not shut the fuck up] **the next thing i feel is pressure on my head, repeatedly. Then I realized this stupid bitch is hitting me in my head. All of this because I'm trying to help this bitch.** (*username removed, YouTube*)

Example 6 is a more complete narrative in the Labovian sense since it is temporally structured (see Labov 1972: 359–374). By this kind of narrative telling, the discussion participant testifies against his (ex) girlfriend who, according to him, hit him without a reason. Further, the discussion participant evaluates his girlfriend explicitly by calling her names ("this stupid bitch", "this

bitch"). In Example 6, positive confessing and negative testifying are used side by side. The discussion participant also wants to highlight how he sees Rihanna's behaviour resembling that of his girlfriend.

The linguistic means of testimonies in Finnish and English language discussions can be seen in Table 3. As the table demonstrates, the most typical way to testify is to implicitly disapprove the behaviour of particular private people: 82 % of Finnish and 75 % of English language testimonies contain an implicitly negative testimony.

TABLE 3.   Linguistic means of moralizing in testimonies.

Linguistic means in testimonies	POS n (%)		NEG n (%)	
	Finnish	*English*	*Finnish*	*English*
Implicit moralizing	4 (36 %)	1 (8 %)	9 (82 %)	9 (75 %)
Explicit moralizing	1 (9 %)	1 (8 %)	1 (9 %)	6 (50 %)

n = the number of comments containing linguistic means of testifying
% = the percentage of linguistic means in the comments containing a testimony

Although the number of testimonies is even smaller than that of confessions, the comparison between the two languages may indicate that participants in English language discussions have a lower threshold to explicitly testify against private people. In the Finnish Internet discussions, only 9 % of the comments contain an explicitly negative testimony, while in the English ones the percentage is 50 %. This can be explained by the assumption that in Finnish language discussions, it is more likely that both the testifier and the object of testifying could be identified, which makes it riskier to explicitly condemn particular private individuals.

5   Conclusion

In celebrity discussions on the Internet, autobiographical moralizing can be seen as one option of participating in a discussion about moral norms. Autobiographical moralizing is not expected, and the idea is, therefore, not to compete whose story is the most unbelievable (cf. Paasonen 2007: 212), but rather to give a good impression of oneself by comparing 'the good me' with

'the bad others'. As Bergmann (1993: 128) suggests, aiming at presenting oneself in a better light may motivate evaluating others as immoral actors. In other words, by testifying and confessing, the discussion participants aim at creating *ethos*, which, according to Aristotle (2008 [350 BC]: 8–9), may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion. By establishing *ethos*, speakers are able to gain credibility for themselves and their words (ibid.). Credibility would be destroyed by exaggeration, which explains why, in both Finnish and English language discussions, the most typical linguistic means of autobiographical moralizing are implicitly positive moralizing of 'the self' and implicit condemnation of people around it.

Although the number of autobiographical comments was too small for the generalization of the results, the comparison between Finnish and English also indicates differences as food for thought. In the English language discussions, it was slightly more common that participants used autobiographical moralizing and overtly testified against people around them, which can be seen to be a consequence of moral uncertainty (see Luckmann 2002: 27–28). In other words, the wider and more pluralistic a forum or a discussion board is, the less likely it is that participants would know each other and each other's moral values beforehand. This makes autobiographical moralizing in multinational and multicultural Internet discussions both less risky and more necessary compared with discussions of culturally and nationally more limited groups. Sharing a piece of story of one's own moral life may reduce moral uncertainty by not only making oneself seem more trustworthy but also by indicating trust in others. In celebrity discussions on the Internet, autobiographical moralizing does not occur in a vacuum but has a rhetorical function in suggesting that 'the moral self' is to be understood as 'the moral other'.

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'It's so wrong yet so funny': celebrity violence, values and the Janus-faced cultural public sphere online

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The aim of this study is to explore the values that characterise participation in the cultural public sphere of local (Finnish) and (potentially) more global or multinational (English-language) celebrity-gossip sites. By utilising the analysis of evaluative language, the values expressed in 900 English-language and 900 Finnish comments from different websites (such as Just Jared, YouTube, Oh No They Didn't and online newspaper sites) were explored. The results indicate that the cultural public sphere of both global and local celebrity-gossip sites has three basic functions, which I will characterise here as morality (purpose), competition of power (game) and entertainment (play).

First, and especially if celebrities undergo serious miseries such as domestic violence, the cultural public sphere involves negotiation of and reflection on the normative meanings of being a citizen. Such moral seriousness is particularly prominent on Finnish sites of celebrity gossip, which may indicate that when celebrity gossip is limited to one culture and nation, the public-spirited focus seems stronger than in potentially global gossip discussions. Second, and perhaps most prominently, the cultural public sphere is a terrain of contest characterised by mockery, pity and hostility towards celebrities, particularly women. Third, the cultural public sphere focuses on shared entertainment, and especially voyeuristic pleasures. Moreover, comments posted to both Finnish and English-language online environments of celebrity gossip are characterised by the overlap of game with both purpose and play. Serious moral purpose stressing obedience to communal rules and playful mockery as a humorous self-expression have a common goal in contributing to self-interested, and often sexist, discourses of power.

Keywords: celebrity; internet; cultural public sphere; values; morality

Introduction: celebrity culture, values and public concern

The potential of popular culture to encourage public-concerned participation seems to be one of the growing interests within the field of celebrity and cultural studies (for example, McGuigan 2005, Jenkins 2006, Couldry and Markham 2007, Johansson 2007, Gorin and Dubied 2011, Graham and Harju 2011, Ahva *et al*. 2013). On the one hand, previous empirical studies indicate that celebrity culture does not create a direct connection to a broader public concern: neither celebrity news (Gorin and Dubied 2011) nor the way gossip readers make meanings of celebrity culture explicitly contributes to political participation (Couldry and Markham 2007, Ahva *et al*. 2013). However, it should be noted that even though heavy interest in celebrities' lives would not correlate with an interest in traditional

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politics, it may encourage active citizenship with a deeper cultural concern (McGuigan 2005, p. 429). According to Jim McGuigan (2005, p. 435), the discursive site for such culturally concerned discussion is *the cultural public sphere*, meaning 'the articulation of politics, public, and personal, as a contested terrain through affective (aesthetic and emotional) modes of communication'. Celebrity can be seen as a prototype of a phenomenon in the cultural public sphere: it is a cultural formation with a social function in the everyday lives and experiences of young people in particular (Turner 2010b, p. 14). In other words, a celebrity is not only a well-known individual but an exemplar of cultural meanings and values in the contemporary mediated world. One of the social functions of celebrity culture lies in its potential to provoke discussion of values and morality, reinforcing and updating the shared normative standards of community (Hermes 1995, p. 132, Rojek 2001, p. 99, Turner 2004, pp. 89–127, Johansson 2007, p. 166).

Values, both moral and self-interested, can be understood as goals serving as guiding principles in the life of a person or a group (Schwartz 1992), and they are often more abstract and hidden than concrete evaluations but strongly influence our choices and actions (Sayer 2011, pp. 25–28). Moreover, values play a role in community-building: we tend to seek social approval for our values, since 'it is difficult to live with values that no-one else supports' (Sayer 2011, p. 27). Consequently, values can be seen as indicators of the nature of participation on gossip sites and they embody functions of the cultural public sphere around celebrity. The classification of values utilised in this study is based on Shalom Schwartz's (1992) category of 10 values, namely values that are usually considered moral (universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, security), values of self-interest in competition with others (power, achievement) and without relation to other people (self-direction, stimulation, hedonism) (see Schwartz 2007, pp. 712–713). Further, these values resonate with Richard Lanham's (2006, pp. 166–176) motive spectrum, consisting of purpose (a serious practical motive of reason, cf. Schwartz's category of moral values), game (the competitive side of human nature, cf. Schwartz's category of self-interest in competition with others) and play (mere pleasure and entertainment, cf. Schwartz's category of self-interest without regard to others).

Since moral values may contribute to positive social relations and involve a motive to improve the well-being of others (Schwartz 2007, pp. 712–713, 724), they can be seen as related to the public interest understood as the common good. On the contrary, game and play are self-motivating and they emerge spontaneously in human behaviour (Lanham 2006, p. 172), with a lack of commitment to find solutions to social inequalities. In everyday social life, however, different kinds of values overlap with one another, rather than emerge in vacuums. For instance, moral values tend to overlap with competitive self-interest: there is always the possibility that morality is affected by class and power (see Walzer 1993, pp. 21–22). Moreover, play tends to overlap with competitive self-interest, which is typical of Western capitalistic culture involving the idea of having fun when competing with others (see Lanham 2006, pp. 171–172). The overlap of game and play in particular can be seen as typical of contemporary celebrity culture, which gets its fuel from 'fame games' (see for example Turner *et al.* 2000), having their ancient roots in the desire to get attention by trying to be first (Lanham 2006, p. 167). This desire to position the self above others through the means of entertainment does not only characterise celebrities' self-promotion, but also gossip readers' participation in which news about celebrities in their miseries often provokes Schadenfreude: taking pleasure in celebrities' misfortunes (see Cross and Littler 2010, pp. 396–397). Schadenfreude can be seen to be linked with camp readings of celebrity gossip, in which the readers of gossip disidentify with a celebrity through meanings of playful non-seriousness (see Hermes 1995, pp. 121, 133, Meyers 2010, pp. 31, 53, 309). Although such consumerism can be seen as democratic

from the point of view of what McGuigan (2005, pp. 436–437) calls uncritical populism, Schadenfreude is a realisation of a culturally and economically closed system that 'cannot position itself in relation to wider social formations or cultural ecologies', as Cross and Littler (2010, p. 414) note critically. In other words, Schadenfreude can be seen as a sign of celebrity industry that stimulates gossip readers' interest in judging celebrity without giving the readers anything beyond the topic of celebrity.

Today, the internet has an important role in the circulation and production of celebrity culture (see, for example, Marshall 2010, Turner 2010a), and online forums and discussion boards serve as popular environments enabling global discussion of celebrity. However, what is still lacking in celebrity studies is a holistic analysis of the values that are constructed by local and more global celebrity gossip readers online, and a comparison between these two groups of participants in their potential to contribute to public-spirited discussion online. The aim of this study is to explore the values that characterise participation in the cultural public sphere of local (Finnish) and (potentially) more global or multinational (English-language) celebrity-gossip sites. I am particularly interested in the ways that values involve moral concern for the well-being of other people or serve goals of self-interest, and whether there are differences in the sharing and negotiation of values in Finnish and English-language online environments. The comments chosen for the study were collected from online discussions about celebrity violence because as a theme of popular culture, violence, and particularly domestic violence (Ahva *et al*. 2013, pp. 10–11), is likely to bring to the surface serious social issues, such as domination of class and gender occurring in a society and culture at large (see Fiske 1989, pp. 127–130). In addition to online comments on domestic violence, comments on fighting female celebrities are analysed in this study, since it is interesting to see whether and how the meanings of sexist domination may also be present when discussing social conflicts that do not involve the obvious men-vs.-women juxtaposition.

Material and method

The focus of this study lies in asynchronous comment sections.[1] The research material of the study consists of 900 English-language and 900 Finnish comments on violence involving celebrities. Half of the comments (450 English-language and 450 Finnish posts) deal with domestic violence. The English-language comments concern the case of globally known pop singers Rihanna and Chris Brown, while the Finnish comments deal with violence involving a Finnish former ski jumper Matti Nykänen and his former wife Mervi Tapola. In the Finnish tabloid press, and on celebrity-gossip sites, this middle-aged couple were seen as a sort of cultural exemplar of 'fallen' and tragic celebrities, who had money but who faced miseries and had fights because of alcohol use. In addition, the other half of the comments in both English-language and Finnish discussions deal with fights involving female celebrities. The English-language comments on female violence concern the British-American media personality Sharon Osbourne, who attacked an American Playboy model and reality-TV contestant Megan Hauserman by pouring a drink on her and pulling her hair in the *Charm School* reality show after Hauserman said that Osbourne was only famous through her husband. The Finnish version of female celebrities' violence concerns a bar fight and a trial that followed the fight involving two entertainment celebrities, Martina Aitolehti and Anne-Mari Berg. The trial also involved Martina Aitolehti's husband, who, together with his wife, was accused of harassing Anne-Mari Berg. These four cases were chosen for the study because the celebrities involved in them are well known either locally or globally, which is why gossip relating to these celebrities provoked a lot of intensive comment on the internet.

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Table 1.   Research material.

The cases of celebrity gossip	Asynchronous discussion comments
Pop singers Rihanna & Chris Brown (domestic violence)	*Just Jared*, an English-language website dedicated to celebrity gossip (150)
	USATODAY.com, a U.S. online newspaper (150)
	YouTube, a global, user-generated website for video sharing and commenting (150)
A Finnish ex-ski jumper Matti Nykanen & his (ex-) wife Mervi Tapola (domestic violence)	*HS.fi*, a Finnish online newspaper (150)
	Kaksplus.fi, a website of a Finnish 'baby magazine' including a lot of gossip (150)
	Suomi24, a general Finnish discussion forum with a heavy interest in celebrity and gossip (150)
Entertainment celebrities Sharon Osbourne & Megan Hauserman (fight in a TV show)	*The Huffington Post*, a U.S. online newspaper (150)
	Live Journal (Oh No They Didn't), an English-language online community dedicated to celebrity gossip (150)
	YouTube (150)
Finnish entertainment celebrities Martina Aitolehti & Anne-Mari Berg (fight in a bar)	*Mtv3.fi*, a website of a Finnish television channel (150)
	Seiska.fi, a website of a Finnish gossip magazine (150)
	Suomi24 (150)

The research material stems from both nationally and globally popular online environments (such as Just Jared and YouTube and various online newspaper sites, see Table 1) in which the discussion is focused on celebrity. The material was collected between January and October 2010. In general, if the most commented-on discussion thread included 150 comments or more, only one thread was chosen for the study. Moreover, in order to see the wide spectrum of values, I collected 75 comments at the beginning and 75 comments in the middle or at the end of a thread. As Meyers (2010, p. 266) points out, sometimes later comments are different from earlier ones because participants who cannot be the first ones may try to attract attention by commenting on celebrities in more aggressive ways. All comment sections analysed in the study are available to view online for all without logging in.

Methodically, this study is based on the analysis of evaluative language. Simply put, evaluative language can be identified when language involves words or phrases of affect ('I *hate* violence', 'I *love* Rihanna'); judgement ('He did *wrong* when he hit her'); and appreciation ('She is a *beauty queen*') (see Martin and White 2005). In this study, values in the postings to the comment sections are seen to be constructed in value discourses, that is, socially shared perceptions of what is desirable and good. Since evaluation comes into life through comparison (Thompson and Hunston 2000, pp. 13, 21), values can be also seen as the opposites of what is evaluated negatively. In the analysis of evaluative language, value discourses in the comments posted to celebrity-gossip sites were analysed as indicators of goals (such as the value discourse of appearance when evaluating Rihanna as a beauty queen, or physical integrity in the case of hating violence). Goals can be moral (when showing concern for the well-being of other people) or self-interested (when evaluating things or people as 'things' for the play of pleasure or the game of power). In this study, one comment was treated as one unit of analysis and classified in value discourses that were seen as contributing to the 10 values suggested by Schwartz (1992) (for instance, a comment that involves the value discourse of appearance embodies achievement and some sort of hedonism, while a comment about physical integrity relates to universalism).

However, often evaluative language may lack explicitly evaluative words, which means that evaluation cannot be understood without a careful contextual analysis (Martin and White 2005, pp. 61–68). The potential of language to carry implicit meanings relates to the notion that evaluative language has a rhetorical function beyond a literal understanding: evaluative language reflects the goals of evaluators and their community (Thompson and Hunston 2000, pp. 6, 13, 21). Moreover, values, especially those constructed in judgement and appreciation, may involve discourses of power through 'institutionalised feelings' (Martin and White 2005, p. 45) that take us out of the domain of personal desires, joys and grievances to that of shared community values. In the linguistic appraisal framework, judgement is seen as a written or spoken realisation of institutionalised feelings concerning rules and regulations of morality, while words or utterances of appreciation are based on institutionalised feelings of aesthetics in which things and phenomena are evaluated. (Martin and White 2005, p. 45) The notion of institutionalised feelings also fits in with Lanham's (2006, pp. 166–176) motive spectrum. Judgement as a linguistic realisation of rules and regulations of morality resonates with the idea of a communally shared moral purpose, whereas appreciation as the evaluation of things, such as a picture of a celebrity, can be seen as a sign of play in which participation is motivated by the pleasure of things. Because evaluative language carries a contextual meaning, this study holds that one online comment can be ambiguous and contain several self-interested and moral values and value discourses.

Digital media, celebrity and the (anti-)democratic potential

What happens to celebrity culture when it is produced and circulated online? On the one hand, there are previous studies arguing that digital media may highlight the democratic potential of popular culture. For instance, the cultural and media analyst Henry Jenkins (2006, pp. 84–85) suggests that celebrity gossip discussed on the internet helps people from various cultural backgrounds to share values and learn new worldviews. Moreover, according to Jenkins (2006, pp. 249–250), popular culture, particularly in the new media, may activate ordinary people and provide emancipating alternatives to political contests. Furthermore, previous empirical research into celebrity-gossip sites (Jerslev 2010), celebrity-gossip blogs (Meyers 2010) and reality-TV forums (Graham and Harju 2011)[2] suggests that celebrity provokes moral discussion online, and may also challenge traditional ideological (such as sexist or racist) values and meanings (see Meyers 2010, pp. 260–270, 278, 284, 305–325). In addition, Todd Graham and Auli Harju (2011, pp. 27–29) suggest in their empirical study of online discussions of *Big Brother* and *Wife Swap* that celebrities provoke public-concerned comments and encourage online participants to talk about issues relating to the common good, such as parenting and the welfare of families.

On the other hand, the results of the previous studies indicate that celebrity culture in the context of new media may even reinforce the anti-democratic and self-interested nature of participation. In contemporary societies, fame is no longer a property of mass-media celebrities only: Web 2.0 has made it possible for all individuals, including the readers of celebrity gossip, to strive for a place at the centre of mediated attention by presenting and promoting the individual self (Marshall 2010, see also Marwick 2010). Moreover, celebrity-gossip sites also involve discourses of social domination and competition between social groups, such as those of class and race, and especially gender (see Fairclough 2008, Meyers 2010). As Kirsty Fairclough (2008, p. 13) argues, celebrity-gossip blogs with heavy interest in female body images and the expression of irony around

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'fallen' celebrities involve a seemingly democratic discourse evoking 'a postfeminist trickery' that encourages hypersexualisation and exploitation 'in the name of empowerment'. Characteristic of such discourse is that evaluative comments on female celebrities' appearance are often made by women themselves and addressed to female readers (Fairclough 2008, pp. 10–12, 17–19). Also Erin Ann Meyers (2010, p. 317) argues that the humorous style of celebrity-gossip blogs may reinforce dominant ideologies. In other words, both Fairclough's (2008) and Meyers' (2010) work highlights how game in online discourse of celebrity culture may come into life as entertaining play (see Lanham 2006, pp. 166–176).

As previous studies suggest, celebrity culture online involves potential for both public concern for morality (purpose) and discourses of self-interest (game and play), which gives an interesting starting point to the holistic analysis of values in the cultural public sphere of celebrity-gossip sites.

Results: values in internet discussions of celebrity violence

In what follows, values found in both English-language and Finnish comment sections of celebrity-gossip sites are analysed in detail. Because of the limited space, all value discourses involved in the 10 main value categories are explained in the Appendix at the end of the article. The first subsection concerns domestic-violence discussions and it is followed by the analysis of values in online discussions of female celebrities' fights. The typology of 10 values is in line with Schwartz's (1992) original categorisation, but here 'social domination' refers to value discourses in which a group of people, such as a group categorised by race, gender or class, is dominated, while 'achievement' concerns competition on a more individual level.

The examples demonstrate how some of the most typical values found in the research material are shared in value discourses. The value discourses discussed in detail have been marked at the end of each example. Note that the examples may also contain value discourses that could not be discussed in detail because of the limited space of the article. Because of copyright (see, for example, Bruckmann 2002), original pseudonyms or usernames and the names of the websites can be seen as references. Since one comment included a personal story of domestic violence, I decided that it would be inappropriate to reveal the username for ethical reasons.

Values in online discussions of domestic violence involving celebrities

When commenting on domestic violence involving the American pop singers Rihanna and Chris Brown, and Finnish former ski jumper Matti Nykänen and his (ex-)wife Mervi Tapola, achievement and security were the most prominent values that mattered to online participants, as Figure 1 shows. A total of 45.3% of comments on English-language and 38.2% on Finnish celebrity gossip sites indicated achievement as their goal, while valuation of security was involved in 40.4% of comments of the English-language material and in 39.6% of the Finnish comments on domestic violence. The high rates of the security value can be explained by the focus on relationship harmony that these celebrity couples were seen to have broken. Social domination is higher when commenting on domestic-violence gossip in Finnish (27.8%) than in English (23.6%). In addition to sexist power, online discussion about domestic violence involving the Finnish celebrity couple brought to the surface domination of class by mocking alcoholics and calling them drunkards, which indicates a desire to look down on a group isolated from the rest of a society and its active labour force.
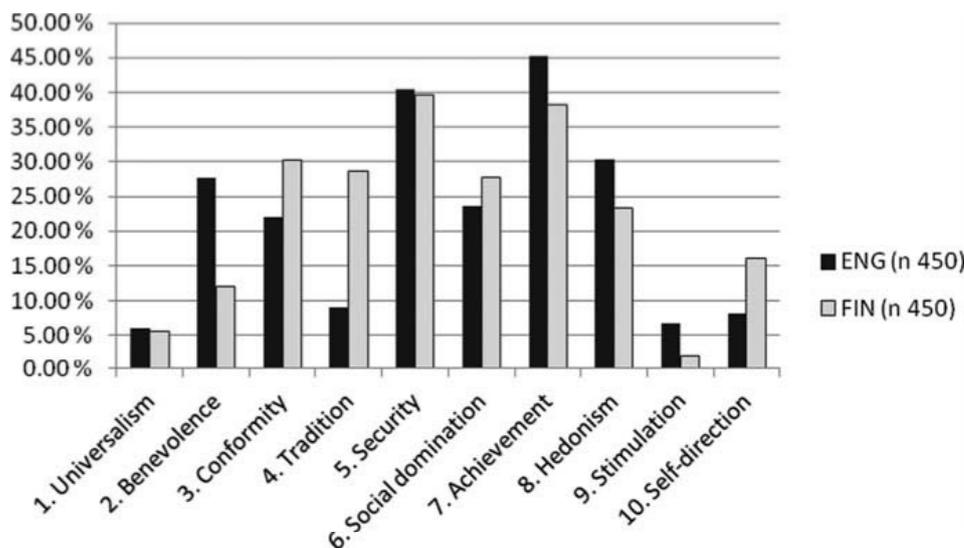
Figure 1. Values relating to domestic violence involving celebrities.

In this study, the 10 main categories of values suggested by Schwartz (1992, 2007) were seen to be formed by several value discourses found in this analysis, which can be seen in Figure 2. Value discourses have been given number codes in accordance with the type of moral or self-interested value they involve. Values that have the number codes 1–5 were categorised as 'moral' (purpose), whereas the numbers 6–7 refer to competitive self-interest (game) and values 8–10 involve self-interest related to pleasures (play). The moral values (1–5) are situated on the left-hand side of Figure 2, while the values of self-interest (6–10) can be found on the right. When classifying value discourses in the 'segments', I utilised Schwartz's description of values. For instance, value discourses that contribute to tradition were seen to be based on a conservative worldview that leans on the customs of one's own culture (see Schwartz 1992, p. 7). Figure 2 also shows the frequencies of each value discourse in domestic-violence discussions. A detailed description of values and value discourses can be seen in the Appendix.

As can be seen in Figure 2, each of the 10 values included several value discourses, numbered as 1.1–10.2. In online discussions of celebrity gossip, the moral value of universalism (number 1), for instance, was constructed in two value discourses, namely, 1.1. physical integrity (in 14 English-language online comments and 8 Finnish ones) and 1.2 social justice and equality (in 14 English-language online comments and 17 Finnish ones). The function of these number codes is to serve as what we may call navigation coordinates for the reader. The same number codes are used in the Appendix, in which each value discourse is described. In what follows, I will show concrete examples of typical value discourses on both English-language and Finnish gossip sites dealing with domestic violence involving celebrities. I will concentrate on the three most typical moral and self-interested value discourses.

Moral value discourses in comments on domestic violence involving celebrities

Since comments involving moral value discourses were relatively long, English-language and Finnish examples are discussed separately in what follows. In English-language discussions about domestic violence, the most popular moral value discourses were: 1)

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Figure 2. Value discourses in online discussions about domestic violence involving celebrities.

5.5 social order (in 97 comments); 2) 5.4 relationship harmony (in 95 comments); and 3) 3.3 obedience to laws and rules (in 89 comments) (see Figure 2). Evaluation in the discourse of social order, relationship harmony and obedience can be regarded as meanings of social sanction, stressing civic duty (see Martin and White 2005, pp. 52–53). Examples 1–3 show how these three value discourses emerged when discussing domestic violence involving celebrities. In Example 3, the focus is on the latter comment, which would not be understandable without the previous one.

(1) In Florida once you get convicted of even simple, non-injurious domestic battery, you lose the right to ever have a gun. You go to anger-management classes for at least a year that are five or six hours a week. You get a restraining order so if you look sideways at her again you go to jail for a long time. They guy always gets the rap even when the woman is the aggressor, etc. This animal should be locked up in a cage for what he did. If you chew on someone's arm and smash your fists in a woman's face, you may not really be a human being. Throw the book at him. I just bet he is sorry. Sorry for what? Himself, most likely. Spare us, please. Pay the price and take it like a man instead of like a whimpering baby. (*beachbum08*, USAToday.com) [social order + relationship harmony + obedience]

(2) if that's real, it's horrific. no apology he could ever make will forget what he did. if anyone else did that to a woman they would be in jail. she is really badly bruised whatever allegedly happened between them is besides the point you NEVER EVER hit a woman. i hope he rots in jail. (*ccars*, Just Jared) [social order + relationship harmony + obedience]

(3) > > so i then started driving towards the police station. when she was calling the police she told them i punched her in the lip and that her lip was swollen. well when we got to the station i told the cop everything. and ended with 'oh yeah she also told the dispatcher i punched her in the lip and her lip was swollen' the girl said nothing [caught in her lie] and the police looked and saw no swollen lip. at that point i was relieved of that stupid fucking bitch. (YouTube)

> > That was messed up what she did. I'm glad that the police saw threw her lies and made a good call and took her in. In no way I was saying that rihanna was excused or right in what she did. I just wanted to state how damaging chris's choice and actions were compared to rihanna's that's all. What he did wasn't worth what he has lost. (*skybluediamond 2003*, YouTube) [social order + relationship harmony]

Examples 1 and 2 highlight the importance of social order, which can be identified when participants call for the arrest of Chris Brown (in Example 1: 'This animal should be locked up in a cage for what he did'; and in Example 2: 'if anyone else did that to a woman they would be in jail' and 'i hope he rots in jail'). In Example 3, the value discourse of social order ('I'm glad that the police saw threw [sic] her lies and made a good call and took her in') relates to the preceding turn in which the online participant tells about his experience when his girlfriend lied about being a victim of domestic violence. Moreover, relationship harmony comes into play when condemning violence and lying in a relation-ship, while obedience discourse emerges when pointing out Chris Brown's role as a citizen who has broken indisputable principles of morally good behaviour. Typical of the value discourse of obedience is absoluteness relating to norms (such as 'If you chew on some-one's arm and smash your fists in a woman's face, you may not really be a human being' in Example 1). Note that Example 1 also involves name-calling of Chris Brown ('[t]his *ani-mal*') and Example 2 includes a defamatory verb ('i hope he *rots* in jail'), which embody individual power to judge celebrities.

In Finnish discussions about domestic violence, the most typical moral value discourses were: 1) 3.3 obedience to laws and rules (in 127 comments); 2) 4.1 criticism of gossip media and audience (in 97 comments); and 3) 5.4 relationship harmony (in 85 comments), which can be seen in Examples 4–6 below. I have translated the original Finnish comments into English. Note that the translations are as precise as possible and therefore utterances from the original comments that were not grammatically correct or were more common to the spoken discourse were also taken into consideration in the translated versions.

(4) No reason to praise

Nykänen cannot be excused only because he is a world champion and winner of Olympics. Nykänen with a career in singing and striptease doesn't give much reason to be praised. A wise man doesn't undertake all stupid things. If someone hasn't noticed it yet, this man has ADHD, like most prisoners do. Alcohol should not be sold to such a person, because then he will lose even the minimal control he has. And even when sober, Nykänen is not perfect. His education has gone very badly and (he) has been in a class for kids with special needs, many marriages, a lot of cheating, and (he) hasn't taken any responsibility for his own kids. Mervi Tapola is obviously codependent or they haven't made prenuptial agreement because she's able to stand by Nykänen. (*abc*, HS.fi) [obedience + criticism + relationship harmony]

(5) MATTI AND MERVI KNIFE SERIAL

O damngod . . . fighting Nykänens . . . they they are just able to get drunk, have bloody fights, divorce, reconcile and all this again again again AGAIN . . . teletubby Nykänens:D:D one

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would think that even the media got fed up. The same news repeats itself year after year!! Soon Matti is in a prison and everything's reconciled . . . but I AM ALWAYS KEEN ON READING . . . HEY HELLOO!!! NO ONE ADMITS BUYING MAGAZINES WITH MATTI AND MERVI HEADLINES. STILL THE MAGAZINES SELL WELL!! (*Mediaatikko*, Suomi24) [obedience + criticism + relationship harmony]

(6) their on-off relationship will never end until the knife hits another spot some other time. soon we will read that mervi has posted divorce papers and a week after that she withdraws them again. would it be even the 15th time? (*vieras*, Kaksplus.fi) [obedience + relationship harmony]

First, the three examples above highlight the obedience to laws and rules. The online participants evoke moral values by implying the importance of communal laws and rules that this couple had broken by undertaking 'stupid things' (see Example 4), being able to just get drunk, fight, divorce and reconcile (see Example 5), and having a violent on-off relationship (see Example 6). Second, the disapproval embodies the value of relationship harmony that this celebrity couple, according to the online participants, has destabilised. Third, in Example 4, the discussion participant criticises the positive treatment of the former sportsman who, according to the online participant, 'cannot be excused only because he is a world champion and winner of Olympics', while the participant in Example 5 wonders why neither the media nor gossip readers get fed up with the fights had by this celebrity couple. Within celebrity culture, criticism of media coverage serves as the basic ingredient of citizenship, although the bridge to broader policy issues would be missing (Ahva *et al*. 2013, p.10). Note that Examples 4 and 5, in addition to their interest in moral norms, also embody self-interestedness. In Example 4, people unable to do 'normal' work and be part of the active labour force of a society because of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are evaluated as prisoners, as people deserving moral disapproval. Moreover, in Example 5, these celebrities are called 'teletubbies', which gives the judgement a humorous and playful tone (note also the emoticons).

Value discourses of self-interest in comments on domestic violence involving celebrities

In both English-language and Finnish discussions about domestic violence involving celebrities, the most popular value discourses of self-interest were: 1) 7.2 individual power (in 168 English-language and 156 Finnish comments); 2) 8.5 voyeurism (in 85 English and 92 Finnish comments); and 3) 6.5 sexist power (in 85 English and 75 Finnish comments). Voyeurism occurred when online participants commented on the picture of a beaten celebrity as Examples 7–11 demonstrate.[3] Examples 7 and 11 also contributed to the discourse of individual power by positioning the self above the celebrity.

(7) omg so poor thing . . . (*Vanessa*, Just Jared) [individual power + voyeurism]

(8) My eyes watered when I saw that pic. She really does look like she has devil's horns. Chris Brown should be in jail. He will always be an abuser to me. (*Yar*, Just Jared) [voyeurism]

(9) OH-EM-GEE INDEED . . . (*miCHELLE B*, Just Jared) [voyeurism]

(10) HOLY SHIZNITS!! CHRIS BROWN IS SERIOUSLY EFFED UP! damn look at that face! (*Jo*, Just Jared) [voyeurism]

(11) could it be that this is just her without makeup? (*palvasha*, Just Jared) [individual power + voyeurism + sexist power]

Sometimes linguistic expressions invoke an emotional reaction without directly persuading the reader or hearer (see Martin and White 2005, p. 62). To put it more concretely, no one

says that seeing the picture of Rihanna's beaten face, albeit shocking, is interesting and entertaining. Nevertheless, we can draw the conclusion of voyeurism on the basis of participants' own reactions ('omg', 'My eyes watered when I saw that pic. She really does look like she has devil's horns', 'OH-EM-GEE', 'HOLY SHIZNITS!!', and 'could it be that this is just her without makeup?'), which provoke other online participants to see the picture of Rihanna's beaten face. Characteristic of voyeurism is that although often morally neutralised and 'normal' to online participation, such as blogging, it entails a way of seeing others as curiosities, rather than as moral equals (see Miller and Shepherd 2004). Moreover, sometimes voyeurism is clearly linked to the way of positioning oneself above the celebrity: the online participant in Example 7 shows pity towards Rihanna by evaluating her as a 'so poor thing', while the commenter in Example 11 mocks the celebrity by asking a rhetorical question 'could it be that this is just her without makeup?'. Example 11, in addition to provoking others to see the celebrity's beaten face, indicates a pleasure of making the celebrity an object of playful mockery in terms of appreciation. According to Martin and White (2005, pp. 56–58), appreciation contributes to the value of 'things', which, as utilised as a type of evaluation in Example 11, has a dehumanising function. Such misogynist dehumanising of the celebrity pathologically tries to deny her dignity, making sympathetic responses seem irrelevant.

Comments trying to diminish sympathy related to seeing a female celebrity's picture were more common to Finnish gossip sites compared with English-language ones. On Finnish gossip sites, the excitement of watching a celebrity's picture was linked to the eagerness of disdaining the celebrity for the way she looks, as Examples 12–16 demonstrate.[4]

(12) Even a scar would beautify that face. (*vieras*, Kaksplus.fi) [individual power + voyeurism + sexist power]

(13) Oh she's horribly swelled up! Oh Mervi Mervi, don't drink anymore . . . (*vieras*, Kaksplus.fi) [individual power + voyeurism + sexist power]

(14) Oh fuck! The cut is so near her eye . . . but doesn't this lady look like worn-out, that's what vodka does to you. (*Oddball*, Kaksplus.fi) [individual power + voyeurism + sexist power]

(15) This Mervi is very puffy! Looks like a drunkard:(A scar doesn't make that face look worse, even though this is a serious issue. (*vieras*, Kaksplus.fi) [individual power + voyeurism + sexist power]

(16) I guess Matti thought while being drunk that this is a living pig, so he could make a ham for Christmas . . . (*bee*, Kaksplus.fi) [individual power + voyeurism + sexist power]

As can be seen in Examples 12–16, in the Finnish discussion of domestic violence on gossip websites, voyeurism was expressed by commenting on the picture of the female celebrity's beaten face. Evaluative language targeting the celebrity's physical appearance indicates the intensity of emotional reactions and provokes others to see the picture of her face. In Examples 13–15, the picture of the celebrity's face also provoked disdain of alcohol use and of alcoholics. Such judgements claiming that the female celebrity's physical appearance is a consequence of her own habits of alcohol drinking can be seen as ways of diminishing the sympathy she could get if seen as a victim of domestic violence. Moreover, Example 16 can be seen as an extremely misogynist comment justifying the female celebrity's victimisation by making fun of her physical appearance.

Typical of domestic-violence discussions in both English and Finnish also was a discourse in which domestic violence against a female celebrity or women in general was

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justified by making men's actions seem normal. Examples below contribute to such highly misogynist value discourse.

> (17) rihanna is the aggressor, she provoked him to beat her up, PLUS she was the one who hit him first so its ok for her to put her hands on a man n its not ok for him to do so??. chris doesnt have any history of violence, why would he lash out on her all of a sudden for NO reason? use ur logic people. so she doesnt need to play a victim n ppl dont have to defend her, she sure knows how to stand up for herself. i hope poor chris doesnt turn gay after this. (*alia4eva*, YouTube) [sexist power + individual power]
>
> (18) WTF . . . EVERYONE NEEDS 2 GET OFF OUR MAN ****!!! SHE GAVE DUDE HERPES LOOK AT DAT BREAK OUT AROUND HER 'LIPS'!!!! I WOULD'VE FUCKED HER DA **** UP 2!!!!! HE SHOULD'VE 'KILLED' HER ASS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! WE DO FEEL SYMPATHY JUS A SMIDGET BIT BUT SHE SHOULD HAVE WRAPPED IT UP B4 CHRIS!!!!! WE ♥ YOU CHRIS 4EVER AND IT'S NEVER A RIGHT TIME 2 SAYGOODBYE . . . . SO **** ALL U HATAS HE AIINT GOIN 2 GET NO TIME '********'!!! (*CHS GET CRUNK CREW!!!!*, Just Jared) [sexist power + individual power]
>
> (19) MinisterToo, the FIRST time it happens it's his fault. The SECOND time it happens it's hers . . . (*Asa Guy*, USAToday.com) [sexist power + individual power]
>
> (20) Just wondering that some women don't ever learn their lesson! (*Gaviota*, HS.fi) [sexist power]
>
> (21) One thing I have been wondering about is that Matti isn't a big guy so is Mervi unable to defend herself or does she do it on purpose, provokes Matti and because Matti cannot fight he takes a knife while being drunk and Mervi can pretend being a victim again. (*vieras*, Kaksplus.fi) [sexist power + individual power]
>
> (22) Well, in this case Mervi is the drunkard, and what is worse than a drunk woman, even satan mentioned in the bible cannot be compared with a drunk woman running her mouth (*kk*, Suomi24) [sexist power + individual power]

The examples above are all explicit in justifying women's oppression (such as 'HE SHOULD'VE "KILLED" HER ASS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!' in Example 18). In addition to the explicitly judgemental tone, Examples 17–22 aim at naturalising the worldview in which victimisation of women is seen as a morally justified or rational way of treating them. The morally judgemental words, such as 'aggressor', 'provoke', 'fault', 'lesson' and 'drunkard', indicate institutionalised emotions of social sanction (see Martin and White 2005, p. 52), trying to convince others by referring to a conservative moral 'objectivity'. To put that in Lanham's (2006, pp. 166–176) terms, game comes into life under the guise of purpose. In other words, the apparent attempt to condemn domestic violence, or at least see it as serious enough to provoke discussion of social norms, does the opposite by contributing to misogynist ideologies that justify the victimisation of women who 'don't ever learn their lesson', as the discussion participant in Example 20 manifests. Moreover, Example 17 also disdains homosexuals – 'i hope poor chris doesnt turn gay after this' – which is another way of contributing to sexist domination.

Values in online discussions of fights involving female celebrities

Figure 3 shows the distribution of values in both English-language and Finnish online environments where fights involving female celebrities were discussed. Achievement and hedonism were the two most prevalent values: 57.1% of English-language and 75.3% of Finnish discussion comments contributed to achievement, while hedonism was involved
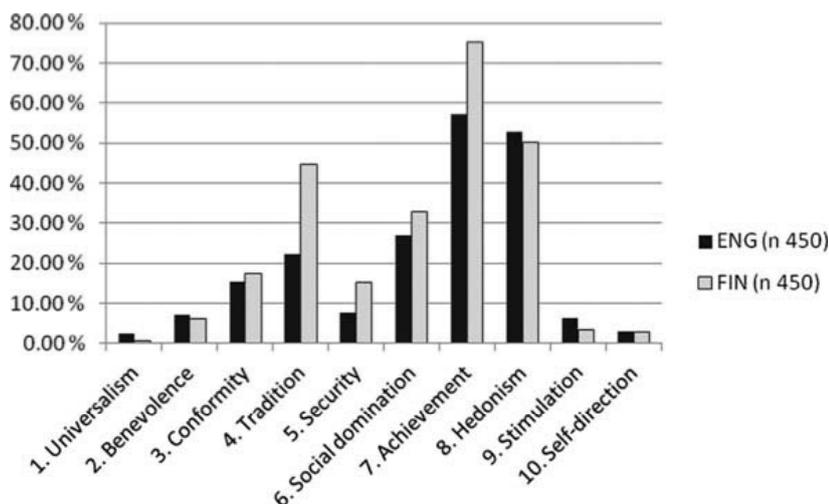
Figure 3. Values relating to violence involving female celebrities.

in 52.7% of English-language and 50.2% of Finnish comments. Social domination also occurred in 26.9% of comments in English and was prevalent in 32.7% of comments in Finnish on fights involving female celebrities. Tradition was the most typical moral value of both English-language (22.2%) and Finnish (44.7%) discussions.

Value discourses embodying the 10 main categories of values can be seen in Figure 4. In addition, the frequencies of comments involving each value discourse in both English-language and Finnish online discussions have been marked in the figure. For instance, 51 English-language comments on fighting female celebrities involved the value discourse of criticism of gossip media and audience (see the number code 4.1), while in Finnish discussions the number of such comments was 46. A detailed description of values and value discourses can be seen in the Appendix.

As can be seen in Figure 4, the values in online discussions of female celebrities' fights involved several value discourses. However, compared with online gossip discussions of domestic violence, value discourses were not so spread out. For instance, the value discourse of relationship harmony (numbered 5.4) is entirely missing in the online discussions of female celebrities' fights analysed in this study. On the other hand, particularly the value discourse of individual power (numbered 7.2) was more prevalent in comments on female celebrities' fights (in 238 English-language comments and 320 Finnish ones) compared with those concerning domestic violence involving celebrities (cf. Figure 2). In other words, celebrity gossip focusing on 'fighting' women involved a stronger homogeneity of value discourses than gossip based on a man-vs.-woman juxtaposition. In what follows, I will show examples of typical value discourses on both English-language and Finnish gossip sites dealing with fights involving female celebrities. As in the previous section of the article, I will concentrate on the three most typical moral and self-interested value discourses.

Moral value discourses in comments on violence involving female celebrities

In both English-language and Finnish discussions about violence involving female celebrities, the most popular moral value discourses were: 1) 3.3 obedience to laws and rules (in 61 of English-language and 73 of Finnish comments); 2) 4.1 criticism of gossip media
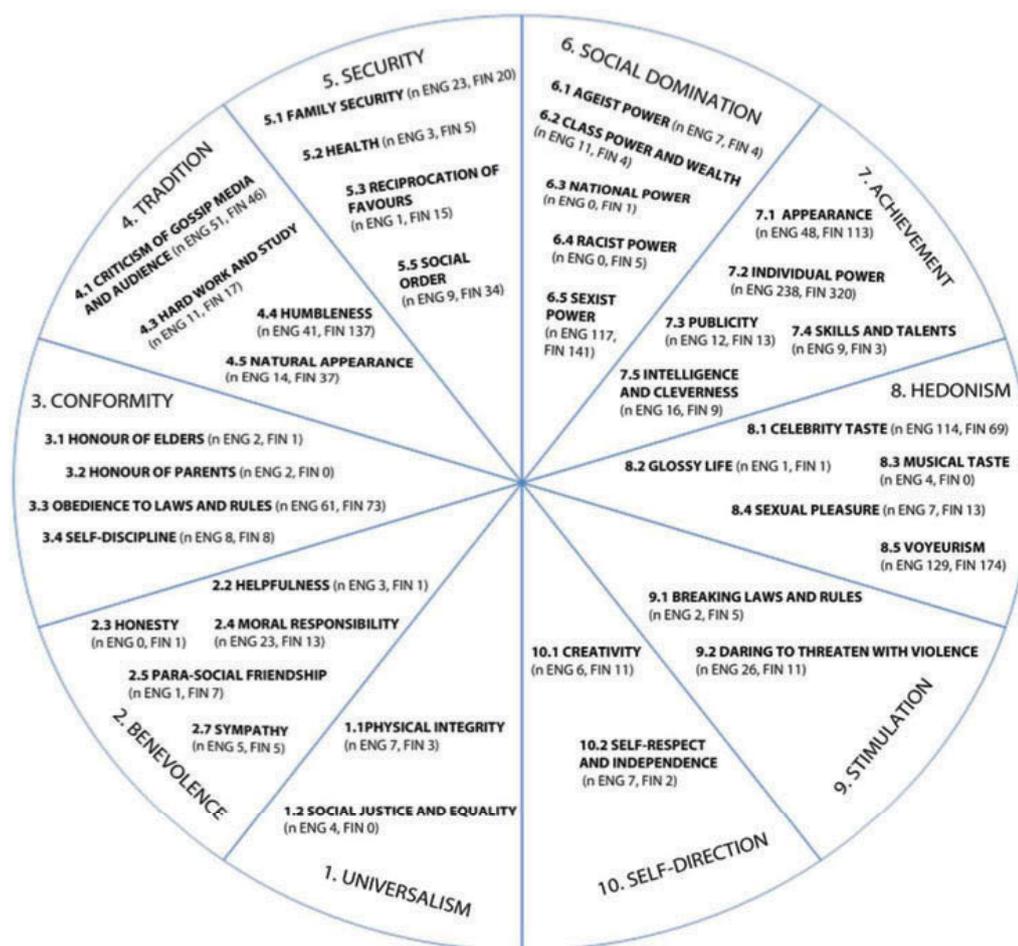
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Figure 4. Value discourses in online discussions about violence involving female celebrities.

and audience (in 51 of English and 46 of Finnish comments); and 3) 4.4 humbleness (in 41 of English and 137 of Finnish comments). Examples below demonstrate how these value discourses were constructed in celebrity-gossip discussions.

(23) There are any number of 'talk' shows that boost ratings by pitting women against each other, but this is beyond the pale. Shame on Sharon Osborne for participating in this drivel. It looks like the product of a mating between The Howard Stern show and Jerry Springer. She has a big enough vocabulary (including the expletives) to fight for her family without physical attack. I hope they have to go to court! (*KayDGee*, Huffington Post) [obedience + criticism + humbleness]

(24) You guys have to get things straight she managed Ozzy! And management isn't an easy job! Shes a hard working business woman while Megan is just aan easy girl thinking shes famous because she is naked half the time. Sharon makes money on her own through hard work. Thats something to be proud of! Good for you Sharon for standing up for your husband and opening a can of whoop ass on Megan. She needed one ˆ_ˆ (*celticspark*, YouTube) [obedience + humbleness]

(25) *WHEN under any circumstances has it been ACCEPTABLE behavior to attack someone? WHEN HAS IT BEEN? UM HELLO REALITY TV?* [the discussion participant is citing a previous comment]

It's been acceptable and ENCOURAGED to attack someone on reality shows (ESPECIALLY dating ones like fol, rol, shot at love, etc etc) since reality tv was shat upon society. [. . .] (___*closetome*, ONTD) [obedience + criticism]

(26) Ho-hum!

And this is what our tax money is used for! Why couldn't these 'she called me an asshole, no she started it' issues of teenage anger be handled privately, only between those involved. Surely, there were more important targets for the money, e.g. elderly care and health care . . . Martina, Esko and Anne-Mari, shame on you and grow up at last! (*Waste of money again*) (*Taas tuhlataan . . .*, Seiska.fi) [obedience + criticism + humbleness]

(27) Whining wannabes

See, it's nothing new. These wannabe c-class celebrities try to make headlines whatever it costs. These needless pieces of publicity trash just hoped someone contacted seiska or other shitty magazines. So they can mirror their personalities. (Suomi24) [obedience + criticism + humbleness]

(28) Oh gosh, what a childish fuss is this, oh gee (who is interested) (*ketä kiinnostaa*, Mtv3.fi) [obedience + criticism]

All examples above involve the value discourse of obedience: the online participants clearly express how the female celebrities have broken the expectations of 'women's' behaviour and therefore should be ashamed of themselves. The way that the gossip media and their audience treats celebrities was also a point of criticism in most of the examples above. The disapproval of the media industry around celebrity culture concerns both the reality-TV industry (Examples 23 and 25) and gossip magazines (Examples 26 and 27), while Example 28 implies disapproval of the gossip audience's interest in the 'childish fuss'. Moreover, comments calling for humbleness (see Examples 23, 24, 26 and 27) blame celebrities for their egoistic behaviour, especially for the way they seek fame and recognition. At the same time, however, the humbleness discourse itself contributes to self-interestedness in which defamatory evaluation of celebrities highlights the ego of a commenter who is seeking attention online. Such hypocrisy can be seen to indicate that the attention-seeking of the online self may also compete with fame-seeking of a media-made celebrity as a discourse of self-promotion (cf. Marshall 2010, p. 39).

Value discourses of self-interest in comments on violence involving female celebrities

In both English-language and Finnish discussions about violence involving female celebrities, the three most prominent value discourses of self-interest were: 1) 7.2 individual power (238 English-language, 320 Finnish); 2) 8.5 voyeurism (129 English, 174 Finnish); and 3) 6.5 sexist power (117 English, 141 Finnish). It was typical that these three value discourses occurred together, as Examples 29–31 from English-language sites and Examples 32–34 from Finnish comment sections show.

(29) Daaaayum

Gotta wonder how much of that is caused from shitty extensions, tho . . . Cause it doesn't look very red or irritated. There also isn't any blood or scabbing . . . Sharon, I expected you to leave scars! (*sillyjacki*, ONTD) [individual power + voyeurism + sexist power]

(30) Megan does not only have silicone in her chest, but in her head as well . . . Fake boobs and fake personality, so what can you expect . . . I'm glad Sharon beat that bitch up a little bit . . . (*FinalFanatic1984*, YouTube) [individual power + voyeurism + sexist power]

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(31) The funniest was when they walked the girl out after Sharon had had a go at her – drenched, with her hair flying about and crying. It's so wrong yet so funny. (*SabrinaFair*, Huffington Post) [individual power + voyeurism + sexist power]

(32) someone can make a painting of these fighting silicones like the one of the fighting capercaillies. (*joku*, Mtv3.fi) [individual power + voyeurism + sexist power]

(33) was someone able to film

DID SOMEONE GET THIS EPISODE FILMED,NOTHING'S SO INTERESTING THAN WATCHING WOMEN FIGHTING THAT IS COOL AWESOMELY COOL (*more MORE*) (*lisää LISÄÄ*, Suomi24) [individual power + voyeurism + sexist power]

(34) Serious thing

This hair extension incident started to make me laugh, I suppose there are even more detachable parts to be found:D (*Kele*, Seiska.fi) [individual power + voyeurism + sexist power]

The tone of discourse utilised in Examples 29–34 relates to Meyers' (2010, p. 317) notion that celebrity-gossip blogs may reinforce dominant ideologies under the guise of humour and pleasure. Although such discourses do not involve conservative moralising of women, aesthetic evaluation in Examples 29–34 can nevertheless be seen as indicating institutionalised emotions that aim at justifying the oppression of women by mocking them through the vocabulary of 'things' (see Martin and White 2005, pp. 45, 56–58). Moreover, such ironic mockery of female celebrities also indicates how online commenting on celebrity gossip involves attitudes of Schadenfreude (see Cross and Littler 2010): public humiliation of celebrities is a source of pleasure for participants on celebrity-gossip sites. In other words, the discourse of game comes with the tone of non-seriousness, mere play (see Lanham 2006, pp. 166–176). By evaluating female celebrities' fights as interesting, participants justify, albeit ironically, the pleasure of watching women attacking each other, such as in Example 32 in which the online participant invokes enjoyment when suggesting that the fight of the female celebrities is as much worth watching as a well-known work by a Finnish painter. Explicit evaluation involving an affective reaction (see Martin and White 2005, pp. 45–52) is realised in attitudinal expressions, such as 'Daaaayum', 'glad', 'funny', 'COOL', 'started to make me laugh', the trigger of which is the celebrity fight itself. Interestingly, sometimes online-gossip participants themselves brought out their awareness of the Janus-faced nature of celebrity culture: although victimisation of a celebrity is not seen as morally right, it is still a source of joy and pleasure for the participants, which is evident in Example 31 ('It's so wrong yet so funny').

Discussion: the cultural public sphere and its functions

This study focused on values and asked what kind of participation characterises the cultural public sphere of local (Finnish) and (potentially) more global or multinational (English-language) celebrity-gossip sites. By utilising the analysis of evaluative language as the method, comments from English-language and Finnish gossip sites were analysed. The results of the study support the view that celebrity culture, online, involves both moral and self-interested values: as Figure 5 shows, the whole motive/value spectrum involving purpose (universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, security), game (achievement, domination) and play (self-direction, stimulation, hedonism) was found in English-language and Finnish online comments on celebrity violence (for the classification of values, see Schwartz 1992, 2007; for the motive spectrum, see Lanham 2006, pp. 166–176).
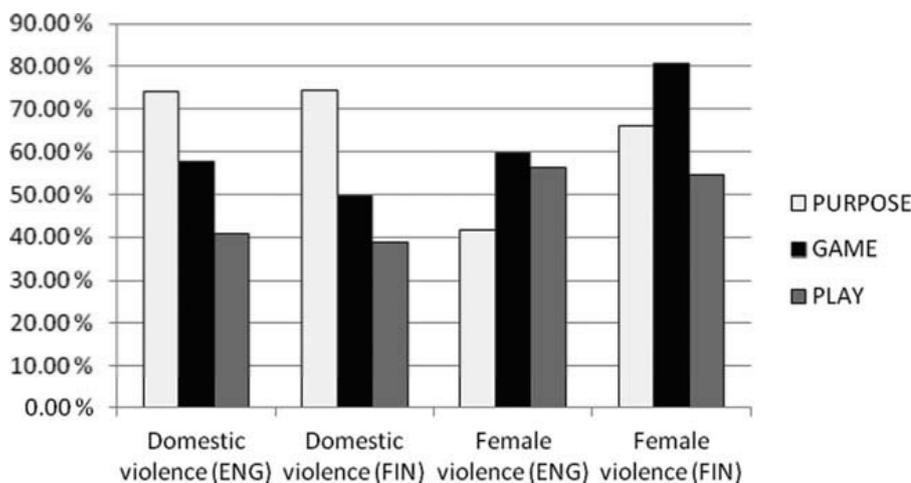
Figure 5. Purpose, game and play in celebrity discussions online.

On Finnish sites, the focus on moral purpose is higher (from 66.2% to 74.4% of comments) than on English-language sites (from 41.6% to 74.2% of comments). This indicates that compared with online participation of a more limited cultural and national group, potentially more multicultural and global participation seems to decrease rather than increase the public concern for being a morally good citizen. On the other hand, moral values tended to overlap with those of power. Being a celebrity and seeking public recognition is something that clashes with the general morality of Finnish culture, especially humbleness, which may partly explain why participants on Finnish gossip sites saw the moralising of celebrities as important.

In addition, as can be seen in Figure 5, the percentage of comments involving moral purpose was higher when discussions dealt with domestic violence (from 74.2% to 74.4% of comments) than when commenting on fights between female celebrities (from 41.6% to 66.2% of comments). These results support the notion that domestic violence is a theme of popular culture that is taken relatively seriously and considered a real-life problem (see Ahva *et al*. 2013, pp. 10–11). However, as Examples 17–22 demonstrated, sometimes morality in domestic violence discussions is only a rhetorical way of reinforcing sexist domination in which men's violent behaviour is seen as justified.

While domestic violence was, in general, seen as a serious topic in celebrity culture, fights involving female celebrities were understood as staged events meant for public scorn and humiliation. The percentage of comments involving play or game was higher in online discussions of female celebrities fights compared with those focusing on domestic violence. This indicates that gossip readers are well aware of the nature of the gossip industry in making headlines and delivering videos of celebrities. Although such a logic may help audience members of celebrity gossip to see themselves as media-savvy and critical consumers (Ahva *et al*. 2013, p. 10), playfulness around female celebrities' fights only reinforces stereotypes of women as objects of gaze and scorn, which supports the notion that celebrity-gossip sites are, at least partly, mediated environments where women are oppressed through a humorous style (see Fairclough 2008, pp. 10–12, 17–19, Meyers 2010, p. 317).

Conclusion

This holistic analysis of values suggests that although participation on celebrity-gossip sites occasionally seems to provoke discussion about good citizenship (see also Graham

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and Harju 2011), the online participants of celebrity gossip are unable, unwilling or unmotivated to find a way out of the power structures of sexism and self-interested individualism that are deeply rooted in celebrity culture (see also Fairclough 2008, pp. 10–12, 17–19, Meyers 2010, p. 317).

As a contribution of the analysis presented in this article, some relevant suggestions for future studies can be made. First, it is noteworthy who the online participants of celebrity gossip are: as Turner (2010b, p. 14) stresses, celebrity culture is linked to the everyday life of young people in particular. These people are not necessarily interested in public participation in the traditional sense of 'deliberating' the issues that are given their societal significance by governmental politics and the mainstream media. As online participants in celebrity gossip, young people create public discourses by themselves on the basis of their own experiences and identities in which moral values may serve as links to a potential interest in other people's well-being. However, as pointed out throughout this study, moral value discourses, although public-spirited, may also be utilised anti-democratically by oppressing groups of people, particularly women.

It is also noteworthy that the oppression of women on celebrity-gossip sites is not exclusively a sign of misogyny. As Fairclough (2008, pp. 10–12, 17–19) argues, many online gossip participants of a post-feminist criticism targeting the female body are young women, which is to be taken into account when interpreting results of online participation in celebrity culture. If the group that participates in playful and seemingly innocent celebrity mockery consists of young women, the cultural public sphere around celebrity online can be seen as a site in which a dominated group actively justifies its own position as the object of social exploitation.

To conclude, the results of this study not only indicate that comments sent by individual participants are Janus-faced, but also suggest a Janus-like nature of the cultural public sphere around celebrity gossip online. In online environments focusing on celebrity violence, moral seriousness stressing obedience to rules and playful mockery as a humorous self-expression have a common goal in contributing to self-interested, and often sexist, discourses of power. Just looking at one side – either the morally serious or the playful one – of such a Janus-like cultural public sphere is not enough when trying to understand its complex nature.

Notes

1. In asynchronous discussions, interaction is structured into turns but a reply may be posted months or even years after the prior turn (see Kollock and Smith 1999, p. 5).
2. In the publication of Graham and Harju (2011), Harju's surname was written incorrectly as 'Hajru'.
3. A link to the Just Jared website can be found here: http://www.justjared.com/2009/02/19/rihannas-bruised-face-revealed/.
4. The comment section of Kaksplus can be found behind this link: http://kaksplus.fi/keskustelu/plussalaiset/mitas-nyt/1610386-mervi-tapola-ruhjottuna-oikeudessa-katso-kuva/.

Notes on contributor

Maria Eronen is a PhD student from the University of Vaasa, Finland. She is currently working on her dissertation concerning morality and rhetoric on celebrity-gossip sites. This article is a part of her larger work.

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Appendix: detailed description of values and value discourses

1 Universalism: concern for general human welfare, not only for one's own primary group (see Schwartz 1992, pp. 11–13).

1.1 **Physical integrity** (highlighting non-violence as a general human value).

1.2 **Social justice and equality** (arguing for justice based on equality of groups of people).

2 Benevolence: concern for the welfare of those who are close and with whom one interacts in everyday life (see Schwartz 1992, p. 11).

2.1 **Forgiveness** (forgiving the behaviour of celebrities, highlighting forgiveness as a general value).

2.2 **Helpfulness** (helping other discussion participants by giving them information when asked or highlighting helpfulness as a general value).

2.3 **Honesty** (highlighting honesty as a value or condemning lying as an act).

2.4 **Moral responsibility** (stressing that people should know that their acts have consequences).

2.5 **Para-social friendship** (cheering up celebrities and talking to them by using the second person singular, 'you').

2.6 **Spiritual life** (talking about praying for someone, particularly for celebrities).

2.7 **Sympathy** (showing positivity towards celebrities or discussion participants who are, or have been, in a troublesome situation).

3 Conformity: restraint of behaviour likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms (see Schwartz 1992, p. 9).

3.1 **Honour of elders** (looking up to older people for moral advice or arguing for their well-being).

3.2 H**onour of parents** (looking up to parents for moral advice).

3.3 **Obedience to laws and rules** (referring to communal norms as undisputable premises).

3.4 **Self-discipline** (valuing self-control and calmness, refraining from alcohol and drugs).

4 Tradition: leaning on the customs and ideas of one's own culture or religion (see Schwartz 1992, p. 7).

4.1 **Criticism of gossip media and audience** (criticising the media or the audience for their treatment of and strong interest in celebrities).

4.2 **Devoutness** (talking about God, talking positively about faith and religion).

4.3 **Hard work and study** (valuing work and education for a community).

4.4 **Humbleness** (criticising celebrities for fame-seeking and their egoistic and easy-going life style or praising them for the opposite).

4.5 **Natural appearance** (arguing for natural appearance and being against making-up, piercing, plastic surgery or hair extensions).

5 Security: 'safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self' (see Schwartz 1992, p. 9).

5.1 **Family security** (arguing for the well-being of family members, defending family).

5.2 **Health** (talking positively about health or criticising unhealthy lifestyles, arguing for rehabilitation of 'fallen' celebrities).

5.3 **Reciprocation of favours** (criticising the use of society's money or services for egoistic purposes).

5.4 **Relationship harmony** (arguing for non-violence and social balance in relationship).

5.5 **Social order** (trust in sentences or other actions by an authority as a means of guaranteeing social security).

6 Social domination: attainment or preservation of dominance (power) within a social system (see Schwartz 1992, pp. 8–9).

6.1 **Ageist power** (evaluating other people negatively or positively because of their age).

6.2 **Class power and wealth** (evaluating poor and marginalised groups negatively, evaluating wealthy groups positively).

6.3 **National power** (blaming foreign nations for immorality).

6.4 **Racist powe**r (evaluating racial groups negatively).

6.5 **Sexist power** (stereotyping gender, calling women 'whores', 'bitches', 'skanks' etc., justifying domestic violence by men, disdaining sexual minorities).

7 Achievement: personal success by obtaining social approval (see Schwartz 1992, p. 8).

7.1 **Appearance** (evaluating people positively or negatively because of their appearance).

7.2 **Individual power** (positioning oneself above celebrities or discussion participants by name-calling, irony or trolling, or by using defamatory adjectives or verbs).

7.3 **Publicity** (valuing celebrity as a career).

7.4 **Skills and talents** (valuing skills and talents in general or in art, music and sport in particular).

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7.5 **Intelligence and cleverness** (valuing intelligence or mocking someone for the lack of it, using clever wordplays when mocking celebrities).

8 Hedonism: pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself (see Schwartz 1992, p. 8).

8.1 **Celebrity taste** (preferring one celebrity to another for the sake of mere liking and fandom).

8.2 **Glossy life** (praising celebrities because of their popularity, clothes and parties).

8.3 **Musical taste** (liking or disliking the music a celebrity makes).

8.4 **Sexual pleasure** (talking about celebrities as sexual objects by evaluating their sexiness or imagining having sex with them).

8.5 **Voyeurism** (commenting on celebrities' pictures, evaluating the act of watching celebrities in their miseries positively, especially by utilising expressions of amusement and surprise, such as 'LOL', 'OMG', 'dayuum').

9 Stimulation: valuing a varied and exciting life in which the optimal level of activation matters (see Schwarz 1992, pp. 7–8).

9.1 **Breaking laws and rules** (talking positively about breaking general moral norms or laws).

9.2 **Daring to threaten with violence** (strong individual use of power by encouraging violence, even the killing of a celebrity or a discussion participant).

10 Self-direction: independence in thought and action by choosing, creating, exploring (see Schwartz 1992, pp. 5–6).

10.1 **Creativity** (expressing affect creatively by rhyming or utilising ambiguous metaphorical expressions, writing a poem or a fictional narrative).

10.2 **Self-respect and independence** (highlighting independent goals and freedom from other people, such as escaping one's own home country for freedom).

Article

Moral argumentation as a rhetorical practice in popular online discourse: Examples from online comment sections of celebrity gossip

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Abstract

This study analyses how online participants of celebrity gossip position themselves in relation to their audience through forms of moral argumentation and thereby contribute to social hierarchies. In this study, forms of moral argumentation are seen as enthymemes, that is, claim-reason units based on moral norms as premises. The material consists of a total of 900 asynchronous online comments in English and 900 in Finnish. In addition to rhetorical argumentation analysis, the study investigates the dependency of moral argumentation on three contextual variables: gendered violence as the topic of discussion (domestic violence/female celebrities' fights), as the shared culture of participants (Finnish-speaking, 'national'/English-speaking, 'multicultural' participants) and a media institution as the moderator of online discourse (media-generated/user-generated websites). Four forms of moral argumentation were found in the material: 1) theoretical (deductive), 2) practical (contextual), 3) categorical (stereotype-based) and 4) digital ('crowding') enthymeme. Theoretical, practical and categorical enthymemes are rhetorical in a traditional sense because they include the hierarchical idea of moral norms as the shared, more or less authoritarian, basis of a community. Digital enthymemes, conversely, are texts without clear borders or any notion of moral norms. Such arguments characterized especially user-generated, English-language discussions concerning female celebrities' fights. This indicates that the digital enthymeme is particularly prevalent where there is a lack of obvious hierarchies in the context of argumentation. As this study argues, however, the seemingly non-hierarchical and individualistic participation through digital enthymemes is a mere illusion, for these enthymemes are based on crowd behaviour supportive of sexist and class-bound domination.

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Introduction

There is growing academic interest in analysing the role of discourse in morality (see e.g. Bergmann, 1998; Bergmann and Luckmann, 1999; Sayer, 2011; Tileagă, 2012). The discourse-based – or empirical – approach to morality highlights the role of moral argumentation as a way of reasoning when judging human beings (persons) in relation to their behaviour (acts). These conceptual topics (i.e. *topoi*), associated with the concepts of act and person, play a central role in the rhetorical theory of argumentation (Jonsen and Toulmin, 1988; Leff, 1983: 24–25; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1951, 2000/ 1969: 293–321). The evaluation of acts and the person doing these acts can be seen as a pair of claim and reason forming an enthymeme, that is, a rhetorical figure in which any idea is connected with reasons for believing it through the rhetorical practices of a community (see Walker, 1994). The synthesis of these otherwise polarized concepts, such as act and person, makes rhetoric dialectical (Burke, 1969: 183–189). For instance, the enthymeme 'Ken is evil because he hit Barbie' is the synthesis of the evaluation of person (Ken) and the evaluation of acts (violence), implying the moral norm 'those who behave violently are bad people'. In rhetorical terms, moral norms are the warrants or premises of behavioural expectations as the usually non-articulated part of the enthymeme (see Jonsen and Toulmin, 1988).

While traditional rhetorical texts (such as courtroom argumentation or political speeches) rely on moral institutions (particularly the state or a national community), texts in popular culture follow a logic that is non-verbal, aesthetic, diffuse and less explicitly hierarchical (Brummett, 1994: 33–67). Such anarchistic texts can be found, for instance, in the new media characterized by emotional performances that are rebellious towards old rules of writing and reasoning (see Soffer, 2012). However, hierarchy, and thereby also morality, is involved in the very nature of human language, including non-reasoned and seemingly individualistic texts (Burke, 1969: 279–280, 325). This means that also the seemingly non-hierarchical or amoral enthymemes dealing with the *topoi* of person (such as body, status, clothes or lifestyle) without any concern for people's acts are to be seen as morally noteworthy. For instance, in celebrity culture, enjoyment of the miseries of the rich and famous is a way of imagining the presence of cosmic (rather than political) justice (Hermes, 1995: 128).

In this article, enthymemes combining (or separating) the evaluation of acts and the evaluation of people are seen as *forms of moral argumentation*. Forms of moral argumentation can also be understood as techniques of persuasion, and their function lies in the ways of positioning the 'self' in relation to the 'other' in discourse (see Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 2000/1969: 189). From the viewpoint of rhetoric, the self means the rhetor, the speaker or writer who addresses the audience, that is, the particular ensemble of people whom the rhetor wants to influence by using argumentation (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 2000/1969). This relation between the rhetor and the addressed audience can be seen as *community* (Miller, 1993: 212). Moreover,

communities are moral because they establish a relation to moral norms as social commitments that guide behaviour (see e.g. Etzioni, 1993). In addition to the minimalist and widely accepted abstract moral norms (such as 'one should treat others as one would like others to treat oneself'), communities are morally maximalist (particularistic) when establishing rules separating 'us' from 'them' (Walzer, 1994). Because of moral maximalism, 'moral ideas themselves tend to be influenced by power relations' (Sayer, 2011: 179). These power relations – that is, hierarchies – explicitly characterize rule-based, bureaucratic discourses, such as the rhetoric of racism and antisemitism (e.g. Reisigl and Wodak, 2001: 205–262).

Online discourse on celebrities can be seen as an interesting topic for the analysis of moral argumentation, since as a form of popular culture, online gossip, unlike politics, seems to be free from strict or explicit rules of bureaucratic forces (see e.g. Jenkins, 2006: 83–84). However, online gossip may still reinforce social hierarchies in the guise of freedom since the freedom of speech provides online gossipers the right to promote oppressive goals (see e.g. Fairclough, 2008; Meyers, 2010). The purpose of this study is to explore *how online participants of celebrity gossip position themselves in relation to their audience through forms of moral argumentation and thereby contribute to social hierarchies*. This study is particularly interested in those forms of moral argumentation that are seemingly non-hierarchical or even amoral, but still contribute to social domination by calling for norms related to gender and class. Specifically, the courtship of gender and that of class form the basic hierarchies often intertwined with each other in rhetorical practices (Burke, 1969: 217).

Moreover, since argumentation is affected by context (see Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 2000/1969: 187–192), this article examines whether forms of moral argumentation on celebrity gossip sites are dependent on contextual variables indicating or lacking explicit moral hierarchies: gendered violence as the topic of discussion (discussions about domestic violence/female celebrities' fights), the shared culture of participants (Finnish-speaking, 'national'/English-speaking, 'multicultural' participants) and a media institution as the moderator of online discourse (media-generated/user-generated websites). These contextual variables are naturally hierarchical (a national culture or media institutions) or they bring power hierarchies to the surface through the topic of gendered violence (especially in the case of domestic violence).

Moral argumentation in online discourse and popular culture

Gossip that used to be regarded as the genre of women in the private sphere (see Bergmann, 1993: 59–67) has become an important mediated discourse in which people evaluate the character and behaviour of celebrities (e.g. Hermes, 1995). On the one hand, celebrity gossip can be seen as the moral genre of the 'masses', which is why it is also one of the central products of contemporary media consumption. On the other hand, however, particularly the internet sites or blogs of celebrity media provide active public forums in which discussions of celebrity gossip take place, highlighting the role of gossip as the reception form of readers who produce moral meanings *by themselves* (see Jerslev, 2010; Meyers, 2012).

On the one hand, popular culture and online participation seem supportive of a demo-cratic and egalitarian construction of communities. According to Jenkins (2006: 83–84), there is real value in gossip discussed on the internet, where people from different social and cultural groups can gather together and freely share their world views. On the other hand, however, previous research also indicates that online discourse, understood here as text and talk in digital networks, is rhetorically and morally challenging. Specifically, such a discourse is characterized by short and quick commenting, at least spatial, but sometimes also temporal, separation of the rhetor and the audience, contextual ambiguity (Jones, 2004), and construction and interpretation of the ethos of the rhetor 'here and now', often through minimal textual cues on the screen (Miller, 2001: 272–273; Warnick, 2007: 47–48; see also Miller, 2004: 205–212).

Accordingly, communities built online tend to be sites of easy and entertaining togeth-erness based on a shared interest without real responsibilities or moral commitments (Fernback, 2007; Silverstone, 2003: 483, 2007: 173). According to Barney (2004), the lack of moral responsibilities in online (or virtual) communities relates to the freedom of liberal market societies from moral commitments to the community. In line with Barney, Chouliaraki (2010) argues that effortless intimacy with technology in new media affects moral imagination, highlighting a personal and particularized judgement instead of the negotiation of communal moral norms (Chouliaraki, 2010: 119–121). The moral sim-plicity involved in online settings may be a sign of the illusion of online participants who think they are communicating with the other, when in fact they are only persuading themselves through their own emotional involvement (Miller, 2001, 2004: 205–212).

Interestingly, similar remarks concern communication within contemporary popular culture, such as celebrity culture, in which personal preferences – instead of the negotia-tion of civic or religious moral norms – guide participation (see Brummett, 2008: 102–104; Hariman, 1995: 79–87). Although the freedom from strict moral rules and responsibilities in online discourse and popular culture may seem empowering, it is note-worthy that the overemphasis of the evaluation of person instead of any considerations of acts may contribute to values in which people are seen as mere 'things', intrinsically inferior or superior to others (see Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 2000/1969: 293). For instance, on blogs and in comment sections of celebrity gossip, women, especially, are judged through their bodily appearance (e.g. Fairclough, 2008; Meyers, 2010). These 'thing-like' conceptions of human beings are at the heart of traditional, non-democratic societies, in which social inequalities are reinforced in body-centric and aesthetic public practices (see Hariman, 1992, also 1995: 51–94).

According to Hariman (1992), Western popular culture involves rhetoric similar to the courtly style. In line with Hariman's definition, the courtly style is defined here as a body-centric performance of societal authorities who reinforce their power through pub-lic ceremonies. An essential characteristic of the courtly style is a general silence or immobility concerning social inequalities. The only thing that the emperor did when the court was coming near to its end was the staging of public ceremonies; otherwise, he was silent and passive (Hariman, 1992: 162). As Hariman (1992) argues, the courtly style is by no means a non-Western phenomenon, but a rhetorical practice playing an essential role in Western mass-mediated culture in which the dominating class acts as the author-ity, such as in the case of sexist domination. Interestingly, body-centric performances are

not only typical of popular culture, but also characterize the seemingly anarchistic new media language in general (e.g. Soffer, 2012), which makes it relevant to discuss how online discourse within popular culture may contribute to power hierarchies.

Material and methods

The research material consists of 1800 asynchronous online comments dealing with either gossip on domestic violence or female celebrities' fights discussed in English-language and Finnish comment sections. In general, violence as a theme of popular culture tends to bring to the surface issues of power and domination occurring on a societal and cultural level (see Fiske, 1989: 127–130). Since violence is a physical manifestation of hierarchies, the study focuses on gossip comments on violence involving celebrities.

Most of the comments sent to gossip sites were relatively short posts (consisting of just a few words), which made it possible to go through a great number of comments. Nine hundred English-language comments concern two cases of American or global celebrities, and 900 Finnish-language comments relate to two cases of Finnish celebrities. The comments were collected between January and October 2010. In general, if the discussion thread most commented on included 150 comments or more, only one thread was chosen for the study. Moreover, in order to explore a wide spectrum of forms of moral argumentation, I collected 75 comments at the beginning and 75 in the middle or at the end of each thread. As Meyers (2010: 266) points out, sometimes later comments on celebrity gossip sites are different from earlier ones because participants who cannot be the first ones may try to attract attention by commenting on celebrities in more aggressive ways. A more elaborate description of the research material can be seen in Table 1.

This study utilizes both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitatively, the study is based on rhetorical argumentation analysis of act and person in enthymematic logic. For Aristotle (see 1994–2009/350 BCE: Book I, Parts 2–3, 9), enthymematic logic meant especially rational and deductive argumentation involving claim and reason, whereas Walker (1994), for example, in his revision of the classical definition, argues that in addition to foregrounding stance and motivating identification with that stance (p. 55), the enthymeme 'constructs or shapes its audience's perception of just what "the argument" is' (p. 63). Because the enthymeme can be seen as the form of discourse constructing and shaping the community's idea of what an argument means, it has a meta-discursive role in guiding community members' perceptions of *how* premises, such as moral norms, should be dealt with in the community.

As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1951) argue, we can distinguish three different techniques of act and person in argument, namely, separation technique, curbing technique and act–person interaction. *Separation technique* concerns two types of act–person separation: 1) either acts are evaluated deductively only in relation to abstract moral norms (e.g. 'eye for an eye') (see Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1951: 264) or 2) people are evaluated independently of their acts and moral norms (see p. 256) ('s/he is evil', 's/he is ugly'). In the *curbing technique*, a favourable or unfavourable prejudice maintains both a person's image and strict moral norms. This form of reasoning relates to people's manners (e.g. 's/he is a liar', 'women provoke men') and links the evaluation of acts and that of person together in a mechanical and unchangeable fashion 'as if our

Table 1. Research material.

The cases of celebrity gossip	Asynchronous discussion comments (total 1800)
Pop singers Rihanna and Chris Brown (domestic violence)	*Just Jared*, an English-language website dedicated to celebrity gossip (150) *USATODAY.com*, a US online newspaper (150) *YouTube*, a global, user-generated website for video sharing and commenting (150)
Finnish ex-ski jumper Matti Nykänen and his (ex-)wife Mervi Tapola (domestic violence)	*HS.fi*, a Finnish online newspaper (150) *Kaksplus.fi*, a website of a Finnish 'baby magazine' including a lot of gossip (150) *Suomi24*, a general Finnish discussion forum with a heavy interest in celebrity and gossip (150)
Entertainment celebrities Sharon Osbourne and Megan Hauserman (fight on a TV show)	*The Huffington Post*, a US online newspaper (150) *LiveJournal* (*Oh No They Didn't*), an English-language online community dedicated to celebrity gossip (150) *YouTube* (150)
Finnish entertainment celebrities Martina Aitolehti and Anne-Mari Berg (fight in a bar)	*Mtv3.fi*, a website of a Finnish television channel (150) *Seiska.fi*, a website of a Finnish gossip magazine (150) *Suomi24* (150)

person had been arrested at a certain stage of its development' (p. 266). According to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (p. 253), *act–person interaction*, conversely, is one of the connections of coexistence belonging to the structures of reality or 'commonplaces'. In the act–person interaction, both people and their acts are evaluated in the enthymeme (e.g. 's/he was mean because s/he yelled at me'). The act–person interaction has the potential to balance hierarchies through the negotiation of moral questions in which '[s]uccessive evocation of the act and the person, then of the person and the act, does not leave the mind at the point at which it started' (p. 261). As a response to the example above, one could argue that 's/he is not mean, just quick-tempered when s/he is busy'.

The research material of the study was analysed in accordance with the ways in which act and person are combined or separated in enthymemes. Since online comments are individual texts 'signed' with personal pseudonyms or usernames, one comment was treated as one individual unit of analysis involving the rhetor's choice of act–person relation. All comments were assumed to represent enthymemes as forms of moral argumentation; thus, 1800 enthymemes were coded in distinct categories in accordance with their act–person relation. Mere spams (such as McDonald's advertisements posted to comment sections) were not included in the material.

Moreover, this study analyses the contextual role of forms of moral argumentation. In rhetorical studies of language, context is typically seen as kairos, that is, the socially perceived space-time (e.g. Miller, 2002), 'right timing' and 'right placing' (Stephenson, 2009) in which the rhetor's (the speaker's or writer's) speech is persuasive to the audience. In addition to the rhetorical understanding of context, this study utilizes a concept of context as understood in systemic-functional linguistics (SFL) because it involves a more detailed classification of sub-contexts. In SFL, the concept of context consists of
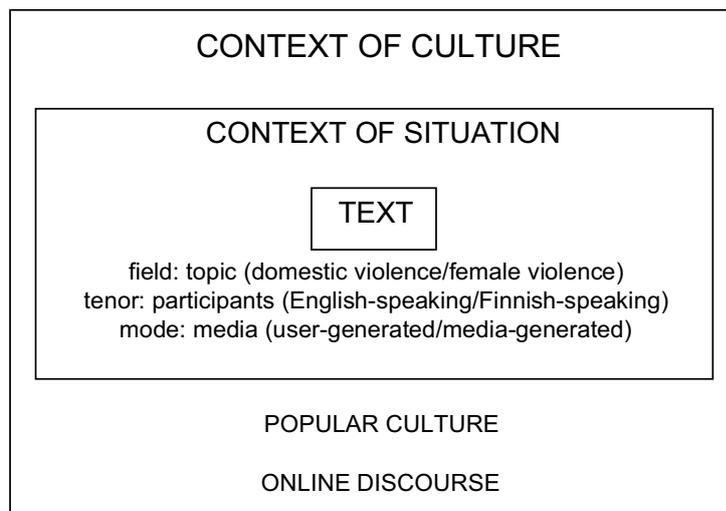
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                   CONTEXT OF CULTURE                      │
│   ┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────┐    │
│   │              CONTEXT OF SITUATION                 │    │
│   │                                                   │    │
│   │              ┌──────────────┐                     │    │
│   │              │     TEXT     │                     │    │
│   │              └──────────────┘                     │    │
│   │                                                   │    │
│   │   field: topic (domestic violence/female violence)│    │
│   │   tenor: participants (English-speaking/Finnish-   │    │
│   │          speaking)                                 │    │
│   │   mode: media (user-generated/media-generated)     │    │
│   └─────────────────────────────────────────────────┘    │
│                                                           │
│                    POPULAR CULTURE                        │
│                                                           │
│                    ONLINE DISCOURSE                       │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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Figure 1. Text in context (see Halliday and Hasan, 1989).

two different layers; namely, context of culture and context of situation (see Halliday and Hasan, 1989). *Context of culture* can be seen as the systemic-functional term for kairos, the specific culture and historical situation in which communication takes place. *Context of situation*, on the other hand, exists within the context of culture, as the immediate physical and social environment in which communication takes place (Halliday and Hasan, 1989: 6). Moreover, context of situation consists of three parts: *field* (the topic and nature of communication), *tenor* (the roles, relationships and social backgrounds of communication participants) and *mode* (the media or channel of communication) (see Halliday and Hasan, 1989). Figure 1 illustrates how the context of situation is understood in this article: field refers to the topic of gossip, tenor means the national background of the online participants and mode stands for the role and nature of the media in online discourse. Moreover, 'text' is seen as an online comment as the unit of analysis. Finally, text and contexts of situations are seen to be surrounded by popular culture and the culture of online discourse.

From the perspective of *field*, this study investigates whether forms of moral argumentation are different in discussions dealing with men's domestic violence against women compared with those focusing on fighting female celebrities. It is interesting to see whether and how forms of moral argumentation may contribute to social hierarchies, although the topic of gossip does not involve an obvious power relation between men and women. From the perspective of *tenor*, it is noteworthy that English-language forums enable the participation of different cultural and national groups, whereas in Finnish online environments, the language limits participation to only one national (and cultural) group. It is interesting to see, therefore, whether English-language participants rely less on moral hierarchies of nationally specific norms and address a culturally wider audience than Finnish-language participants do. As for *mode*, the research material of the study involves comments from both user-generated and media-generated comment sections. In this study, user-generated websites mean online environments in which the participants

play a central role in choosing a discussion topic and posting creative content. On websites categorized as user-generated, a thread begins with a post sent by gossip readers, who often have the possibility to send videos and pictures as part of their comments. On websites that are seen as media-generated, a discussion thread is led by a gossip news story written by a media institution and readers' participation is limited to relatively short postings of text. It is also typical that comment sections of media-generated websites are either pre- or post-moderated by media institutions, holding the power to control content on their sites. According to previous research, active engagement in user-generated content online may challenge old norms and ways of public participation (see e.g. Sheridan et al., 2009). It is therefore interesting to explore whether user-generated and media-generated websites differ from each other in the ways of contributing to social hierarchies.

Quantitatively, this study utilizes chi-square distribution to measure the dependency of forms of moral argumentation on each contextual variable (field, tenor and mode). Basically, the chi-square reveals whether moral argumentation varies in accordance with 1) the more or less explicit moral hierarchy involved in the topic of discussion (domestic violence/violence involving female celebrities); 2) the bigger or smaller role of a national culture as the moral authority supported by online participants (Finnish-language/English-language participants); and 3) the stronger or weaker moral control of a media institution over content on celebrity gossip sites (media-generated/user-generated websites).

Forms of moral argumentation on celebrity gossip sites

Four forms of moral argumentation, as exemplified in four distinct types of enthymematic act–person relation, were found in this study: *theoretical*, *practical*, *categorical* and *digital enthymeme*. In what follows, these forms of moral argumentation are discussed in detail and examples of each form are given. The Finnish examples have been translated into English. Note that digital enthymemes formed groups of consecutive comments, while the other three types of enthymemes were mainly separate texts without such crowd behaviour in the flow of online discourse.

Theoretical enthymeme

Theoretical enthymeme represents deductive moral argumentation based on a moral norm as a rule that is regarded as valid despite the context or circumstances of action (see Jonsen and Toulmin, 1988: 34). Interestingly, just because the theoretical enthymeme does not leave room for the negotiation of the relevance of moral norms in context, rhetors utilize emotional force in the form of coarse language, extensive use of exclamation marks and capital letters in order to highlight their opinion. Such an enthymeme, therefore, is close to the separation technique as deductive reasoning, but differs from the 'neutrality' of the separation technique as understood by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1951: 264–265). Consider the following examples:

> (1) I agree that this LOSER needs to go to jail,, but first,,, I say 'An eye for an eye!!!' .. Someone should kick the Ever Lovin **** out this Puss and THEN put him away!!!! Get better Rihanna! F*** You Brown you LOSER!!!!! (*Ant, Just Jared*)

(2) There are so many crimes done by excusing them because of alcohol use that it is easier to treat alcoholism as a disease than deal with it. ALCOHOLISM IS YOUR OWN CHOICE! (*Gaviota, HS.fi*)

(3) As was her right!! You defend what's yours, that includes your spouse! Megan pushed things too far and got what she deserved. Personally, I would've loved to see her bleed, if I wasn't worried about Sharon getting a contact disease XD (*FunnyFishy22, YouTube*)

(4) Violence stops bitching What might Berg have said to Martina? I don't think that it began without a reason… (*kopo, Suomi24*)

Common to Examples 1–4 is that they all call for unquestioned moral norms through premises expressed as sayings: 'An eye for an eye!!!' (Example 1), 'ALCOHOLISM IS YOUR OWN CHOICE!' (Example 2), 'You defend what's yours, that includes your spouse!' (Example 3) and 'Violence stops bitching' (Example 4). In Example 1, a discussion participant stresses that Chris Brown should go through what he did to Rihanna. The rule is highlighted in the use of coarse language and the judging of Chris Brown as a 'loser'. Example 2, on the other hand, is from a Finnish discussion of domestic violence that involved a lot of comments on alcohol use. In that example, the discussion participant uses capital letters to stress the opinion that alcoholics do not deserve sympathy because they are responsible for their own alcoholism. In Example 3, the discussion participant defends Sharon Osbourne's attack on the playboy model Megan Hauserman, who is mocked through defamatory language justifying her victimization and claiming that she has a contact disease. Example 4 calls for a mechanical reciprocity in social relations according to which it is justified to stop verbal provocation by using violence. Such deductive reasoning may have a function in naturalizing power structures in argumentation, making a specific hierarchical structure part of community's unquestioned reality (Hariman, 1995: 4, 13–49).

Practical enthymeme

Some of the participants in the comment sections of celebrity gossip evaluated acts by taking into consideration the role of people (their intentions, etc.) involved in the case. According to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1951: 261), such interaction of act and person is the prerequisite of moral negotiation. In this study, this form of moral argumentation is called *practical enthymeme*, that is, argument based on moral norms by applying them to the particularities of a context (see Jonsen and Toulmin, 1988: 35). The practical enthymeme, therefore, aims at problem-solving by considering practical issues, as Examples 5–8 show:

(5) His publicist certainly could have done a better job at making him at least sound remorseful, but let's not forget – this is a 19 year old. Just because he's a celebrity doesn't mean he's any better equipped – and probably less so – to control his emotions than the average 18, 19, 20 year old. Not making excuses, but we've all been bombarded with the bad choices of young female celebrities who've probably been slapped around during their alcohol and drug binges. This story is just a reminder that despite being a celebrity, at this age controlling one's emotion takes maturity he obviously hasn't yet acquired. Praying for you, Chris and Rihanna! (*AvaG, UsaToday*)

(6) I feel pity for both Matti and Mervi. As individuals they are both surely fine, but together such a bad combination. As a home psychologist I would say that they are codependent on each other. Why would they otherwise keep living together; their divorce application has been submitted 14 times and always they cancel it, and after everything they have gone through they still vow in the name of love. It's so sad. *Neighborhood voyeur* (*Kerrostalokyttääjä, Kaksplus.fi)*

(7) The funniest part about all this that everyone is missing … Sharon was hosting this show to treat these girls to be more lady like. Of course I know it's just a show, and I never expected any of these girls to be reformed. I expect the contestants to fight with each other- But Sharon should of known better than to sink so low. Maybe she needs a little charm school herself. (*ChuckFarley, Huffington Post*)

(8) According to one of the two tabloid newspapers, Anne-Mari has filed a police report, which is completely right. This was at least the second time already that Aitolehti has attacked Anne-Mari. (*Suomi24*)

Example 5 evaluates the domestic violence case involving Rihanna and Chris Brown. According to the discussion participant, people should not be too eager to judge Brown because he is, according to the participant, still a teenager with low self-control. At the end of the post, the discussion participant shows sympathy towards both celebrities by referring to praying as a religious act. According to Tileagă (2012: 213–215), this form of moral argumentation can be seen as an example of Judaeo-Christian ethics typical of which is the way of taking a partial but negotiable view on human relations instead of deductive reasoning or condemnation of a person as essentially corrupt. Similar moral problem-solving can be found in the methods of casuistry, in which each moral case is evaluated through its specific contextual characteristics (see Jonsen and Toulmin, 1988).

In Example 6, the discussion participant argues that the characters of the Finnish celebrities do not match. In their relationship, according to the participant, divorce would be a good option. This practical enthymeme, therefore, can be seen to involve psycho-logical considerations of a concrete situation (see Tileagă, 2012: 211). Moreover, the participant in Example 7 takes into consideration the fact that Sharon Osbourne was hosting a show called *Charm School*: she, if anyone, should have respected the norms of the show. This enthymeme reflects a wider social context, in which personal responsibilities meet communal and ideological ones (see Tileagă, 2012: 215). Such an argument questions the moral hierarchy in which older women, compared with younger ones, would automatically stand for a higher degree of moral maturity. The gossip participant in Example 8, on the other hand, sees the bar fight involving the two Finnish female celebrities as serious. According to the participant, it was the second time that Martina had attacked Anne-Mari, which is a way of seeing wrongdoing in relation to someone's personality and moral character (see Tileagă, 2012: 211). In Example 8, the evaluation of the other celebrity's moral character is utilized to justify the police report.

Compared with the theoretical enthymeme in which old moral norms are maintained, the practical enthymeme involves a logic that applies moral norms to the particularities of a context. The practical enthymeme, therefore, can be seen to involve a belief in a common moral ability of all citizens to negotiate moral norms through individual interpretations (see Hariman, 1995: 114, 119).

Categorical enthymeme

When discussing celebrity violence, some participants produced comments that evaluated people or groups of people by referring to their manners, as if people's character were the carrier of an unquestioned moral norm. I call this form of moral argumentation *categorical enthymeme* because it puts a particular individual or group in the category of moral inferiors – 'others' (see Wander, 1984). The categorical enthymeme is deductive, but in a different way compared with the theoretical enthymeme. While the theoretical enthymeme aims at reinforcing a moral norm, the categorical enthymeme contributes to stereotypes of a person or a group and tries to persuade the audience to see the particular person or group in a favourable or an unfavourable light by indirectly referring to strict moral norms that are utilized to justify domination. This strategy is close to stereotyping, where discussion participants show an unwillingness to change their attitudes concerning people or groups (see Walton, 1999: 95–98, 103–105). In other words, characteristic of the categorical enthymeme is a curbing technique as a way of mechanically combining the evaluation of act and that of person (see Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1951: 265; also Tileagă, 2012: 212). Through such mechanical argumentation practices, a community makes its members mere puppets required to follow the community's 'truths' (see Sayer, 2011: 33–34), as Examples 9–12 show:

> (9) Prone to violence. Keep buying:
>
> Lil Kim: Felony conviction for perjury involving testimony over a shooting.
> Snoop Dog: Multiple arrests for narcotics, weapons charges
> P Diddy: Arrests and charges involving a shooting in a club
> Tupak and Biggie Smalls (?): victims of drive by shootings
> .50 cent: Confessed narcotics trafficker
> R Kelly: Multiple arrests, accused child pornographer
>
> Keep buying and supporting this behaviour. It 'stimulates' the economy. (*IrregularGuy, USAToday.com*)

> (10) A good man?
>
> Good men do not go off the rails when playing with alcohol. (He is) a similar repugnant drunkass to all his kind, he just thinks he is someone.. Well, here is at least one person who drunkards can feel superior to, that's what his "popularity" is based on nowadays. Usually, after you have met such people, you instinctively check if you can still find your wallet… (A DISGUSTING COUPLE [*ÄLLÖTTÄVÄ PARI*] Suomi24)

> (11) GOOD. Cannot stand Megan. She epitomizes every preppy girl in high school and every sorority girl now I stayed the fuck away from. (*forgethissmile, ONTD*)

> (12) Brats are fighting. The shallow lifestyle in Helsinki must be awesome. Wine flows and hair is pulled out of the head. (*nima, Mtv3.fi*)

In Examples 9–12, the categorical enthymeme aims at 'arresting' the development of the image of people categorized in groups of race, class and gender. In Example 9, a discussion

participant makes the domestic violence between Rihanna and Chris Brown a racial issue by listing black male celebrities and their violent acts, which involves a stereotype 'black men are violent'. In Example 10, the Finnish former ski-jumper and his wife are seen as a 'disgusting' couple, alcoholics who are 'doomed' in their moral inferiority. Example 11 evaluates Hauserman as a prototype of a 'preppy girl' or 'sorority girl', which contributes to a stereotype of middle - or upper - class young women as attention-seeking and egoistic. The discussion participant in Example 12, on the other hand, ridicules the fighting female celebrities by evaluating them as naive and superficial, which, moreover, is utilized as a stereotype of Finnish (female) celebrities in general. Compared with Examples 5–8, Examples 9–12 are less likely to solve social inequalities because the aim of the participants using the categorical enthymeme is to maintain borders between 'us' and 'them' – between white and black, men and women, healthy and ill or rich and poor. The categorical enthymeme, therefore, maintains hierarchical structures established in the (nation) state as an economical and bureaucratic moral institution separating moral 'superiors' from 'inferiors' (see Hariman, 1995: 141–176; see also Reisigl and Wodak, 2001: 205–262).

Digital enthymeme

All three types of enthymemes discussed so far involve moral norms as the authority of argumentation. However, many comments in the research material of this study were emotional reactions, judging celebrities without any notion of moral norms. These comments 'work like enthymemes, since users work through the texts by supplying the missing inferences as they go' (Warnick, 2007: 121). I call these arguments *digital enthymemes* and define them as non-hierarchical, 'crowding' comments found in a shared and dynamic digital environment, in which pictures, videos, written texts and links speak for themselves. In the digital enthymemes as forms of moral argumentation, the focus lies on the evaluation of people, which makes them 'thing-like' conceptions (see Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1951: 256). Because of the absent moral reasoning, digital enthymemes are relatively short postings. Example 13 from a discussion of domestic violence gossip involves comments concerning a picture of Rihanna's beaten face.

(13) Comments from *Just Jared*:

\# woah (*Tia*)

\# I am seriously… Shocked. I wasn't expecting that. This as*hole MUST go to jail. (*laura*)

\# woaah! poor rihanna! (*ina*)

\# omg so poor thing…(*vanessa*)

\# HOLY CRAP (*GERM*)

\# Aww, sad. (*Ella*)

\# chris is psycho!!!!!!! (*andrea*)

In Example 13, online gossipers participate in a form of moral argumentation in which 'no-time engagement with technology' with 'expectations of effortless immediacy, the most prominent element of contemporary consumer culture' affects moral practices

online (see Chouliaraki, 2010: 117). Reasoning is hidden as if the participants were trying to persuade themselves through their own emotions (see Miller, 2001; 2004: 205–212). However, the promise of individualism in the non-hierarchical participation is a mere illusion. In Example 13, the participants *unanimously* condemn Chris Brown (e.g 'chris is psycho !!!!!!!') and feel pity for Rihanna through the *shared* performative style (e.g. 'woaah! poor rihanna!', 'omg so poor thing').

In Example 14, the participants comment on a picture of Megan Hauserman's head, in which she shows her hair after the fight with Osbourne, who was reported to have pulled Hauserman's hair extensions. Ways of ridicule and mockery are easy to see in the comments.

> (14) Comments from *ONTD*:
>
> # Daaaayum
>
> Gotta wonder how much of that is caused from shitty extensions, tho… Cause it doesn't look very red or irritated. There also isn't any blood or scabbing…. Sharon, I expected you to leave scars! (*sillyjacki*)
>
> # That looks like when my cat had worms and was ripping her hair off her butt region. (*orangeandblack*)
>
> # weave? (*rlykewl*)
>
> # wow i was looking at that for a good few seconds before i realized what it was. dayum. (*christiandior*)

As Example 14 shows, the picture of Megan Hauserman's head provoked comment that concentrated on mocking her. Moral argumentation in the example takes place through act-person separation in which the celebrity's appearance and body parts, instead of her acts, are seen as signs of her character (see Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 2000 [1969]: 293–294). The picture works as a proof that is utilized to legitimize mocking attitudes towards Hauserman. In general, such mockery focusing on celebrities' body and appearance was typical of ONTD gossip community, indicating the emotional togetherness of participants on the site.

In Example 15, online participants judge the two Finnish female celebrities by evaluating their intelligence, appearance and moral character without mentioning what these celebrities have done to deserve negative or positive treatment.

> (15) Comments from *Seiska.fi*:
>
> # anne-mari is the most sensible one
>
> when I'm reading their blogs, only anne-mari has something to say.. martina and esko are just brats.. (*Mindeeh89*)
>
> # Go Martina! Try to beat that fucking annoying person. (*Jannaaa*)
>
> # yack
>
> oh gosh what an ugly person martina is… (*Tollo81*)
>
> # Go martina! No wonder she wanted to smash the face of a clown like annemari… :D *on martinas side* (*martinan puolella*)

As with Examples 13 and 14, Example 15 also involves comments with performative rather than argumentative style (e.g. 'Go Martina!', 'yack'). What is interesting in

Example 15 is that the celebrity taste is polarized: while some prefer Martina Aitolehti, others cheer in support of Anne-Mari Berg. However, explicit expressions of agreement or disagreement with other participants on the site are missing. The celebrity mockery involved in Examples 14 and 15 has an anarchistic meaning through which the participants manifest their individual freedom to judge. Examples 14 and 15 contribute to the idea of cosmic justice in which the public bashing of celebrities willing to become rich and famous is seen as justified (see Hermes, 1995: 128).

Examples 13, 14 and 15 are digital enthymemes because they are all dependent on proofs and reasons not part of the hierarchical structure of argumentation but found in the gossip stories, pictures of celebrities and external websites, as well as in posts by like-minded participants. In Examples 13, 14 and 15, particularly young, lower or middle-class female celebrities are evaluated as pitiful or ridiculous objects of voyeurism. Although digital enthymeming may not be as explicitly oppressive as moralistic reasoning in the theoretical or categorical enthymeme, it nevertheless is disempowering in evaluating women as 'things', not as subjects capable of moral considerations. Ironically, therefore, online participants utilizing digital enthymemes can be seen to perform the voice of the silent emperor – or the ruling class – as the sexist oppressor manifesting its power through public spectacles (see Hariman, 1992).

Forms of moral argumentation and their contextual dependency

In the quantitative analysis, chi-square distribution was utilized as a statistical tool indicating whether forms of moral argumentation (theoretical, practical, categorical and digital enthymeme) are dependent on the contextual variables of field (topic), tenor (participants) and mode (media). The numbers of the forms of moral argumentation as classified in accordance with each contextual variable can be seen in Appendix 1.

Topic (field) and forms of moral argumentation

The dependency of forms of moral argumentation on discussion topic was the most significant contextual dependency found in this study, with a chi-square of 157.65 and $p < 0.001$. This means that, with 99.9 percent certainty, female celebrities' fights and domestic violence involving celebrities are discussion topics that differ from each other in the distribution of forms of moral argumentation. The percentages of moral enthymemes in relation to discussion topics can be seen in Figure 2.

As Figure 2 shows, the digital enthymeme was the most common form of moral argumentation considering both discussion topics. In female violence discussions, 51.3% of comments utilized the digital enthymeme, while in domestic violence discussions, 38.4% of comments were based on the digital enthymeme as a form of moral argumentation. The percentage of the practical enthymeme made the most notable difference between domestic violence and female violence discussions: while 24.7% of comments on domestic violence were practical enthymemes, only 4.05% of comments in female violence discussions utilized the practical enthymeme. Moreover, the theoretical enthymeme
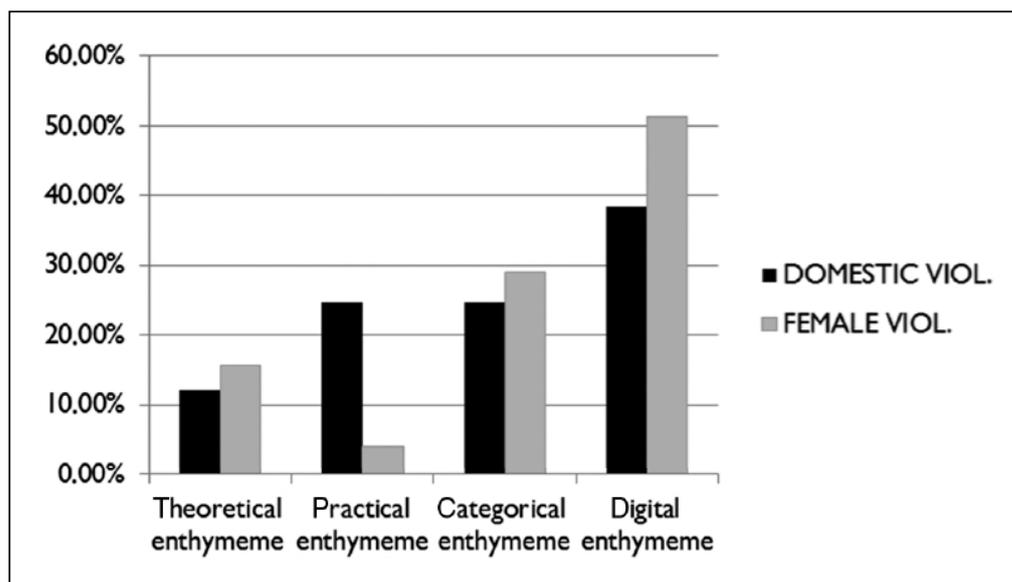
Figure 2. Percentages of enthymemes and topic (chi-square 157.65, *p* < 0.001).

(female viol. 15.6%/domestic viol. 12.2%) and categorical enthymeme (female viol. 29.1%/domestic viol. 24.7%) were slightly more common to female violence discussions.

What do these findings indicate? Interestingly, the online comments on female celebrities' fights favoured the most hierarchical (theoretical and categorical enthymeme) and seemingly the least hierarchical moral argumentation (digital enthymeme). Both theoretical and categorical enthymemes are based on strict rules as the basis of moral relations, and the digital enthymeme as the evaluation of person is often related to judgements of body and appearance. Consequently, we can draw the conclusion that if the case of celebrity gossip does not involve an obvious juxtaposition between men and women, sexist domination is strengthened through moral argumentation. In other words, fighting female celebrities were evaluated as moral inferiors, either beings under strict moral control or 'things' completely outside moral concerns.

Participants (tenor) and forms of moral argumentation

According to the quantitative results, the distribution of forms of moral argumentation varies in accordance with language/national culture of participants with 99.9% certainty. (with the chi-square of 36.47 and *p* < 0.001). This means that English-language and Finnish discussions significantly differ from each other in moral argumentation. We can see these differences on English-language and Finnish sites, especially in the use of digital and categorical enthymemes, as Figure 3 illustrates.

In both English-language and Finnish comment sections of celebrity gossip, the digital enthymeme was the most commonly used form of moral argumentation, which, moreover, was more common to comments sent by English-language participants (51.6%) than those of Finnish online gossipers (38.2%). Theoretical (Eng. 11.3%/Fin. 16.4%) and
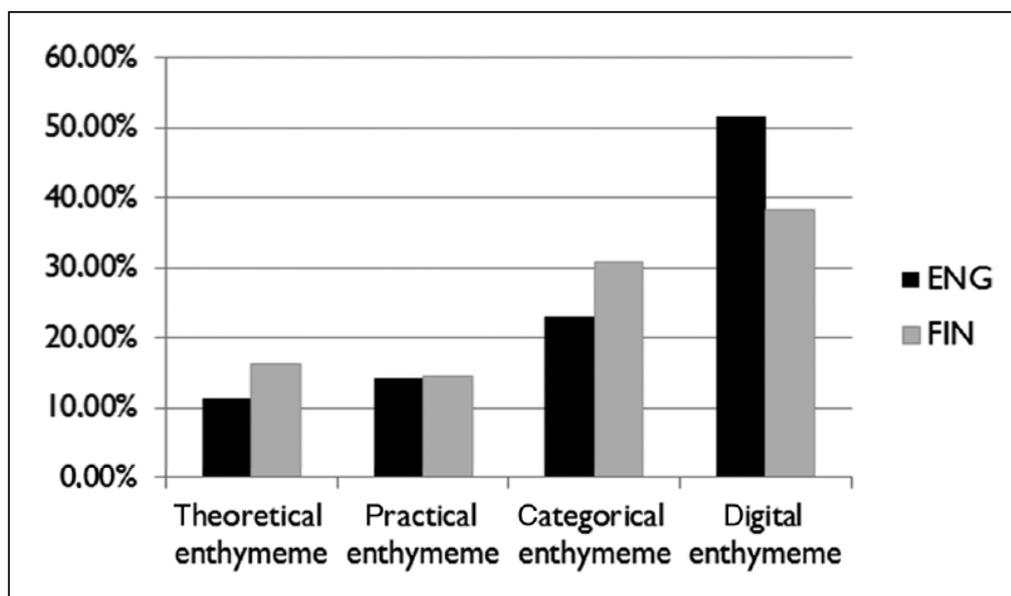
Figure 3. Percentages of enthymemes and participants (chi-square 36.47, *p* < 0.001).

categorical (Eng. 23.0%/Fin. 30.8%) enthymemes, on the other hand, were more typical of Finnish online discussions. The distribution of practical enthymemes was almost even (Eng. 14.1%/Fin. 14.6%). Consequently, we can draw the conclusion that, compared with Finnish-language participants, English-language gossipers are less concerned with explicitly hierarchical moral norms (see theoretical and categorical enthymeme in Figure 3) and more focused on judging celebrities on the basis of personal preferences (see digital enthymeme in Figure 3). Interestingly – but also paradoxically – the digital enthymeme as a judgement of a person can be seen as open to different cultures and opinions. For instance, when making favourable or unfavourable comments on celebrities' appearance, different groups of people do not face the challenge of negotiating moral norms in order to get along with one another, which may welcome people from different cultural backgrounds to contribute to a community.

Media (mode) and forms of moral argumentation

In this study, *YouTube*, *ONTD* (a Live Journal community dedicated to celebrity culture), *Suomi24* (a general Finnish discussion forum) and *Kaksplus.fi* (the website of a Finnish 'baby magazine') were categorized as user-generated websites. *USAToday*.com, *Huffington Post*, *Just Jared* (a website dedicated to celebrity gossip), *HS.fi* (the website of a Finnish newspaper), *MTV3.fi* (the website of a Finnish TV channel) and *Seiska.fi* (the website of a Finnish gossip magazine) were seen as media-generated since they are based on media institutions that choose topics for online discussion and hold the right to moderate the comment sections. According to the results, the chi-square of 11.03 suggests that, with 95% certainty, there are differences between user-generated and
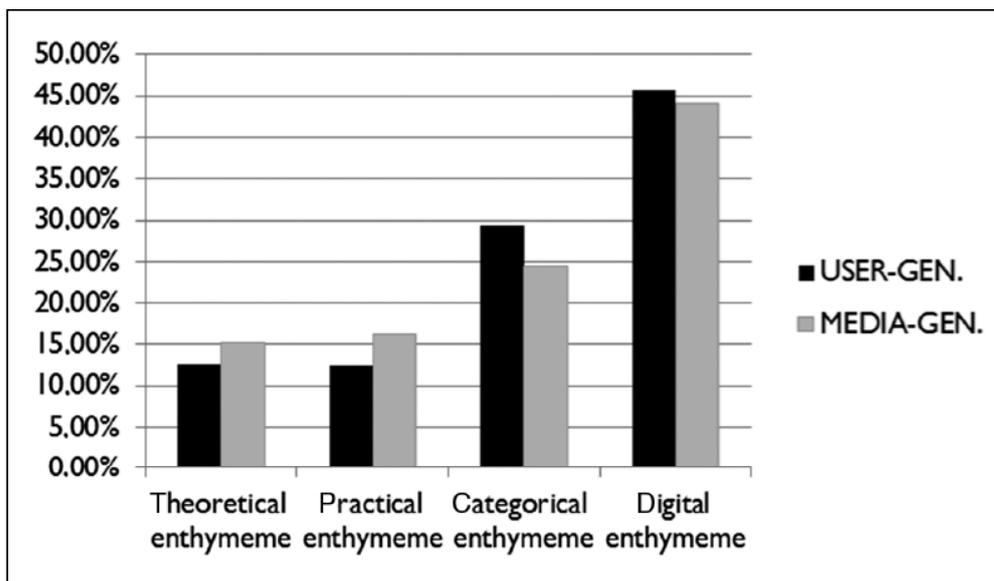
Figure 4. Percentages of enthymemes and media (chi-square 11.03, *p* < 0.05).

media-generated websites in the distribution of forms of moral argumentation, which can be seen in Figure 4.

While theoretical (user-gen. 12.6%/media-gen. 15.2%) and practical (user-gen. 12.4%/media-gen. 16.2%) enthymemes were more common to media-generated websites, categorical (user-gen. 29.3%/media-gen. 24.4%) and digital (user-gen. 45.7%/media-gen. 44.1%) enthymemes were more typical of websites that encourage participants to start new discussion threads and post user-generated content (often also pictures or videos). Based on the results, we can draw the conclusion that gossipers on media-generated websites were keener on referring to moral norms, while participants on user-generated websites were more concentrated on judging people by either reinforcing stereotypes (categorical enthymeme) or focusing merely on the evaluation of the person (digital enthymeme). Accordingly, these results differ from previous findings suggesting that engagement in user-content online would challenge social hierarchies (e.g. Sheridan et al., 2009). Perhaps media-generated websites are obedient to moral institutions (i.e. the state) or are at least concerned with their own reputation as online environments, which may explain why some of the comments judging and stereotyping people could have been either pre- or post-moderated.

Conclusion

This article analysed forms of moral argumentation as rhetorical practices in comment sections dealing with celebrity gossip. Four forms of moral argumentation based on different moral argumentation techniques (see Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1951) were found in the study: theoretical, practical, categorical and digital enthymemes. The *theoretical enthymeme* was defined as a deductive form of moral argumentation in which a community maintains its moral norms as unquestioned rules. The *practical enthymeme*

takes into account the particularities of a concrete situation, also evaluating people involved in the case, which makes moral norms concepts that can be negotiated in a community. The *categorical enthymeme* involves evaluation of both act and people, which, however, are combined in an unchangeable fashion, contributing to both unquestioned moral norms and stereotypes dividing 'us' (the in-group) from 'them' (groups categorized as 'other'). The *digital enthymeme* can be seen as a form of moral argumentation involving only evaluation of people when supporting proofs and like-minded participants can be found in a surrounding discursive environment that is seen to speak for itself.

Moreover, the chi-square distribution of moral argumentation showed that the topic of discussion and the language and national culture of participants are particularly statistically significant variables concerning the forms of moral argumentation. Compared with comments on domestic violence against women, violence involving female celebrities provokes fewer practical enthymemes and more theoretical, categorical and digital ones. Moreover, digital enthymemes are more common to English-language sites than to Finnish ones, which, in turn, are more focused on theoretical and categorical enthymemes. In general, however, the digital enthymeme was the most common form of moral argumentation on celebrity gossip sites, independent of any contextual variable. These findings are in line with previous remarks, according to which online discourse reduces communal moral norms to particularized preferences (see e.g. Barney, 2004; Chouliaraki, 2010; Silverstone, 2003). Popular online discourse is focused on free self-expression and playful performance of liking and disliking, instead of being obedient to strict, institutional moral norms expressed in theoretical enthymemes.

As a closer examination indicates, however, the digital enthymeme involves a paradox of individual freedom. While the users of the digital enthymeme remain distant from considerations of moral inequalities in concrete human relations, they, at the same time, are too close to the digital context in which difficult moral problems do not have to be solved in order for one to be part of a community. The digital enthymeme is a way of minimizing distance between the self and the other and making this intimacy a preferable form of communication. According to Silverstone (2003), an intimacy between online participants represents improper distance, that is, a morally distorted relation of the 'self' and the 'other'. By promoting momentary emotional togetherness of the rhetor and the audience, the digital enthymeme contributes to crowd behaviour that ultimately attacks the idea of individuals as responsible agents free to make their own moral decisions.

This study has produced new results on the possible paradoxes of freedom in popular new media discourse that is seemingly free from hierarchies, but may effectively reinforce some oppressively hierarchical meanings, particularly those relating to gender or class. The cost of liberalism as mass-culture and mass-society may indicate a turn towards moral primitivism that reinforces social inequalities under the guise of public spectacles and performances, of which the digital enthymeme is a good example. This rhetorical practice characterizes the courtly style (Hariman, 1992; 1995: 51–94) as a persuasive form in which moral inequalities are not negotiated in discourse, but, on the contrary, are reinforced in the aesthetic, playful and sometimes even seemingly innocent expressions that promote freedom from the burden of moral reasoning.

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Appendix 1. Numbers of forms of moral argumentation in field, tenor and mode

Appendix Table 1. Frequencies of enthymemes and field (topic of discussion): chi-square 157.65, $p < 0.001$.

Enthymemes	Domestic viol.	Female viol.	Total
Theoretical	110	140	250
Practical	222	36	258
Categorical	222	262	484
Digital	346	462	808
Total	900	900	1800

Appendix Table 2. Frequencies of enthymemes and tenor (participants): chi-square 36.47, $p < 0.001$.

Enthymemes	Finnish	English	Total
Theoretical	148	102	250
Practical	131	127	258
Categorical	277	207	484
Digital	344	464	808
Total	900	900	1800

Appendix Table 3. Frequencies of enthymemes and mode (media): chi-square 11.03, $p < 0.05$.

Enthymemes	User-gen.	Media-gen.	Total
Theoretical	113	137	250
Practical	112	146	258
Categorical	264	220	484
Digital	411	397	808
Total	900	900	1800

Author biography

Maria Eronen is a PhD student from the University of Vaasa, Finland. She is currently working on her dissertation concerning morality and rhetoric in English-language and Finnish comment sections of celebrity gossip. This article contributes to her larger work.

Digital enthymeme: morality, emotions, and materialism in new media participation

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Abstract

In this article, I discuss moral and rhetorical challenges in new media discourse concerning celebrities. I focus on the concept of digital enthymeme, that is, an online comment evaluating people negatively or positively without articulated reasoning, but, instead, letting online participants find proofs by themselves in a digital environment surrounded by pictures, texts, links, and videos. The aim of this paper is to explore what kind of moral rhetoric is involved in digital enthymemes concerning celebrities. The research questions are 1) what kinds of digital enthymemes are used by English- and Finnish-speaking online participants commenting on gossip about violent celebrities and 2) how these enthymemes operate as moral arguments on the level of style (discourse itself as a persuasive material) and in relation to moral norms as a communally shared purpose. The research material consists of 1800 online comments (900 English-language, 900 Finnish comments) of which 808 comments were categorized as digital enthymemes (464 English-language, 344 Finnish comments). Methodically, this study combines rhetorical argumentation analysis of enthymemes with the analysis of evaluative language based on the linguistic appraisal framework. Two types of digital enthymemes, namely, moralistic and amoralistic, were identified in the material. The moral rhetoric in both types of digital enthymemes is solely based on the emotional involvement of online selves as a sign of consumerism and materialism becoming more important than moral negotiation. While moralistic digital enthymemes invoke personalized moral norms by judging celebrities as moral beings, amoralistic digital enthymemes block moral imagination by dehumanizing celebrities and evaluating them as objects, such as aesthetic or sexual "things". In general, amoralistic digital enthymemes were more typical than those evaluating celebrities in moralistic terms.

Keywords:

Digital enthymeme, emotions, enthymeme, internet, morality, digital rhetoric

1. Introduction: popular culture, morality, and digital communication

We are living the era of constant connectedness, networking, and mobility of individuals in which new media make our everyday social connections more visual and more widely observable than before. One of the most prominent signs of the digital age is participation in contemporary public arenas by 'ordinary people', that is, those who do not have a societal status as public actors but are able to adopt such a role by blogging, commenting, or tweeting. According to the media scholar Graeme Turner (2010), we are witnessing a so-called demotic turn by which he means the increasing cultural and societal visibility of the 'ordinary' and the 'popular' through new participatory media (such as reality TV or Web 2.0). New media participation, therefore, can be seen as a fruitful target for the analysis of contemporary cultures, values, and moralities.

On the one hand, discussion within the fields of cultural and celebrity studies points out the possibility that contemporary popular culture as "free" or "open" site for public dialogues could increase culturally diverse public negotiation of morality and values and create an alternative democratic public sphere to that of often strictly bureaucratic governmental discourse (see e.g. McGuigan 2005; Jenkins 2006; Graham & Harju 2011). Moreover, new media genres of celebrity gossip, particularly blogs, highlight the gossip readers' role in making meanings, which may challenge the hegemony of media-made celebrity culture (Meyers 2012). These optimistic approaches to the demotic turn stress the pedagogic and emancipating potential of lay people's participation in contemporary public arenas. As Henry Jenkins (2006: 84–85) describes, "there is a real value in gossip that extends into virtual rather than face-to-face communities" because thereby different social groups can learn how they each see the world.

On the other hand, however, there are a lot of sceptical or at least critical notions of what happens to everyday moral reasoning when practiced online and what kinds of rhetorical and moral challenges relate to community building in digital networks (see e.g. Robins 1999; Miller 2001; 2004; Mitra & Watts 2002; Silverstone 2003; 2007; Barney 2004; Orgad 2007; Chouliaraki 2010; Chouliaraki 2011; Chouliaraki & Orgad 2011; Chouliaraki 2012). One of the most notable critics of technological proximity was the media scholar Roger Silverstone who dedicated his life work to ethical criticism of

our everyday mediated experiences and technology-based communication shaping the moral life (see Orgad 2007; Chouliaraki & Orgad 2011). According to Silverstone (2003: 480–483; 2007: 133–135, 173), participation in technologically impregnated environments may involve a distorted relation between the self and the other, which denies real (moral) responsibility as a duty of care for the 'other' beyond reciprocity online (see also Robins 1999). Similarly, Carolyn R. Miller argues that participation in digital environments involves a rhetorical problem of optimizing the trustworthiness of the self and the other (Miller 2001: 267). Communication in computer-mediated settings may highlight pathos, emotion, at the expense of reasoning, logos (Miller 2004: 205–212). Moreover, Lilie Chouliaraki (2010: 212) who has analyzed humanitarian participation in the new media argues that one of the characteristics of new media discourse is its relation to post-humanitarianism that makes people mirror their own world views in a "consumerist" fashion instead of moral negotiation. Typical of new media participation is also mediated self-presentation that abandons the normativity of the public sphere as linguistic rationalism and highlights playful, ironic textualities contributing to particularized meanings and values (Chouliaraki 2011: 368; 2012: 2). Similar moral criticism has been presented by Darien Barney who sees online participation as empty of moral obligations to community, which, according to him, presents "a perfect technological solution to the problem of community in a liberal, market society" (Barney 2004: 32). From these critical perspectives, informal online discourses, because of their "freedom", may lack reasoned moral criticism needed to develop communities through the solving of social inequalities.

The lack of moral reasoning in online discourse may be a consequence of the nature of new media participation that highlights style (the material and playful side of communication) in addition to, but also at the expense of, purpose (ideas, rationality, and morality shared and negotiated in communication) (see Lanham 2006). As Richard Lanham (2006: 1–22) describes, we are living in an attention economy in which style as the way of packing values and information in words or pictures becomes a materialistic and therefore an economical issue (ibid. 3). It is the free use of technology that enables the endless reproduction in which "we can eat our cake, still have it, and give it away too." In the attention economy, repetition and sharing, however, do not mean egalitarianism because the production of "things", namely texts, pictures, and videos to appear on a screen involves competition of attention. (Ibid.12.) In the comment sections of celebrity gossip blogs, for instance, "one can attract attention by making the most inflammatory comment" (Meyers 2010: 266).

This study deals with non-reasoned morality in "ordinary people's" new media participation. Particularly, this study focuses on the digital enthymeme as a morally simplistic way of participating in celebrity gossip online. In this study, the definition of the digital enthymeme is seen in relation to the concept of enthymeme as a kind of syllogism in which an idea is combined with reasons for believing it (see Walker 1994). The digital enthymeme is here defined as a non-reasoned value-judgment that appears as a comment evaluating people on a website where proofs can be effortlessly found in pictures, texts, links, and videos available in the shared digital context. When the process of finding proofs is invisible to the audience, online commenting itself follows a binary logic in which people and things are evaluated either positively or negatively, in terms of liking or disliking. This definition of the digital enthymeme closely relates to Barbara Warnick's (2007) remarks on rhetoric online. According to her, persuasion made possible by the hypertextual and intertextual structure of the internet is dependent on a user's ability to find the missing cues and supply the missing links so that online arguments work like enthymemes (Warnick 2007: 121). Examples of what I mean by digital enthymemes could be evaluative utterances, such as "S/he is ugly" or "I hate her/him" as online comments sent to discussion lists on celebrity gossip sites where supporting proofs preceding and following the comments can be found by clicking, scrolling, and making associations individually. The aim of this paper is to explore what kind of moral rhetoric is involved in digital enthymemes concerning celebrities. By moral rhetoric I mean the ways of positioning the self in relation to others by persuading them to share positive or negative evaluation of people and construct a common attitude toward the role of moral norms in a community. The aim is approached through two research questions 1) what kinds of digital enthymemes are used by English- and Finnish-speaking online participants commenting on gossip about violent celebrities and 2) how these enthymemes operate as moral arguments on the level of style (discourse itself as a persuasive material) and in relation to moral norms as a communally shared purpose.

The comments on celebrity violence were chosen for this analysis because violence as a theme of popular culture tends to provoke judgments relating to larger societal issues (such as class or gender) (see Fiske 1989: 127–130). Moreover, although a lot of celebrity gossiping is potentially multinational and made possible by global celebrity industries and entertainment media, there are online gossip discussions taking place within more limited national and cultural groups, such as Finnish, in which shared moral norms can be assumed to play a central role. The comparison of English-language and potentially more global online discussions with

Finnish ones may give some ideas relating to possible moral challenges of multinational and multicultural online discourse. Since the possibility of moral uncertainty in shared standards of evaluating people is the higher the further we go from our home communities (e.g. Luckmann 2002: 27–78), it is interesting to see whether English-language online participants, compared with Finnish ones, are more likely to judge celebrities by completely avoiding moral terms.

2. The focus of research

This study utilizes a rhetorical approach to digital communication. In this section, I will take a closer look at the concept of enthymeme and discuss its moral function and after that describe the material and methods of the study.

2.1 Enthymeme and moral rhetoric

In a moral sense, there is something fundamental in the concept of enthymeme as the body of persuasive argument, that is, a rhetorical syllogism combining any idea with reasons for believing it in joint interaction between the rhetor and the audience (Bitzer 1959; Conley 1984; Jonsen & Toulmin 1988: 73–74; Walker 1994). Jeffrey Walker (1994: 54–55) argues that this "new-rhetorical" definition of enthymeme combines Aristotle's perception of the rational enthymeme with the notion of the emotional enthymeme. Namely, in contemporary complex societies, where moral contracts are needed to avoid conflicts between different cultures and identities, morality needs to be negotiated through interaction (Bergmann 1998), producing publicly "crafted virtue" in which both reason and emotion matter (see Condit 1987). This study utilizes this new-rhetorical approach to the enthymeme as public interaction in which voices "from the grassroots" are to be taken as seriously as an authorial discourse. This approach does not hold that all enthymemes necessarily are harmonious combinations of reason and emotion, but in such new-rhetorical analysis it is possible to deal with the enthymeme's role in value-based reasoning in which an argument gets its meaning in a dialogue between the rhetor and the audience (see Walker 1994: 63). Indeed, from a rhetorical point of view, 'community' includes the rhetor (the speaker or writer) and the audience as the people whom the rhetor wants to persuade (Miller 1993: 212). The community of the rhetor and the audience is made possible by values, that is, objects of agreement as shared preferences and interests (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1951; 2000 [1969]: 74). Since the enthymeme involves the rhetor, the audience, and values as the starting point of a community, it can be

seen as a basic way of positioning the self in relation to the other in a rhetorical practice.

In addition, the enthymeme can be seen to consist of different components: the claim (the idea that the rhetor wants the audience to believe), the reason (minor premises, explanation or proofs why to believe the idea) and major premises of argumentation as the enthymeme's omitted part meant for the audience to complete. When looking at enthymemes from a moral or ethical perspective, the judgment of people and evaluation of their acts can be seen as the basic pair of claim and reason as the rhetoricians Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca (1951; 2000 [1969]: 293–316) argue. In rhetorical stylistics focusing on the enthymeme, the interest lies in such claim plus minor premise pairs (Fahnestock 2012: 376) that can be seen as the material side of rhetoric called specific topoi (indicating the time, the place, the circumstances, and the emotional involvement in argumentation) (Grimaldi 1972: 124–133). That is to say, specific topoi are the material patterns of an argument and serve as "places" for different types of genre, institution, or discipline (Miller & Selzer 1985: 311–316; Miller 1987: 62, 67). In this study, the specific topoi are seen as the styles of enthymemes in which the persuasiveness of written or spoken words and utterances is dependent on the particularities of an audience (see Burke 1969: 62). These notions of specific topoi closely relate to Perelman's and Olbrechts-Tyteca's (2000 [1969]: 77–79) remarks on concrete values that are attached to a specific person, group, or object. From the viewpoint of specific topoi, different moral genres, such as celebrity gossip online, newspaper discourse on a politician's reputation, or criminal justice in courtrooms, utilize specific styles of act-person argumentation which are persuasive to specific audiences in a particular historical and cultural context. A specific style of act-person argumentation is involved for instance in communally shared togetherness based on a shared pleasure of mocking particular celebrities (see Meyers 2010: 266). Such a style would be called a separation technique in which people are evaluated as "thinglike" objects, not as moral subjects acting in a justifiable or condemnable manner (see Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1951).

Moreover, however, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1951; 2000 [1969]: 293–316) also argue that act-person relation is one of the connections of coexistence or commonplaces. In classical rhetoric, commonplaces are called common topoi (literally "common places") that are also known as warrants (Toulmin 2003 [1958]) or maxims proven by experience (Jonsen & Toulmin 1988: 74). In this study, common topoi are seen as the major premises of enthymemes that exist beyond the material and concrete discourse, that is, beyond style (see Fahnestock 2012: 376). Within the

common topoi, we can distinguish moral norms as the general expectations of accepted behavior in a community (the definition of norm, see Luhmann 2008: 28–55). Act-person interaction is essential to morality because it contributes to the moral development of a community by enabling the negotiation of values. As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1951: 261) argue, "[s]uccessive evocation of the act and the person, then of the person and the act, does not leave the mind at the point at which it started." Elsewhere, they also point out that abstract values "seem to provide criteria for one wishing to change the established order" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 2000 [1969]: 79). According to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (ibid. 77–79), these abstract values, such as truth, justice, love, and equality, are irreconcilable values that as higher (moral) considerations are used for the criticism of concrete values. Since act-person interaction is not only a style (a concrete and material claim-reason unit in discourse) but can also be seen as a common topos, it operates as an abstract moral conception whether we were dealing with celebrity gossip online, a politician's reputation in a newspaper discourse, or criminal justice in courtrooms. Picture 1 illustrates how the enthymeme, as understood in this paper, consists of specific topoi (concrete material "places") and common topos (moral norms as the abstract "common place" guiding behavior and discourse in a community).
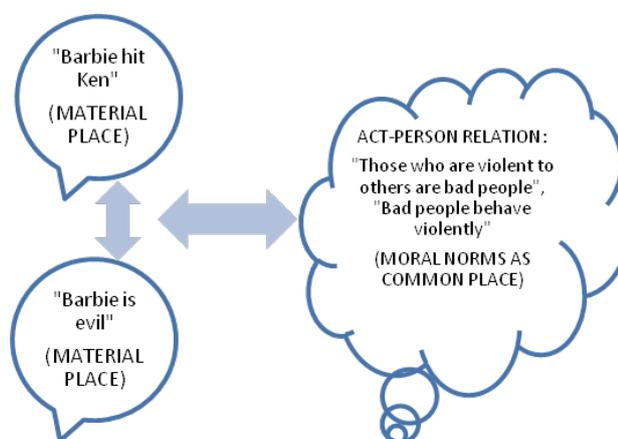
Picture 1. Enthymeme as a moral concept.

In Picture 1, an example argument (either written or spoken) "Barbie hit Ken because she is evil" or "Barbie is evil because she hit Ken", forms the immediately observable part of the enthymeme in which "Barbie hit Ken" brings out an occurred act and "Barbie is evil" is an emotional expression judging a person. Such explicitly judgmental tones can be found in celebrity gossip discourse, but they would be rare in

more formal genres such as in newspaper articles or courtroom speeches. In other words, this enthymeme is stylistically specific to popular culture. However, this example also has a relation to moral norms (visualized inside the thought bubble) as the part of enthymeme "existing" beyond the material form. In this silent and invisible place of ideas, the rhetor and the audience can "meet" and form a community beyond what is immediately observable. However, in order to find such a common moral place, the rhetor and the audience need to follow the empirically observable coordinates of "act" and "person". That is to say, the style of evaluating people and/ or their behavior always has moral importance in reinforcing, challenging, or just silently accepting moral norms of a community. The audience could argue, for instance, that "Barbie hit Ken because she had to defend herself", which may revise the morality of a community. Such act-person interaction characterizes moral negotiation and constant moral development of a community that is not stuck in the form.

2.2. Material and methods

The research material consists of 1800 asynchronous1 comments on four cases dealing with either domestic violence or female celebrities' fights discussed in comment sections of English-language and Finnish websites of celebrity gossip. The domestic violence as a serious moral and societal topic of popular culture (see Ahva et al. 2013: 10–11) and "female fights" discussions focusing on the physical appearance of celebrities, rather than their moral character, were chosen for the study to give a picture of the possible diversity of digital enthymemes. 900 English-language comments concern two cases of American or global celebrities, and 900 Finnish-language comments relate to two cases of Finnish celebrities. The comments were collected between January and October 2010. In general, if the most commented discussion thread included 150 comments or more, only one thread was chosen for the study. Moreover, I collected 75 comments at the beginning and 75 comments in the middle or at the end of a thread in order to see the diversity of digital enthymemes. The choosing of arguments was based on the notion that as the number of posts in a thread gets higher, the style of online argumentation is easily affected by the rising need to get one's voice heard by commenting on celebrities in more aggressive ways (see Meyers 2010: 266). A more elaborate description of the research material can be seen in Table 1.

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1 In asynchronous discussions, interaction is structured into turns but a reply may be posted months or even years after the prior turn (see Kollock & Smith 1999: 5).

THE CASES OF CELEBRITY GOSSIP	ASYNCHRONOUS DISCUSSION COMMENTS (total 1800)
Pop singers Rihanna & Chris Brown (domestic violence)	*Just Jared*, an English-language website dedicated to celebrity gossip (150) *USATODAY.com*, a U.S. online newspaper (150) *YouTube,* a global, user-generated website for video sharing and commenting (150)
A Finnish ex-ski jumper Matti Nykänen & his (ex-)wife Mervi Tapola (domestic violence)	*HS.fi*, a Finnish online newspaper (150) *Kaksplus.fi*, a website of a Finnish 'baby magazine' including a lot of gossip (150) *Suomi24*, a general Finnish discussion forum with a heavy interest in celebrity and gossip (150)
Entertainment celebrities Sharon Osbourne & Megan Hauserman (fight in a TV show)	*The Huffington Post*, a U.S. online newspaper (150) *LiveJournal* (*Oh No They Didn't*), an English-language online community dedicated to celebrity gossip (150) *YouTube* (150)
Finnish entertainment celebrities Martina Aitolehti & Anne-Mari Berg (fight in a bar)	*Mtv3.fi*, a website of a Finnish television channel (150) *Seiska.fi*, a website of a Finnish gossip magazine (150) *Suomi24* (150)

Table 1. Research material

Methodically, this study utilizes both rhetorical argumentation analysis of enthymemes (see Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1951; Miller & Selzer 1985: 315; Jonsen & Toulmin 1988) and the analysis of evaluative language based on the linguistic appraisal framework (see Martin & White 2005). First, by utilizing the rhetorical argumentation analysis, digital enthymemes could be seen as realizations of the separation technique (see Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1951) in which people are evaluated without reasoning because proofs can be found in the shared digital environment by scrolling and clicking. Second, the analysis of evaluative language (Martin & White 2005) was utilized as a method to explore different ways of evaluating people. According to Jim Martin and Peter R. R. White (2005), there are three categories of evaluation, namely, affect (ways of feeling, such as "I hate them"), judgment (evaluation based on social esteem or sanction, such as "Ken is a bad person"), and appreciation (aesthetic evaluation, such as "Barbie is ugly"). Affect is at the heart of evaluation and it is transformed either into moral or aesthetic meanings, depending on the particular context and community (see Martin & White 2005: 45). In the analysis of evaluative language, "emotion" was seen as evaluative uses of language involving affect, judgment, or appreciation. Consequently, "emotion" was analysed as evaluation, not as a certain psychological reaction or a state of mind. Third, digital enthymemes as separation techniques were analyzed in relation to a digital environment and moral norms and compared with the idea of act-person relation as presented in Picture 2.
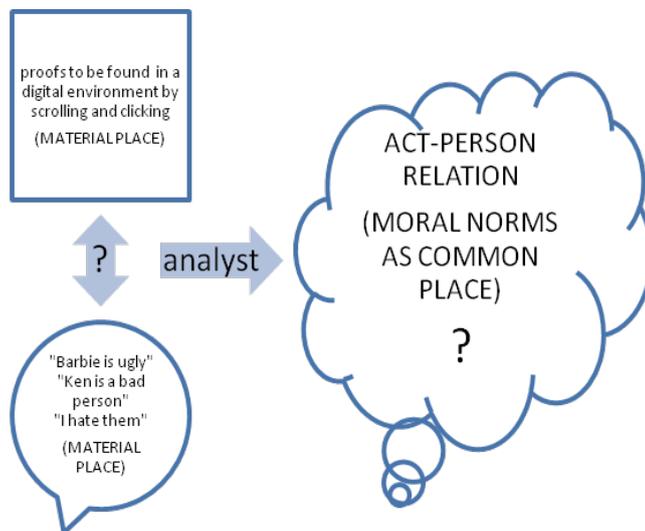
Picture 2. Analyzing digital enthymemes.

As Picture 2 illustrates, in the digital enthymeme, material "places" stand for both the comments involving evaluation of people and the digital environment where proofs and support for the comments can be found (see also Warnick 2007: 121). In order to answer to the first research question (what kinds of digital enthymemes are used), digital enthymemes were categorized as moralistic or amoralistic, depending on the notion of whether people are judged as moral beings (in terms of affect or judgment) or as mere "things" to be liked or disliked (in terms of affect or appreciation) (see Martin & White 2005). Because digital enthymemes do not involve moral reasoning, the way of judging people is necessarily narrow-minded. In this study, moralistic is seen as an adjective meaning a simplistic moral attitude, while amoralistic refers to morally unconcerned judgments, such as oppressive jokes or comments on ugliness, which try to avoid moral criticism by reducing the ways of evaluating people to taste. Such "unintended" moral judgments, however, are to be included in the analysis when trying to understand the nature of morality in everyday interaction and evaluation. (See Young 2011 [1990]: 148–152).

In accordance with the method of this study, a comment such as "Barbie is ugly" would be a realization of an amoralistic digital enthymeme, whereas "Ken is a bad person" would be categorized as a moralistic one. The comment "I hate them" would be either moralistic or amoralistic depending on the digital environment as the context for interpretation. The question marks in Picture 2 stand for the second research question of this study: how do these enthymemes operate as moral arguments on the level of style (discourse itself as a persuasive material) and in relation to moral norms as a

communally shared purpose? In order to answer to this question, the study utilizes "retrospective invention" as a rhetorical argumentation analysis in which the analyst seeks within empirically observable topoi (such as the comment "Barbie is ugly" and the particular digital environment where the comment appears) a way to conceptual places where sources for the persuasiveness of style can be found (about the method, see e.g. Miller & Selzer 1985: 315). Consequently, I explored how moralistic and amoralistic digital enthymemes as comments sent to a particular digital environment are related (or not related) to moral norms. In this study, one online comment evaluating people without reasoning (such as "Barbie is ugly"), but appearing in a digital context of proofs, was seen as one unit of analysis – as one digital enthymeme. The next section is for the results.

3. Results: digital enthymemes in celebrity gossip discourse online

In this study, 808 digital enthymemes were found, which means that almost the half (44,9 %) of 1800 comments analyzed were digital enthymemes. The comments left out of this analysis were those that somehow evaluated acts or negotiated moral norms and were thereby different from digital enthymemes that concern the 'person' only. In general, digital enthymemes were more common to English-language gossip discussions (in 464 comments) than to Finnish ones (in 344 comments). Further, digital enthymemes were categorized as moralistic or amoralistic comments depending on whether human beings are evaluated as moral beings or as corporeal, aesthetic, or cultural "things". Of the 808 digital enthymemes found in the study, only 222 comments were moralistic, while 586 were amoralistic, which can be seen in Figure 1.
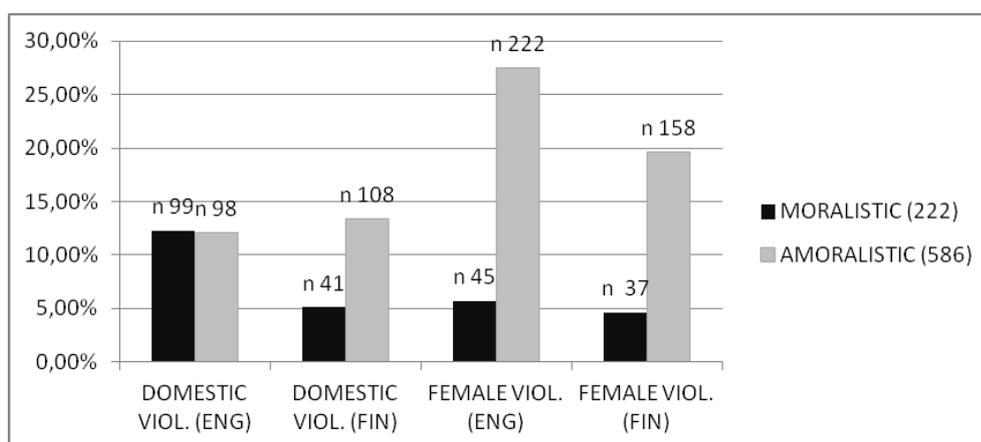

Figure 1. Types of digital enthymemes on celebrity gossip sites.

As Figure 1 shows, the comments evaluating human beings as amoral objects were more common to the discussions about fights involving female celebrities than those dealing with domestic violence involving celebrities. Consequently, the gossip about fighting female celebrities, especially, provoked online participants to use digital enthymemes without a moral concern. Moreover, digital enthymemes as moralistic comments characterize particularly English-language discussions of domestic violence because the gossip news about the beaten Rihanna provoked a lot of sympathetic reactions from her fans and strong negative judgments calling for the penalty of her boyfriend Chris Brown. In what follows, I will give some examples of digital enthymemes as both moralistic and amoralistic comments and discuss their relation to moral norms. Typical of digital enthymemes was to emerge in groups of a few consecutive comments, as the examples show. The Finnish example comments have been translated into English.

3.1 Digital enthymemes as moralistic comments

In this section, I will deal with comments in which celebrities are evaluated in moralistic terms, as 'good' people to be sympathized or 'bad' to be condemned. Characteristic of the digital enthymemes in which celebrities were evaluated as good or bad moral beings, was a more serious tone of discourse compared with amoralistic comments. Most of these morally serious, albeit simplistic, comments were posted to websites dealing with domestic violence gossip, which resonates with the notion that domestic violence, especially, is seen as a morally serious topic of popular culture (see Ahva et al. 2013: 10–11). On the Just Jared gossip site involving the gossip news story "Rihanna's bruised face revealed", moralistic comments were uses of evaluation sympathizing Rihanna as the alleged victim and condemning Chris Brown with voices aggressively insisting that he should be punished, which can be seen in Picture 3.
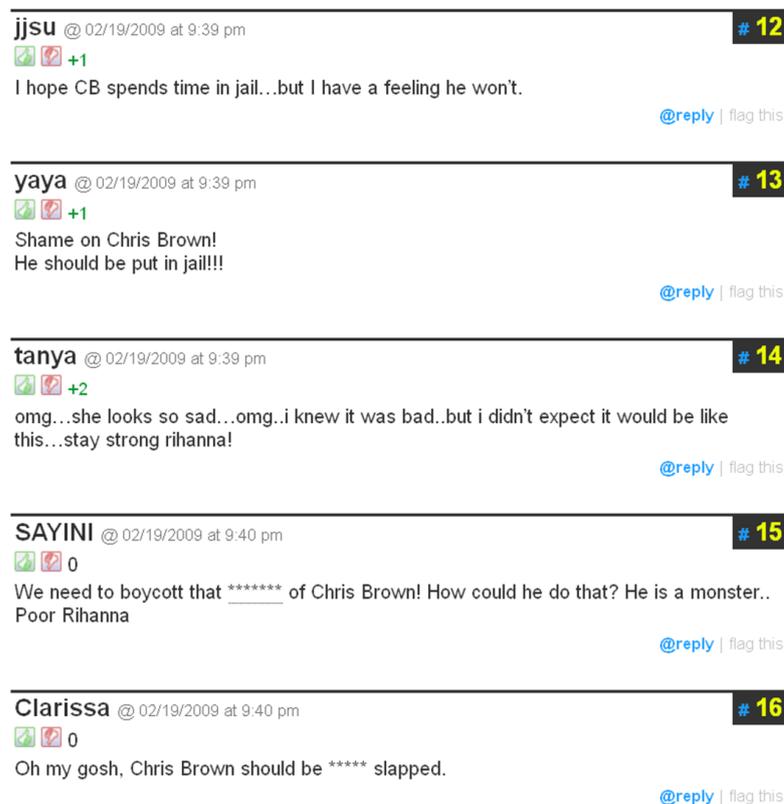
Picture 3. Examples of digital enthymemes as moralistic comments on Just Jared.

As the comments in Picture 3 show, the gossip news about Rihanna's alleged beating provoked commenting involving an explicit tone of voice, such as "I hope CB spends time in jail" (in comment #12), "He should be put in jail!!!" (in comment #13), and "We need to boycott that…He is a monster..."(in comment #15). These judgments calling for social sanction rely on the moral institution of the state or its capitalistic system (see Martin & White 2005: 52). At the same time, emotional comments indicating a fellow-feeling for Rihanna can be distinguished when the participants evaluate a picture of Rihanna's bruised face in comments #14 and #15 (e.g. "omg...she looks so sad...omg" or "Poor Rihanna"). Such discourse involves language of affect, which, according to Martin and White (2005: 46), is based on the relation of an emoter (the participant experiencing the emotion) and trigger (the phenomenon causing the emotion). In these comments, we can clearly see the strong like-mindedness of Rihanna's fans getting together online to feel and judge on a seemingly same basis. However, none of these comments explicitly shows willingness to negotiate the role of moral norms in relation to domestic violence: the reasons for the emotional claims are not articulated in the public discourse. In other words, these posts can be seen as

signs of emoter-trigger relationship in which online participants are eager to express their own feelings, expecting others to feel the same.

In Finnish online comment sections dealing with celebrity gossip about domestic violence, the posts showing fellow-feeling for the female celebrity were less explicit than on English-language websites. However, the condemnation of Matti Nykänen, the Finnish male celebrity accused of a violent attack against his (ex)wife, was evident, which can be seen in Picture 4. The sender of the comment #2 asks a question "Why is he always set free?" to which the participant of the comment #3 replies "Well, because he is Matti. But if you had done this, you were already in jail", which is followed by the comment #4: "I wonder about that too :O." All these comments can be seen as digital enthymemes insisting that Nykänen should be put in jail.

28.12.09, 13:54		#2
Rukoilijasirkka Vierailija	Miksi toi päästetään vaan vapaaksi? 😠	
		💬 Lainaa
28.12.09, 13:55		#3
sutinasussu ○	🔁 Alkuperäinen kirjoittaja **Rukoilijasirkka** Miksi toi päästetään vaan vapaaksi? 😠 No koska se on Matti. Mutta jos sinä olisit tehnyt noin, olisit jo vankilassa istumassa. 😠 😠	
		💬 Lainaa
28.12.09, 13:55		#4
NannaIhana ○	joo ihmettelen kans :o	

Picture 4. Examples of digital enthymemes as moralistic comments on Kaksplus.fi.

In addition to the judgment calling for social sanction (see Martin & White 2005: 52–54), interesting in Picture 4 is the use emoticons: the headwall ([O) in comments #2 and #3 and surprise (:O) in comment #4. These emoticons can be seen to embody some kind of frustration related to the news that the male celebrity is not arrested even though he had committed domestic violence. Like the English-language examples, also the Finnish examples indicate a way of sharing personal moral judgments in celebrity gossip discussions. These notions of digital enthymemes resonate with Chouliaraki's (2012: 3) remarks on self-mediation as mediated participation in which an inner moral self is the most authentic expression of publicness. Similarities can also be found with

post-humanitarian discourse in which personal moral considerations and individual action take place through effortless intimacy with technology (Chouliaraki 2010: 117). Such technological proximity on gossip sites may promote a belief that the 'self' is an autonomous moral judge who can easily support his or her inner moral imagination with quickly typed comments. Moreover, previous moralistic digital enthymemes posted to the site may persuade new participants to post comments that share the judgment, which creates a circle of digital enthymeming as visualized in Picture 5.
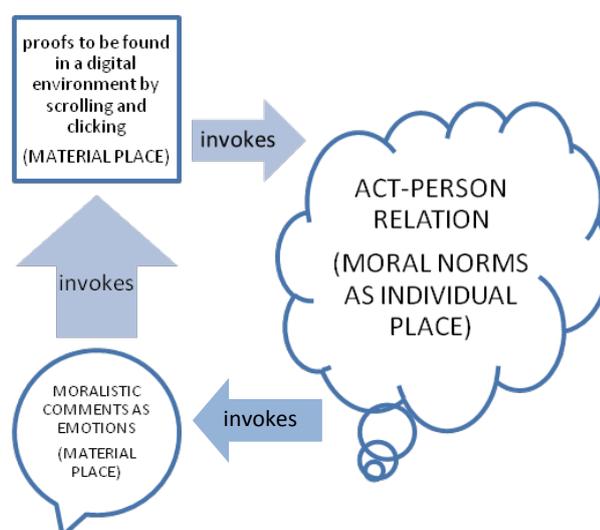
Picture 5. Digital enthymemes as moralistic comments.

As Picture 5 shows, digital enthymemes as moralistic comments entail searching for proofs in a digital environment, making individual moral considerations based on the proofs, and expressing emotions as moralistic comments. Although such participation can be seen to involve moral considerations, these considerations are merely psychological, not socially negotiated and do not, therefore, occur in common topoi. In other words, the community of the rhetor and the audience is built in material places – in conclusions that are visible on the screen. Earlier in this paper, the material level of discourse was linked with the concept of style in which persuasion derives from the particularities of an audience (see Burke 1969: 62). In these comments, the particularities of the audience can be seen in the style of pathos that invites other like-minded participants to express their emotions as results of inner moral considerations. Despite the internal, non-argumentative moral logic, the users of moralistic digital enthymemes share a common interest in the world of social affairs and provoke new

like-minded participants who think that Chris Brown is "a monster" or who wonder why Matti Nykänen is always set free.
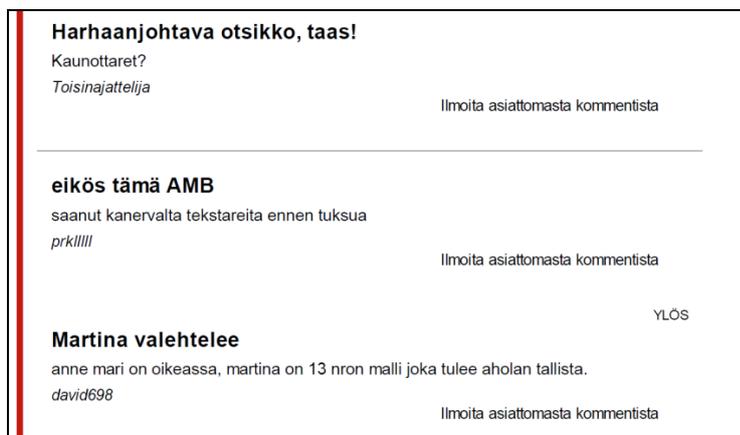
3.2. Digital enthymemes as amoralistic comments

Compared with digital enthymemes as moralistic comments, digital enthymemes as amoralistic comments utilized a less serious but still an aggressively judging tone of discourse. Characteristic of the amoralistic comments was non-reasoned and often ironic evaluation of celebrities as cultural products, or aesthetic and sexual "things". In Martin's and White's (2005) categories of evaluative language, amoralistic digital enthymemes would be mainly based on appreciation which is concerned of evaluation of things and phenomena (see ibid. 56). Moreover, the notion of amoralistic digital enthymemes resonates with Chouliaraki's (2011; 2012: 2) remarks that the artful quality of new media contents may become more important than social and moral criticism of technological participation. Since digital enthymemes as amoralistic comments were more typical of female fights discussions than those of domestic violence, I will bring out examples from online comment sections dealing with fighting female celebrities. I have categorized the amoralistic digital enthymemes into three main groups: 1) ranking and comparison (Pictures 6 and 7), 2) sexual mockery (Pictures 8 and 9), and 3) aesthetic mockery (Pictures 10 and 11). In addition to these mocking comments, both English-language and Finnish celebrity gossip discussions also involved amoralistic digital enthymemes that aggressively invented creative ways of killing a celebrity (such as using a celebrity as a human piñata but being disappointed when seeing that the celebrity's broken head were empty). Because of research ethics, however, such mockery concerning the killing of celebrities is not cited in this study. Pictures 6 and 7 show how online gossip participants ranked female celebrities as "things" and compared them with other public figures or things.

Picture 6. Examples of digital enthymemes as ranking and
comparison in ONTD Live Journal community

Comments ranking celebrities in Picture 6 can be seen to involve an ironic message: "[p]oor Megan" is ranked as "fav. VH1 reality star EVER" and as third in the ranking list "1. new york 2. pumkin 3. megan 4. buckwild." After posting the list, however, the discussion participant corrects it by saying in capital letters: "HOW COULD I FORGET LACEY,SHES SECOND." This enthymeming, I argue, has an ironic meaning. As a rhetorical style, irony is a figure of speech or writing utilized as a means of making a claim but meaning the opposite (Fahnestock 2012: 111). The ironic elements in the comments of Picture 6 can be distinguished in the homogeneous responses expressing like-mindedness ("she ranks up here for me too") and in the uses of capital letters highlighting the ridiculous nature of entertainment celebrities (see Fahnestock 2012: 113). Moreover, irony as a form of community building resonates with the ONTD forum's slogan, "The celebrities are disposable. The gossip is priceless." Through this motto, celebrity gossip discourse is evaluated as worthier than individual celebrities who only have a materialistic value to gossipers. Ranking and comparison was also utilized on Finnish comment sections, as can be seen in Picture 7 including comments on the gossip news "Scandalous beauties in the court right now."

> **Harhaanjohtava otsikko, taas!**
> Kaunottaret?
> *Toisinajattelija*
>   Ilmoita asiattomasta kommentista
>
> ---
>
> **eikös tämä AMB**
> saanut kanervalta tekstareita ennen tuksua
> *prklllll*
>   Ilmoita asiattomasta kommentista
>
>   YLÖS
>
> **Martina valehtelee**
> anne mari on oikeassa, martina on 13 nron malli joka tulee aholan tallista.
> *david698*
>   Ilmoita asiattomasta kommentista

Picture 7. Examples of digital enthymemes as
ranking and comparison on Seiska.fi.

In Picture 7, the first commenter expresses his/her mocking attitude "A misleading headline, again! Beauties?" as a response to the headline in which the female celebrities were called "Scandalous beauties." In this online discourse, the female celebrities are seen as cultural products having some kind of aesthetic essence that is not seen to match the way of evaluating them in the gossip headline. By comparing the pictures and the physical appearance of celebrities with the headline, the gossip participant reduces the celebrities to objects of his or her own "picture analysis"; they are not "beauties" (because they are not seen to look like such). The second commenter, on the other hand, starts a new topic by asking "Didn't this AMB [Anne-Mari Berg] get some text messages from kanerva before tuksu", which refers back to one of the most well-known political scandals in Finland, in which a minister of foreign affairs (Ilkka Kanerva) had to leave his job after an erotic dancer (Johanna Tukiainen, mockingly called "tuksu") publicly revealed the text messages the minister had sent to her. By pointing out the possibility that Anne-Mari Berg got text messages from the minister before Tukiainen, the gossip participant puts Anne-Mari Berg in comparison with the other, widely mocked female celebrity. The last comment in Picture 7 claims that "Martina is lying – anne mari is right, martina is number 13 model who comes from the ahola's stall2." The celebrity's label "number 13 model" is utilized as a means of ranking.

While Pictures 6 and 7 involve comments in which celebrities are seen as cultural products to be compared with other celebrities and cultural artifacts, celebrities in Pictures 8 and 9 are mocked as sexual objects.

2 Ahola's stall refers to a Finnish model agency.
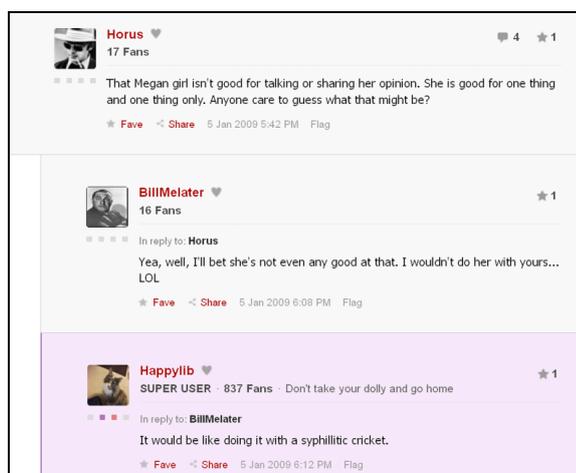
Picture 8. Examples of digital enthymemes as

sexual mockery on Huffingtonpost.com.

At least two commenters (Horus and BillMelater) in Picture 8 have male identities, which reinforces the notion that the mockery is a sexist discourse oppressing women. In the picture, the first commenter implies that having sex is the only thing that the celebrity is good for ("She is good for one thing and one thing only") and provokes other participants on the site to respond ("Anyone care to guess what that might be?"). As a response to the first commenter, the second participant types "Yea, well, I'll bet she's not even good at that. I wouldn't do her with yours... LOL" to reinforce the sexist mockery. The last comment in Picture 8 ("It would be like doing it with a syphillitic cricket") makes the style of the sexual ridicule even more intense. Part of the playfulness is that the actual topic (having sex with the celebrity) stays in between lines. Sexual mockery was also part of Finnish forums, as the comments in Picture 9 show.

Picture 9. Examples of digital enthymemes as
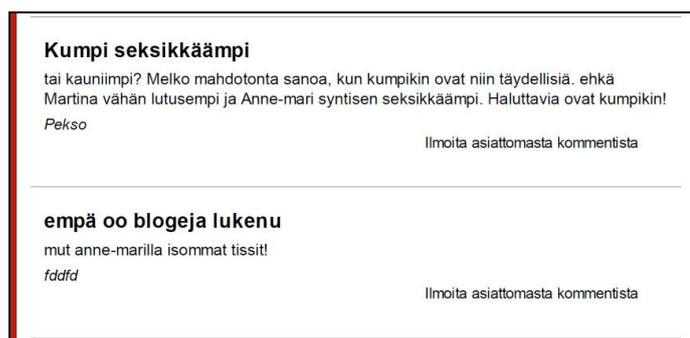
sexual mockery on Suomi24.fi.

In Picture 9, the first participant types "Good flesh ;)) Pretty comic :)) The fat of the miss candidates gets darker when they are boxing :))" to which the other participant replies "I wouldn't be afraid at all if such a little bitch attacked me in a bar..on the contrary, it would be nice to have a match." As in Picture 8, also in Picture 9 celebrities are seen as corporeal objects playing a role in relation to the gossip participants' bodily desires expressed with ironic tones. Comments involving sexual mockery as the justification of oppression of the female body have a lot of similarities with aesthetic mockery included in Pictures 10 and 11.
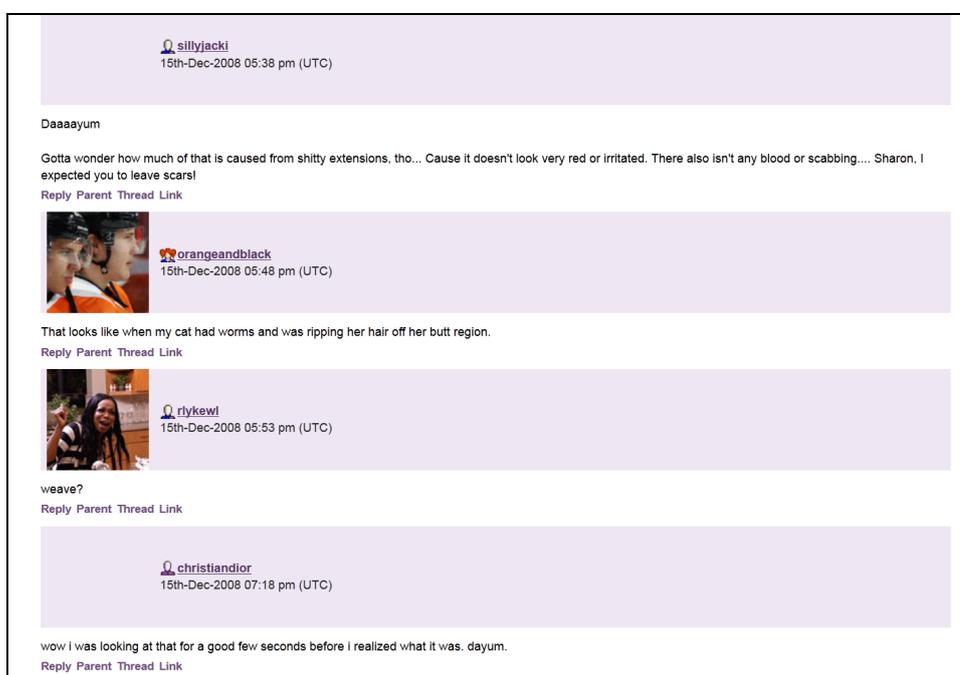
Picture 10. Examples of digital enthymemes as
aesthetic mockery in ONTD Live Journal community

The comments in Picture 10 are responses to a picture in which Megan Hauserman shows her hair after having the alleged fight in which Sharon Osbourne was reported to have pulled her hair. Again, the playful and non-serious tone of commenting is plain to see. For instance, the expression dayum (in the last comment in Picture 10) or exaggerated as Daaaayum (in the first comment in Picture 10) indicates a happy surprise related to voyeuristic pleasures of seeing the picture and reading the gossip news story. As Martin and White (2005: 62) would argue, such linguistic choices invoke an emotional reaction, rather than directly tell how the "emoter" feels. In other

words, these participants of online gossip perform rather than articulate their reactions. The first commenter also expresses disappointment when seeing the picture ("...it doesn't look very red or irritated. There also isn't any blood or scabbing.... Sharon, I expected you to leave scars!"), which, in this context, makes sense as a ridicule. Moreover, in the second comment, the participant compares the physical appearance of Megan's head with the butt region of a cat having worms, which not only shares with the first participant the right to mockery, but also makes the mocking tone even coarser. The third ("weave?") and the last commenter ("wow i was looking at that for a good few seconds before i realized what it was. dayum") continue the aesthetic mockery by indicating that they were not even sure what is in the picture. In Finnish comments in Picture 11, the aesthetic mockery was linked with ranking, comparison, and sexual mockery, indicating how the main types of amoralistic digital enthymemes may overlap with one another.


> **Kumpi seksikkäämpi**
> tai kauniimpi? Melko mahdotonta sanoa, kun kumpikin ovat niin täydellisiä. ehkä
> Martina vähän lutusempi ja Anne-mari syntisen seksikkäämpi. Haluttavia ovat kumpikin!
> *Pekso*
> Ilmoita asiattomasta kommentista
>
> **empä oo blogeja lukenu**
> mut anne-marilla isommat tissit!
> *fddfd*
> Ilmoita asiattomasta kommentista

Picture 11. Examples of digital enthymemes as
aesthetic mockery on Seiska.fi.

The first commenter in Picture 11 asks "Which one is sexier or more beautiful? Pretty impossible to say because they both are so perfect. perhaps Martina is a little bit cuter and Anne-Mari sinfully sexier. They both are desirable!" which is followed by the comment "I haven't read their blogs but anne-mari has bigger tits!". This aesthetic mockery makes these celebrities voyeuristic objects of sexual desires and sexist oppression. Moreover, evident in the comments of Picture 11 is also a comparison between these two celebrities (which of them is sexier or more beautiful or has bigger tits), which aims at contributing to the ranking of celebrities as cultural products having certain empirically observable qualities.

Digital enthymemes as amoralistic comments highlight materialism in the evaluation of people more than digital enthymemes as moralistic comments because

the amoralistic digital enthymemes completely block the way to moral thinking. The only thing that matters in amoralistic digital enthymemes is the style of discourse, as Picture 12 illustrates.
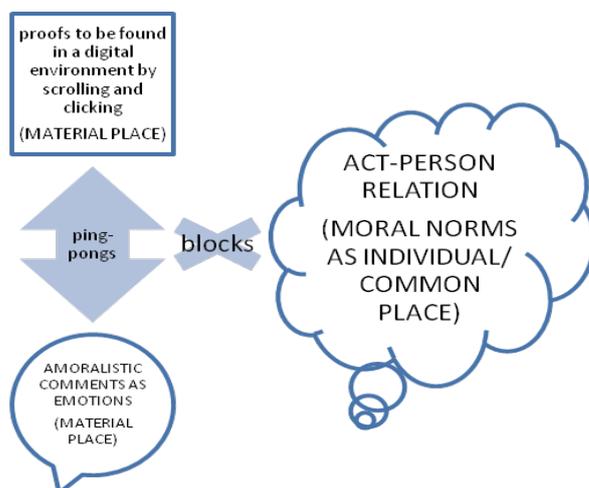
Picture 12. Digital enthymemes as amoralistic comments.

Amoralisti digital enthymemes make celebrities dehumanized objects of stylistic evaluation, which is justified by proofs that are to be found in the digital environment. Such a shared way of creating an argument in the digital space can be seen to hinder moral thinking (be it individual or common), as Picture 12 shows. While the moralistic digital enthymeme involves interest in social issues of celebrities, the amoralistic digital enthymeme can be seen as new media participation that is entirely dependent on the way of evaluating people as "things" and treating their bodies and body parts as objects of concrete values, be they sexual, aesthetic, voyeuristic or other. Moreover, Susan Barnes (2001: 42) argues that because interruptions and other social cues keeping discussion participants aware of group dynamics are missing in an internet discussion, online conversation favors "a ping pong kind of arguing" in which frequent disagreement keeps discussion going on (see also Shirky 1995: 44). However, the digital enthymeme, particularly in its amoralistic form, is characterized by like-mindedness with the surrounding envicronment. This like-mindedness is realized as a ping-pong kind of relation between consecutive amoralistic posts in a comment section. Consequently, in celebrity gossip online, "ping-ponging" is not related to disagreement as much as it is related to accelerated repetition as if the speed of the ping-pong ball would get faster when the competition of who makes the most inflammatory comment on celebrities gets tougher (cf. Meyers 2010: 266). Such ping-ponging, therefore, is a

good example of reproduction in a digital environment (see Lanham 2006: 12). A style is shared when it becomes multiple.

4. Conclusion: Digital enthymemes and moral irresponsibility

In this article, I have examined moral and rhetorical challenges of a popular new media discourse by focusing on the digital enthymeme as an argument that involves a claim but abandons reason because proofs for the claim can be found in the surrounding digital environment of links, texts, pictures, and videos. Because the evaluation of person and his/her acts can be seen as the basic pair of moral claim and reason (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1951), this paper started from the notion of act-person argumentation. The digital enthymeme was approached as a separation technique in which the evaluation of acts as an explanation for the evaluation of people is missing. Moreover, the comment sections dealing with domestic violence and female celebrities' fights were chosen for the study because violence involving celebrities is a popular topic that tends to bring important social meanings to the surface (see Fiske 1989: 127–130).

The aim of this paper was to explore what kind of moral rhetoric is involved in digital enthymemes concerning celebrities. This aim was approached through two research questions: 1) what kinds of digital enthymemes are used by English- and Finnish-speaking online participants commenting on gossip about violent celebrities and 2) how these enthymemes operate as moral arguments on the level of style (discourse itself as a persuasive material) and in relation to moral norms as a communally shared purpose. In general, digital enthymemes were more typical of English-language than Finnish discussions of celebrities. This indicates that perhaps the digital enthymeme as an argument avoiding the evaluation of acts is a way of making social judgments and community building as easy as possible for participants who may come from various national or cultural backgrounds.

To answer to the first question, this study utilized an analysis of evaluative language (Martin & White 2005) through which two types of digital enthymemes were found, namely, moralistic and amoralistic. While moralistic digital enthymemes evaluate celebrities as 'good' or 'bad' human beings who deserve sympathy or antipathy, amoralistic digital enthymemes dehumanize celebrities and rank them as cultural products or evaluate them as corporeal objects having certain sexual or aesthetic qualities. To answer to the second research question, this study utilized a rhetorical argumentation analysis in which the material discourse (specific topoi) was seen as

linguistic cues whose relation to conceptual major premises (common topoi) as communally negotiated moral norms was examined (about the method see e.g. Miller & Selzer 1985: 315). According to the results, neither moralistic nor amoralistic digital enthymemes aim at negotiation of moral norms in a community. While moralistic digital enthymemes invoke personalized considerations of moral norms, amoralistic digital enthymemes block any relation to moral norms and manifest, therefore, an anarchistic freedom from rules. Paradoxically, the shared interest in reducing the evaluation of people to aesthetic, sexual, or cultural taste may be a way of avoiding moral uncertainty by creating easy and entertaining togetherness beyond national borders. This may explain why English-language online environments, especially, favor amoralistic digital enthymemes.

The moralistic digital enthymemes were typical of discourses surrounding gossip about celebrities involved in domestic violence. In such digital enthymemes, online gossip participants were eager to condemn male celebrities often in harsh words and show fellow-feeling for female celebrities by typing short but emotionally intensive comments. The notion of digital enthymemes as moralistic comments resonates with Chouliaraki's (2010: 117) remarks on post-humanitarian style that is characterized by "no-time engagement with technology" in which the "expectations of effortless immediacy, the most prominent element of contemporary consumer culture, are increasingly populating the moral imagination of humanitarianism." Moreover, as Chouliaraki (2010: 117) continues, such new media participation is also characterized by the absence of reasons and morality explaining why technological action is needed. The moral persuasiveness of these digital enthymemes is based on a silent claim that individuals have the right to express their emotions in public and build moral norms inside their own minds, without taking a communal responsibility.

Digital enthymemes as amoralistic comments, on the other hand, try to challenge moral seriousness by dehumanizing celebrities, often with mocking tones, and reducing their characters to corporeal and aesthetic figures. These enthymemes were typical of female fights discussions in which moral condemnation of "violent celebrities" was not the main point. These notions of amoralistic digital enthymemes have similarities with Chouliaraki's (2011: 364) remarks on playful and self-oriented textualities which are concerned of morality of irony turning solidarity into self-centred consumerism and reproducing already existing power-structures. It is evident that the amoralistic digital enthymemes are born in the context of situated meanings and values (see Chouliaraki 2011: 368). A lot of these comments can be seen as a discourse mocking celebrities only when analyzed in relation to the surrounding textual, visual,

and cultural environment. In celebrity gossip discourse, the power relations particularly concern sexist dominance over the woman's body and character by promoting participation in which women are dehumanized and mocked.

Sexist participation in celebrity gossip online is not, however, necessarily a masculine discourse oppressing women. As Kirsty Fairclough's (2008) study suggests, the discourse evaluating the female physical appearance in celebrity gossip online may come under the guise of feminist empowerment in which women make evaluative meanings of female bodies in the name of freedom. In addition to gender, the mediated circulation of emotions in celebrity culture is related to questions of class: the comments of mockery typically target relatively young, lower middle class women (see Tyler 2008; Paasonen & Pajala 2010). The persuasion in such discourse is based on the right to express temptations, desires and likings and dislikings, which, in the name of the freedom of expression, deny the role of moral thinking in new media participation. Instead of civic morality, the amoralistic digital enthymemes can be seen to construct a morality of style in which the shared taste becomes the norm that rules the community's judgment and thus ties community members together, which is typical of contemporary popular culture (see Brummett 2008: 102–103).

Why is digital enthymeming, then, so common to celebrity gossip online? I argue that there are at least two main reasons explaining the popularity of non-reasoned new media discourse. First, participants using digital enthymemes let one another pass the test of trustworthiness perhaps too easily. These remarks closely relate to Miller's notions of ethos online. According to her, we have a natural need to see our interlocutors as trustworthy, which may explain why online participants assume things that are not articulated in the interaction itself (see Miller 2001). In computer-mediated environments, where cues of the other mind are minimal, we often need to optimize both the 'other' and ourselves in order to communicate (Miller 2001: 270–271). Such optimizing abandoning criticism also relates to visuality in online environments. What can be seen has an authentic truth value, which, of course, is often a mere illusion (see Finnegan 2001). In celebrity gossip online, the visual effectiveness is evident when pictures of celebrities and their body parts are taken for granted and judged as metonymic evidence justifying the mockery attacking their character. When celebrity gossip commenters type their comments online, they expect others to see the same textual cues, pictures, and videos which they treat as the reference points of their own comments. Consequently, reasoning online becomes unnecessary, something that may even threaten affective intensity as an experience of togetherness. But the material context is dynamically changing through the constant

updating of links and contents and cannot, therefore, serve as the solid common ground for online participants. Second, digital enthymemes are based on emotional connectivity as the shared self-interest. Lev Manovich (2001: 269) deals with such emotional connectivity by bringing out that a digital environment is a subjective space because users utilize its architecture to reflect their own movements and emotions. In celebrity culture, this individual emotional connectivity has a tendency to become affectively and socially "sticky" as clusters of emotions (typically negative ones) are constantly linked to particular celebrity phenomena in the popular media and on their online forums (see Paasonen & Pajala 2010; about emotional stickiness, see Ahmed 2004). Popular culture seems to provide a context of evaluation in which women, especially, are dehumanized, that is, "amoralized". This may explain the higher percent of amoralistic than moralistic digital enthymemes in discussions of female celebrities' fights. The results of moralistic and amoralistic enthymemes might have been different if the discussion concerned for instance male politicians who are taken seriously and judged as morally responsible societal authorities.

Digital enthymemes lack routes to common topoi – to abstract places natural of human reasoning – and benefits of these enthymemes can, therefore, be measured in specific topoi only, that is, according to Grimaldi (1972: 134), material propositions of rhetoric. Since the digital enthymeme does not support our common humanity, it can support mere institutions or ideologies, such as capitalistic systems of celebrity media that are ruled by concrete values measured in instant benefits. Common to both moralistic and amoralistic digital enthymemes is materialism highlighted in the clicking and typing behavior when following gossip news and sending comments to gossip forums. Such online behavior can be seen to match the commercial interests of many celebrity gossip sites and gossip media whose profits are dependent on the number of users or readers and their clicks and comments. Carefully reasoned critical argumentation as the negotiation based on abstract values (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 2000 [1969]: 79) takes more time and effort and would not do such an instant materialistic favor. Moreover, particularly the idea of amoralistic digital enthymemes also resonates with what Robert Hariman (1992) calls courtly style. According to Hariman (1992: 162), the courtly style is a public discourse that reduces the ethics and morality of a community to (mediated) spectacles around public persons' body parts, which is a sign of social immobility that only reinforces the already-existing hierarchies of a community through power-spectacular displays. In other words, the courtly style tries to direct public focus to issues that hinder moral negotiation of social inequalities. Since the amoralistic digital enthymeme reduced young (lower middle-class) women,

especially, to their corporeal figures, we can see it as an ideological way of paralyzing moral criticism. Amoralistic digital enthymemes, just like the courtly style, try to make such serious counter-arguments irrelevant in which ideological power structures are challenged. In amoralistic digital enthymemes, it is a discourse-external authority, rather than communal moral negotiation or individual moral imagination, which has the power to rule and set norms for the discourse. Consequently, the online commenters using amoralistic digital enthymemes reproduce the meanings and values (such as physical appearance, voyeurism, and sexism) typical of celebrity media institutions, which can be seen to reinforce rather than challenge the hegemony of media-made celebrity culture (cf. Meyers 2012). In other words, the amoralistic digital enthymeme, especially, not only hinders criticism but can be seen to support patriarchal domination through the seemingly power-free modes of celebrity gossip discourse.

The digital enthymeme does not exist by accident. On the contrary, its persuasiveness is based on technologically promoted self-interest in which moral responsibility as the care for the other is abandoned when embracing the individual freedom of choice and expression (see Silverstone 2003, pp. 480–483; 2007, p. 173). This self-interest is, perhaps, intertwined with (neo)liberal consumerism at the center of which lies the emotional self without true responsibilities (see Barney 2004: 36–37; Chouliaraki 2013: 179–180, 185–186). By introducing the digital enthymeme as a new concept for communication and media studies, this study has suggested a critical tool to approach emotional involvement in new media participation from a rhetorical and moral perspective.

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ONLINE CELEBRITY GOSSIP, MORAL DISIDENTIFICATION, AND *ETHOS*:
Exploring the Rhetorical Grounds of Celebrity Mockery

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Abstract: Typical of celebrity culture in online spaces is the mockery of and disidentification with celebrities. This study defines moral disidentification as a rhetorically meaningful positioning in which people evaluate others without sympathetically identifying with them. Based on the idea of online environments as normative sites where the *ethos* of co-participants is controlled, this study explores the rhetorical grounds of celebrity mockery in new media contexts by focusing on types of normativity utilized to support moral disidentification with celebrities in an online community for celebrity gossip (Oh No They Didn't). According to the findings, online gossipers support moral disidentification through five types of normativity (*virtual; voyeuristic; playful; disparate;* and *aesthetic*). These types of normativity contribute to the *ethos* of clever, self-empowering participants who argue that celebrities should not be seen as authentic or real but openly mocked and ridiculed because they are "fair game" made by the media industry. This study discusses such ethos in relation to ethical theories of late modernity and argues that the rhetorical grounds of celebrity mockery lie in the contradiction of *phronesis* and *arete* in online gossipers' *ethos*.

Keywords: *Arete*, celebrity, *ethos*, *eunoia*, morality, online community, *phronesis*, late modernity, rhetoric

1   Introduction

\#   Daaaayum

Gotta wonder how much of that is caused from shitty extensions, tho... Cause it doesn't look very red or irritated. There also isn't any blood or scabbing.... Sharon, I expected you to leave scars! (sillyjacki)

\#   That looks like when my cat had worms and was ripping her hair off her butt region. (orangeandblack)

\#   weave? (rlykewl)

\#   wow i was looking at that for a good few seconds before i realized what it was. dayum. (christiandior)

\#   who the fuck goes to the hospital because their hair was ripped out? Its not bleeding, it's not even red. What the fuck do you think they are going to do about it? (captain_flappy)

\#   LOL, do not fuck with Sharon Osbourne, bb. (jessashoutbaby)

The comments cited above are reactions to a picture of Playboy model and reality TV personality Megan Hauserman, which was posted on the website of the *LiveJournal* gossip community *Oh No They Didn't (ONTD)* on 15 December 2008. In the picture, the celebrity shows her hair after the fight filmed on the TV show *Rock of Law, Charm School* in which the host Sharon Osbourne attacked Hauserman by pulling out her hair extensions. The attack was preceded by Hauserman's comment that Osbourne is famous only through her husband Ozzy Osbourne. In the ONTD online community, this gossip news was seen as staged. It provoked humorous comments with the purpose of mocking Hauserman for her fame, which was considered undeserved. Such celebrity bashing is linked to media-savvy readings of an audience aware of the media industries' strategies to attract attention (see Ahva, et al. 194–195). In other words, readings involving a critical and antipathetic stance toward celebrities are made from the role/position of a media audience who know that celebrities are not real individuals but mere objects of "fair game." In contemporary celebrity culture, particularly in new media environments, such as in blogs and comment sections, celebrity mockery is a popular way of media participation (e.g. Fairclough; Meyers, *Gossip Talk and Online Community*; Meyers, *Dishing Dirt*; Eronen, "It's so wrong yet so funny"; Eronen, "Moral Argumentation as a Rhetorical Practice").

In this paper, such mocking of celebrities is called *moral disidentification*. By moral disidentification, I mean a rhetorically meaningful positioning in which people evaluate others without sympathetically identifying with them. Joke Hermes and Erin Ann Meyers categorize such disidentification as frivolous gossip readings, while Lilie Chouliaraki deals with disidentification when speaking about ironic spectatorship. As a phenomenon of celebrity culture, frivolous gossip readings – both in face-to-face gossip and online – can be defined as disidentification with celebrities, resulting from the rejection of dominant values and morals (see Hermes 121, 133-141; Meyers, *Gossip Talk*: 30-32, 53, 169, 283, 309). According to Joke Hermes (121, 133–141), frivolous gossip readings oppose serious ones in which the celebrity gossip audience treats celebrities as individuals similar to themselves.

Moreover, the term "ironic spectator," as Chouliaraki argues, characterizes Western audiences who distance themselves from suffering others when consuming humanitarian appeals, news, and concerts or participating in celebrity culture with a doubt on their own treatment of mediated others on the basis of their common humanity. Such disidentified ways of positioning the self in relation to the other derive from the late-modern disbelief in moral "grand narratives" of altruistic benevolence and skepticism toward political morality's universal justice (9-15, 172-180). The ironic spectatorship, according to

Chouliaraki's remarks, is characteristic of contemporary media participation in which people know that media try to persuade them through illusions and fantasies.

Common to frivolous gossip readings and ironic spectatorship is the contribution to *ethos*, the credibility of the rhetor, through the postmodern rejection of the moral worth of others who appear as mediated faces. Ethos is central in the meaning-making practices surrounding celebrity phenomena, for being a celebrity and evaluating celebrities involves the art of the self. Online environments provide new, intriguing possibilities for this art, as P. David Marshall suggests in his article "The promotion and presentation of the self." Interestingly, in online comment sections of celebrity gossip, autobiographical confessions and testimonies as narrative ways of taking celebrities "personally" are particularly rare (Eronen "Autobiographical Moralizing"). According to Shani Orgad, moreover, online discourse (e.g. blogs, online comments) seems to reject the narrative structure when it allows "no ending" and no moral explanation of media contents (*Media Representation* 132, 195-196). These remarks make one assume that text-based online contexts in particular are prone to impersonal participation that highlights what Laura Gurak calls "group *ethos*." According to her analysis, group ethos is the collective force of an online community, which contributes to insularity and rejects differences in the name of conformism (255).

Accepting and rejecting certain *ethos* constructions of others are central discourse-internal moral practices in communication. As Jörg R. Bergmann ("Introduction" 287-288) argues, the evaluation of people and their behavior carries risks for language users, and breaking the norms of a community is likely to lead to "counter-moralization" as a discourse-internal moral phenomenon in which the moralizers themselves become targets of moralizing. The understanding of morality in its discourse-internal role highlights the meaning of rhetorical speeches (such as online comments) as *ethos*-constructing acts that are morally controlled. Online communities, seen here as the processes of evolving togetherness in cyberspace (Fernback), are dependent on such discourse-internal normativity. If participants have broken the shared norms of an online community, they are punished – their entire profile may even be deleted (e.g. Reid 118-120, 130-132; Orgad "The Internet as a Moral Space" 37-38). Although moral disidentification in new media participation has been analyzed previously, studying the ways it is normatively supported in the context of online celebrity gossip remains a gap to be filled.

The aim of this paper is to explore the rhetorical grounds of celebrity mockery in new media contexts by focusing on types of normativity utilized to support moral

disidentification with celebrities in an online community for celebrity gossip (Oh No They Didn't). Oh No They Didn't (ONTD) was chosen for this study because its interest in morally disidentifying readings is very evident and can even be seen in the community's slogan: "The celebrities are disposable. The gossip is priceless." In other words, celebrities evaluated on ONTD have no personal moral worth but the online participants regard the gossip about celebrities as valuable.

2 Morality, identification, and late-modern artificiality

In this study, morality is understood as a rhetorical practice of positioning oneself in relation to the other people. In terms of rhetorical theory, such moral positioning can be understood as Burkean identification in which rhetors put themselves in the place of other people or objects and by so doing suggest that "I" am (or want to be) similar with another in this or that respect (20–21). Furthermore, moral positioning contributes to *ethos* – the character of a rhetor, such as that of an online gossip participant. The idea of a credible *ethos* varies according to moral stances dependent on the targets of (dis)identification. One such moral stance is moral disidentification with mediated others, differing fundamentally from Adam Smith's classical idea of moral (sympathetic) identification (see Smith 3–7). In moral identification, the self as a moral agent imagines things happening to the other as if they were happening to the self. Hence, moral identification involves the idea that the self is morally present but still separate from the other. Moral disidentification, on the contrary, can be seen as "role ethics." According to Alasdair MacIntyre's work *Ethics and Politics*, complex societies involve social structures that require citizens to act in a context-bound role that may contradict the moral responsibility to treat others as responsive beings. In contexts favoring role-playing, the excellence in role performance is regarded as a virtue that substitutes moral virtues (200). In an extreme case, as MacIntyre goes on to say, agents exhibit no awareness of responsibilities or norms beyond their roles in a particular sphere of activity (202). However, the way role-players reject moral perspectives that do not fit with a certain role is not simply the lack or absence of the self; it occurs as an active refusal and denial (202). In other words, role-playing is based on conscious choices that make the role become real.

Particularly in young people's new media participation, the borders between role positions and the self as a moral agent may become blurred, as Howard Gardner argues (99-106). In such participation, people trust the online performer that reveals only minimal cues of itself. As the findings of a recently conducted study

suggest, those who are deeply involved in online environments tend to feel moral emotions as intensely in their experiences on the screen as in their social relationships behind it (see Gabriels et al.). The blurring of the boundaries between role-playing and moral identification becomes evident when role-playing is seen in conflict with, but is nevertheless preferred to, moral identification. Considering media content shown to the audience, such blurred boundaries involve meaning-making struggles between seeing media characters as vulnerable human beings and treating them as mere objects of pleasure. Specifically, disidentifying with celebrities by treating them as disposable, as the slogan of ONTD states, indicates seeing celebrities as materialistic products that are replaceable and therefore made for the audience to consume (Cross and Littler).

In addition to MacIntyre's remarks on role ethics, disidentification with celebrities becomes meaningful through the idea of late-modern artificiality. By late modernism, I mean the era of culture and communication where rhetors and their audiences are faced with uncertainty concerning what is real and what should be taken seriously (Bauman *Liquid Modernity*). Often late modernism and postmodernism are seen as synonyms. However, I understand postmodernism as a stage in which the aesthetic and superficial is seen as the only truth. In this study, I prefer *late modernism* to postmodernism because the real and aesthetic are still negotiable, which is evident on ONTD.

In his book *Postmodern Ethics*, Zygmunt Bauman argues that we can distinguish two main targets of identification: the proximate Other and the distant Third. While proximity is the relationship connecting the Self and the Other on an emotional and moral level, distance is the realm of justice and social rules that comes with the Third who is also a sort of other but a distant one, an outsider (112–116, 132). The existence of the Third before the Self refers to the domain of society where relationships are faceless, stereotype-based and group-focused, not personal or private (112–116, 130). In online celebrity gossip, the Self represents gossip participants who position themselves in relation to celebrities and online co-gossipers. In such new media contexts, neither celebrities nor co-gossipers are individuals but they represent faceless groups. In Bauman's terms, identification with celebrities, as well as with co-gossipers, would be a sign of "aesthetic proximity" representing the nearness of the crowd that effortlessly wipes out distance (*Postmodern Ethics* 115; 130–132). This is because both celebrities and online gossipers appear as mediated faces who never reveal their own personality.

Another fruitful theory that helps to explain the artificiality of contemporary media culture is Jean Baudrillard's theory of *Simulacra and Simulation* which he uses to make sense of the relationships between aesthetic (or symbolic)

representations and reality. Literally, the concept of *simulacra* means similarities between the real world item (such as a tree) and its representation (a picture of the tree). To distinguish what is real and meaningful to people living with copies of reality, Baudrillard deals with first-, second-, and third-order simulacrum. The first order is associated with the premodern age in which human-made artifacts are unique copies and clearly artificial objects of a real item, such as the Mona Lisa painting. In the second order typical of the modern age of industrial revolution, copies try to mimic reality, such as celebrity images that represent the individual living in Western society. In the third order, which is characteristic of postmodernism, the relationship between reality and symbols is no longer seen as relevant. The third order of simulacra is simulation beyond true or false (21). Thus in the third order, it is irrelevant whether celebrities are morally good or bad individuals because the audience is supposed to know that they are artificial and merely playing a role made up by the gossip media industry.

In what follows, I will discuss moral disidentification in rhetorical terms. I first deal with the history of gossip and contextualize moral disidentification of celebrities in the surrounding *kairos* – a temporal and spatial context. In a rhetorical sense, understanding *kairos* is important since it is provides an explanation of why moral identification and disidentification are competitive ways of constructing and controlling *ethos* in celebrity gossip. After defining the *kairos* of moral disidentification, I will describe the material and method of the present study, which is followed by the findings and conclusion.

3   The *kairos* of moral disidentification

In rhetorical studies, *kairos* is typically defined as the socially perceived space-time (e.g. Miller "Foreword"): it is the "right timing" and "right placing" of a speech (Stephenson). In this paper, accordingly, *kairos* is seen as the cultural moment and material context in which the rhetor's (the speaker's or writer's) speech is persuasive to its audience.

3.1   *Gossip and its two kairotic turns as cultural moments*

Gossip is a genre in which people evaluate individuals not present in the conversation and by so doing contribute to the normative achievement of social integration in a community (Bergmann *Discreet Indiscretions*). In other words, gossip never merely concerns individuals, but rather contributes to the moral norms and values of a community. Because gossip is a genre that establishes

social bonds between interlocutors (151), it is a rhetorical genre in which the rhetor (the speaker or writer) chooses the addressed listener or reader.

Before the era of mass-media celebrities, gossip was limited mostly to the private sphere, as Bergmann suggests (59-67). According to Bergmann, in private sphere gossip, the gossip producer, the gossip recipient, and the targets of gossip form a mobile triad in which the roles of gossip participants and those gossiped about may trade places (45-70). Characteristic of private sphere gossip are "discreet indiscretions" as more or less cautious evaluations of people, which means that gossipers are aware that their own reputation is also at stake. Private sphere gossip, moreover, involves a potential for moral identification, since it is typical to negotiate moral principles and social norms as situated meanings with the purpose of understanding the individual(s) who have become topics of gossip discourse (130-134).

While private sphere gossip concerns small communities, celebrity gossip was born to touch the "masses," as Bergmann suggests (50-51). I call this first kairotic turn of gossip *the mass-mediated turn*. Unlike private sphere gossip, gossip representing the mass-mediated turn is not based on a circle of acquaintanceship that includes gossip participants and their targets (51). Celebrities, therefore, are "fair game" for mass-mediated moral talk that does not threaten the reputation of gossipers. Nevertheless, celebrities tend to be treated as if they were real individuals to be identified with. In the mass-mediated turn, such serious gossip readings (see Hermes) are legitimate ways of moral positioning. Thus moral positioning similar to private gossip is the source of gossiper's *ethos*. In Baudrillard's terms, identification with celebrities would be a practice of second-order simulacrum in which celebrity as a media-made character is treated as real. In this phase, celebrities are role players and gossipers make their proximity for sale through their consumer habits when identifying with celebrities.

Today, various online gossip sites and celebrity gossip blogs are popular media environments where judgments of people can be found (e.g. Fairclough; Meyers, *Gossip Talk*; Meyers, "Blogs Give Regular People the Chance to Talk Back"; Meyers, *Dishing Dirt*; Eronen, "It's so wrong yet so funny"; Eronen, "Moral Argumentation as a Rhetorical Practice"). Online gossip is part of the so-called *demotic turn* where those without public status can participate in public discourse (see Turner). While the mass-mediated turn of gossip already put the individual – the celebrity – at the center of public attention, it was the demotic turn that made ordinary people as active gossip producers visible.

At the same time that the circle of gossip expanded and relationships based on acquaintanceship emerged on a global scale, relationships of what Jan Fernback

calls "convenient togetherness" came to characterize media participation more widely. According to Carolyn R. Miller, online togetherness involves emotional connectivity between interlocutors ("Writing in a Culture of Simulation"; "Expertise and Agency" 205-212). Such an emotional bond between those making judgments is also involved in online celebrity mockery. One central emotion contributing to disidentification with celebrities by strengthening the sympathetic togetherness between interlocutors is *Schadenfreude*, as Steve Cross and Jo Littler point out. In celebrity culture, Schadenfreude means enjoying a celebrity's downfall. It manifests itself as celebrity mockery, being a realization of a culturally and economically closed system that "cannot position itself in relation to wider social formations or cultural ecologies" (414). In other words, Schadenfreude is part of the logic of gossip media industry that stimulates gossip readers' interest in judging celebrity without giving the readers anything beyond the topic of celebrity.

Smith categorizes hatred and resentment, the feelings that provoke Schadenfreude, into antisocial passions in which "our sympathy is divided between the person who feels them and the person who is the object of them" (31–35). In other words, the sympathy involved in moral disidentification has both an exclusive and inclusive function. It creates proximity to co-gossipers at the expense of celebrities who are disidentified with because of seeing them as artificial. This is where the third-order simulacrum as a form of serious role-playing takes place, and the co-gossipers trade places with celebrities as targets of identification. The paradox of such proximity is that celebrity gossipers also are role players who use the artificiality of celebrity as the grounds of their own role-playing. In what follows, a sympathetic relation between online participants is discussed in relation to online environments as material, specifically visual, contexts.

3.2   *The material kairos of moral disidentification*

The material *kairos* in new media is based on modes, media, and the technologies of product, reproduction, and distribution (Sheridan et al. 4-5). One example of such technology is an online comment section (such as the one on ONTD) that allows participants to post comments and pictures and reply to others' comments. Such environments easily make things and people appear as material, particularly visual, objects to which emotional reactions are attached. In general, emotional reactions as bodily sensations and feelings attached to *objects* are called affect (Ahmed 82-100; Paasonen: 22-23, 54-55, 232-236). Affect, therefore, is a specific group of emotions targeting material objects rather than subjects seen as

morally responsible. In classical treatises on rhetoric, affect is seen as a negative emotion. For instance for Quintilian, the "affectus" involves dark emotions, such as anger aroused by hatred (see Katula 8). Because Schadenfreude toward celebrities goes hand in hand with moral disidentification with them (see Cross and Littler), it can be seen as an emotion with "affective" force.

According to Paasonen, because of the focus on the "visual" in online environments, affective reactions to objects are not individual or private discourse but rather become collective means of social interaction (232-236). Moreover, communication highlighting the visual also makes this visual itself a topic of meta-disagreement according to which the shared style of communication should be respected. In online discussion forums, as Shani Orgad argues, the reciprocity between like-minded online participants is often the preferable form of communication and those who do not respect it may be excluded (37-38). These remarks go hand in hand with the notion of "group *ethos*" as the sign of collective, not individual, credibility (see Gurak).

A demonstrative example of online reciprocity can be found in Miller's article "Writing in a Culture of Simulation". In that paper, she describes that a conversation with artificial-intelligence agents, such as with the artificial, MUD (Multi User Domain) -player Julia, created for other MUD-players an illusion of interacting with a human other. Although Julia was a robot, and therefore quite literally an artificial being, her credibility as an example of role-playing is striking. The fact that Julia could not *personally* produce anything creative did not make her less credible. On the contrary, people liked Julia precisely because she was able to contribute to reciprocity, such as by sharing humor with users (270). In this example, Julia is, literally, a role-player: her character was automated to act in a certain way and she was *not* able to make evaluations and judgments independently from her creator and the users of the program. Her ability to play a role, however, was effectively persuasive. In other words, this example indicates that expectations for role-playing in online environments may challenge the idea of trust and credibility as the sincerity of the "self" (Gardner 99-106). Interestingly, Miller argues that such *ethos* of role-playing, despite its highly emotional rhetoric, is the *ethos* of intelligent agents ("Expertise and Agency" 208-212). Such *ethos* of intelligent agents is obvious in online celebrity mockery in which celebrity gossipers present themselves as highly media-savvy participants, aware of the artificial nature of celebrities.

4   On the analysis: Material and method

The comments cited and analyzed in this study derive from two discussion threads on ONTD entitled "Megan shows her head after attack by Sharon Osbourne, remains butterface while doing so" and "Sharon O. attacked me!" In order to analyze comments from several participants, I chose two threads instead of one. Particular criteria for collecting a sample from the threads were needed. From the discussion "Megan shows her head after attack by Sharon Osbourne, remains butterface while doing so," the first 75 comments were included in the material, whereas from the discussion "Sharon O. attacked me!," 75 comments at the end of the thread were collected. This decision was made due to the fact that at times the tone of online gossip may become more aggressive, and thereby more clearly disidentifying, toward the end of a thread (see Meyers, *Gossip Talk* 266). The total sample size was limited to 150 comments because the comments on ONTD were relatively long. Moreover, this particular case of celebrity gossip was chosen for the study because online gossip concerning female celebrities, specifically those working in the entertainment industry, provokes reactions of mockery and disidentification (140; 175; 207-208; 266; 278).

The methodical basis of this paper is a rhetorical analysis of online communication in which the understanding of *ethos* as a process is central (see Miller "Writing in a Culture of Simulation"; Mitra and Watts; Warnick). Such an approach to *ethos* refers back to Aristotle who saw *ethos* as the process through which rhetors aim at creating credibility on the basis of their character (*Rhetoric*, Book 1, Chapter 2, part 3). As Aristotle (*Rhetoric*, Book I, Chapter 2, part 4) argues, persuasion based on *ethos* "should result from the speech, not from a previous opinion that the speaker is a certain kind of person." In this study, online *ethos* is seen as the process of creating credibility in the "dwelling space" of cyberspace in which the ethical validity of voices is judged on the basis of how they construct this space (see Mitra and Watts 484, 486, 495-496). By the same token, "it is the quality of the performance that counts" (Warnick 264).

Moreover, this study focuses on three components of *ethos* as aspects of which credibility as a rhetorical element is constructed. According to Aristotle, *ethos* has three parts: 1) *phronesis* (practical wisdom, good sense, and reason); 2) *arete* (good moral character, good moral values or moral virtue); and 3) *eunoia* (goodwill or emotions, the cooperative principle of ethos) (*Rhetoric*, Book 2, Chapter 1, part 5). For Aristotle, phronesis is a reasoned capacity related to moral practice (acts) (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI, Parts 1, 5-7, 12). Compared with *phronesis*, which is more distant, identification has a stronger function in *arete* and *eunoia*. According to Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, Parts 6 and 9),

moral virtue (*arete*) is a state of character that makes a person good. Consequently, the lack of *arete* is associated with moral badness, which means that rhetors do not say what they really think (see *Rhetoric*, Book 2, Chapter 1, part 6). Miller moreover, argues that a discourse of intelligent agents taking place as emotional interaction involves the problem of *arete* ("Expertise and Agency"). According to her, the lack of *arete* in cyborg discourse is a rhetorical problem making people seek feeling and response from an agent who remains unknown (212–213). On the contrary, *eunoia* is the most pathos-oriented and relativistic part of *ethos*, evolving in a sympathetic relationship with the audience (205–213). In online communication in particular, *eunoia* is a central element for the sympathetic relation between interlocutors (210–213).

To analyze *phronesis*, *arete*, and *eunoia* in online discourse, concrete definitions of these rather abstract concepts were needed. In this study, *phronesis* is understood as the practical knowledge of the artificial nature of celebrities (such as "they should not be identified with because they are stupid attention-seekers"). By *arete*, I mean moral stories and considerations through which online gossipers as rhetors identify with celebrities (such as "I know how it hurts when someone insults you"). The last one, *eunoia*, is here defined as a means of emotional cooperation with the audience ("She is disgusting!" "LOL," "I hate her"). Thus *eunoia* can take place as moral disidentification with celebrities. I chose to examine more closely those types of normativity in which ONTD participants support moral disidentification with celebrities, such as "you should not take this celebrity fight as a personal moral lesson because these celebrities are stupid attention-seekers whom we are watching for entertainment."

5   Types of normativity supporting moral disidentification on ONTD

In the ONTD online gossip community, moral disidentification was supported in five types of normativity: *virtual*, *voyeuristic*, *playful*, *disparate*, and *aesthetic*. These types of normativity derive from the role of the media audience that has the legitimacy to freely judge celebrities as their "fair game". In what follows, I will provide examples demonstrating that moral disidentification takes place as the active refusal and denial of moral identification.

5.1   Virtual normativity

One type of *ethos* control, called here *virtual normativity*, was utilized to highlight the nature of the celebrity fight as a staged event and thereby to oppose interpretations in which participants associated the celebrity fight with "real-life" morality. This type of normativity is prominent in the comments of sapporonoodles and implexa below. Note that the personal story criticized by these two participants had already been deleted on ONTD.

(1)   um. congratulations? idk how we got from pulling out meghan's extensions to a super personal story. But um. :\ (sapporonoodles)

(2)   I'm not gonna say don't share personal stories on ontd, because hey i get up in people's shit all the time, but i mean, for a topic that's really *stupid* i don't understand why you would delve so deep into yourself unless you're looking for a pity party. and it's finals week and i have no serotonin left in my brain, so I'm going to be unnecessarily mean, but i just didn't get why you had to go *there*. i don't get why everyone is always trying to out-horror story everyone else, esp. over a fight about someone's freaking weave being pulled out. i mean, if you've "been there" you know that this story is absolute bullshit compared to what goes on outside of mtv studios, and go on your merry way. i think it's really funny that ontd choses this topic as their morality buffer du jour. anyway. (sapporonoodles) [original italics]

(3)   I don't know what the personal story or w/e was but I *love* this comment because it's how I feel about so much of ontd. I hate when people comment with a personal story with some tenuous link to the post, trying to get a reaction and some pity. We all have shit and we'd all like people to hover around us saying "U GO BB" or "poor you bb :(" but this is real life and you have to get a grip. (implexa) [original italics]

As can be seen in Examples 1-3, the *ethos* construction of the participant who had shared a personal story is seen as inappropriate. As a punishment for the norm-breaking behavior, the participant's comment had been removed. In Examples 1-3, bringing up moral considerations from one's personal life is evaluated as a way of asking for undeserved pity and is thus condemned. In virtual normativity, *ethos* is based on the awareness concerning the fact that the particular show is produced by celebrity media industry. In that sense, the frivolous readings of gossip (Hermes 132-141) are highlighted. This manner of rejecting a serious, personal interest in celebrities is also typical of other celebrity forums, such as WWTDD (see Meyers, *Gossip Talk* 284).

Interestingly, however, the responses from both sapporonoodles and implexa paradoxically involve argumentation that *seriously* calls for the *eunoia* of shared frivolous interpretations. The exclusion of the personal story can be seen as the exclusion of *arete*. *Phronesis*, albeit in the subtext, is implied in these comments in the reasoning that one should be media-savvy enough to know that the show

was staged and is, therefore, incomparable with moral issues in private life. Such *phronesis* is a good example of practical reasoning in which role-players permit only those considerations that derive from their role position (see MacIntyre 200, 202). Bringing up that the story of the celebrities is "really stupid" and "absolute bullshit" is a way of referring to one's practical knowledge concerning the staged nature of the fight. By so doing, online participants contribute to the role of a media-savvy audience in the guise of which they have the legitimate right to judge celebrities freely.

5.2   *Voyeuristic normativity*

In this study, *voyeuristic normativity* refers to a persuasive means of criticizing participants who have stepped out from their roles as voyeurs and interfered in celebrities' doings. According to voyeuristic normativity, evaluating Sharon Osbourne negatively and showing sympathy to Megan Hauserman, as participants in Examples 4-8 and 10 do, destabilize the togetherness on ONTD. In Examples 9 and 11, _closetome attacks these participants, specifically curiouslinh, for such destabilization.

(4)   Sue that bitch! I hate the Osbournes (curiouslinh)

(5)   that family is beyond trashy. How the heck are the Osbournes able to teach charm school. I went to a real charm school when I was hitting puberty and let me tell you the teacher was the classiest most elegant woman I ever met in my entire life. Classy women do no need to tell anyone there classy they just are.. and Sharon definitely is not. Another thing Megan was obviously playing a role if Sharon took it this far then that's crazy and should be sued. Or this could just be an elaborate plan to generate buzz. (beanie1816)

(6)   amen sista (curiouslinh)

(7)   ia (dollicia)

(8)   ia (porcelinaa)

(9)   And most of ONTD hates Megan. And you wonder why we have no sympathy for her fug skank ass? (_closetome)

(10)   Sorry, I have a mind of my own and I don't jump on bandwagons sweetie (curiouslinh)

(11)   The only reason you're defending Megan is because you, as you said, hate the Osbourne's. Stop pretending you're Mother Theresa and acting so offended that people on a REALITY SHOW REUNION got into a bitch fight. Um hello, isn't that the entire fucking point of reality show reunions? Usually they start screaming at each other first and are pried apart before anyone gets seriously hurt, but apparently they didn't know Sharon doesn't play that game. And to steal what aeryn said, "And bullshit about how it was not "charming" of Sharon to resort to violence after being on Charm School. Like that fucking

show was REALLY about them changing their lives. Get a clue. It's a paycheck and publicity and we watch them bitching at each other for entertainment." (_closetome)

As can be seen in the comments above, the participant in Example 4 interferes in the celebrities' doings by guiding Hauserman to sue Osbourne, while the participant of Example 5 defines "classy women" based on personal experiences. Participants in Examples 6-8 agree with these views (amen sista = amen sister, ia = I agree). In addition, curiouslinh in Example 10 stresses independence from ONTD's general argument that one should disidentify with Hauserman ("Sorry, I have a mind of my own and I don't jump on bandwagons sweetie"). On the contrary, the comments by _closetome (Examples 9 and 11) demonstrate that the expected moral disidentificaon on ONTD is to be taken seriously – as a norm. The voyeuristic normativity is evident in Example 11, in which _closetome condemns interfering in celebrities' doings and identifying with them. According to _closetome (who cites another participant called aeryn), participants on ONTD are expected to watch celebrities "bitching at each other for entertainment."

Thus voyeurism on ONTD is a shared rhetorical practice that takes place in the name of a collective affect. According to voyeuristic normativity, sharing the pleasures of watching the celebrity fight forms a credible *ethos*. As can be seen in Example 11, the contribution to shared pleasures involves an attack on naive *arete* ("Stop pretending you're Mother Theresa and acting so offended that people on a REALITY SHOW REUNION got into a bitch fight"). Curiouslinh is blamed for *pretending* to be Mother Theresa and *acting* offended. Although voyeuristic normativity is strictly based on the role of the audience as a voyeur, such normativity is utilized to censure those who take the celebrity fight seriously. The type of normativity in Example 11 contributes to an *ethos* in which online community members of ONTD are persuaded to play the role of voyeurs, which opposes personal moral considerations. Like in virtual normativity, also in voyeuristic normativity *phronesis* is related to the awareness of the frivolous nature of the celebrity fight ("It's a paycheck and publicity"). In other words, showing the awareness that media content and characters are mere spectacles becomes the sign of practical wisdom in this context.

5.3   *Playful normativity*

By *playful normativity*, I mean a humorous means of character-construction in which participants in a discussion become the target of mockery and become a stand-in for the disidentified celebrity because of their sympathy for her. In Example 12, pantless_deacon agrees with Megan Hauserman that Sharon

Osbourne is famous only through her husband. In their responses, both lilstarmel (Example 13) and hemsworth (Example 14) contribute to playful normativity in which pantless_deacon, because of his criticism of Osbourne, is equated with Hauserman:

> (12)   ALSO, what Megan said was true. Sharon needs to give it a rest, she gained fame from the MTV series, basically exploiting Ozzy's condition. It was fine to point out Ozzy's issues when she was making money off of them. I guess problem was that Megan forgot to write a check before insulting Ozzy/Sharon? (pantless_deacon)

> (13)   Oh, shut up Megan. You need to get your ass kicked. (lilstarmel)

> (14)   oh megan, shut the fuck up you stupid attention whore (hemsworth)

In Examples 13 and 14, playful normativity involves *ethos* control in which the participant who breaks the norm of ONTD is criticized through the idea of role-playing. Interestingly, in Examples 13 and 14 the participant who had agreed with Hauserman is accused of role-playing at the same time when the role of the audience as a distant judge becomes the sign of a credible *ethos*. In Baudrillard's terms, these online participants regard the third-order simulacrum as more authentic or real than the second order. Moreover, Examples 13 and 14 operate inside the framework of celebrity culture in which Hauserman as an artificial celebrity ("attention whore") is seen as a person whose mockery is legitimized in the name of the collective emotions (*eunoia*) of ONTD participants. An effective way of sharing *eunoia* is the humor under which mockery is covered. What is attacked, again, is *arete* as the part of *ethos* with considerations *beyond* what appears on the screen (outside of ONTD or reality television). Moreover, *phronesis* is implied in these comments as the way of making the *de-faming* of Hauserman seem a legitimate reaction to her media-made fame.

5.4   Disparate normativity

The type of *ethos* control here called disparate *normativity* is utilized when one sees the character of celebrities as incomparable with that of co-participants. Disparate normativity is perhaps the most obvious way of *ethos* control indicating that moral stances of identification and disidentification are based on different orders of simulacra. In Examples 15-18, online participants break the third order of simulacra as the norm of frivolous online *ethos* by imagining themselves going through the hair-pulling misery. Such interpretations aim at creating relevance between the actions of celebrities and reality, and thereby indicate that the celebrity fight is taken as a morally serious issue. Example 19 continues the idea of taking the reality TV fight as an authentic fact by arguing that Hauserman's

hair was so weak that it would have fallen out without pulling it. Although the participant in Example 19 is not sympathetic toward Hauserman, s/he indicates taking the gossip of fallen hair extensions seriously. On the contrary, sapporonoodles in Example 20 ends this discussion by opposing those who have taken the gossip story too personally.

(15)   Bitches get stitches so if someone ripped out my weave because I was being a cunt, I wouldn't sue, no. (bakemonos)

(16)   You have issues and you're lying out of your ass (curiouslinh)

(17)   Just because I don't agree with suing over the fact that someone instigated an attack by insulting someone's family does not mean I have issues nor am I lying, but we can just end it here by saying you will have your opinion and I will have mine. (bakemonos)

(18)   LMFAO you're still fucking lying. If a celebrity attacked you and proceeded to pull out chunks of hair from your scalp, I bet my ass you will sue or settle for a settlement. Don't even try to bullshit (curiouslinh)

(19)   LETS ALL BE CLEAR.

Sharon probably didn't touch a hair on little ms thang's head. Her weak ass hair can't handle all that weave, I mean damn...Beyonce doesn't even wear that much weave. If sharon hadn't of pulled it out her hair would have fallen out anyway. ugh, her whole head disgusts me. (burnbabyburn)

(20)   i don't think i or they would be dumb or attention-whorey enough to invoke that sort of action from a celebrity. so i mean, no one has any reason to bullshit, because we're not attention whores like meghan. this entire scenario is completely ridiculous, and you're on a high horse for nothing but giving me lols right now. (sapporonoodles)

As can be seen in Example 20, the participant contrasts Hauserman and other people and thereby criticizes the naive *arete* of those participants who had treated the celebrity as a real individual. According to sapporonoodles, "this entire scenario is completely ridiculous." Moreover, the explicit mockery of the celebrity indicates a commitment to the ONTD's *eunoia* according to which certain celebrities, symbolized by Hauserman, are to be looked down on because of their attention-seeking and therefore untrustworthy behaviour. Interestingly, in addition to celebrity mockery, Example 20 aims at supporting a sympathetic relation and harmonious reciprocity between participants on ONTD ("no one has any reason to bullshit"). This particular comment is a telling example of the sympathy-antipathy contradiction in which the emotional reciprocity (*eunoia*) between interlocutors is based on the shared delight of a celebrity's public self-humiliation. Accordingly, the harmony and cooperation in the online community go hand in hand with the active refusal to identify with a media-made celebrity.

Consequently, Example 20 can be seen to imply *phronesis* that rationalizes and legitimizes moral disidentification as the sign of a media-savvy audience.

5.5   *Aesthetic normativity*

In aesthetic normativity, online gossip participants contribute to *ethos* which celebrities' appearance, style, and bodies are seen as signs of their character. In this study, *aesthetic normativity* is defined as *ethos* control in which a discussion participant guides others to evaluate celebrities based on their physical appearance. In Example 21, _closetome criticizes curiouslinh for the lack of *phronesis* relating to the way of treating the staged celebrity fight as if it would be a real incident to be morally condemned. The comment is followed by a response from curiouslinh who argues in Example 22 that one can dislike a celebrity but nevertheless see her as beautiful. Finally,_closetome in Example 23 utilizes aesthetic normativity as a way to criticize curiouslinh for separating the celebrity's appearance from her worth as a person.

(21)   *WHEN under any circumstances has it been ACCEPTABLE behavior to attack someone? WHEN HAS IT BEEN?* [_closetome citing curiouslinh]

UM HELLO REALITY TV? It's been acceptable and ENCOURAGED to attack someone on reality shows (ESPECIALLY dating ones like fol,rol,shot at love, etc etc) since reality tv was shat upon society. (_closetome)

I also hate Kim Kardashian but you do not see me bashing her and shit. I actually own a Kim Kardashian community regardless if I find her personality obnoxious and unbearable, so do not under any circumstances try that shit with me. [_closetome citing curiouslinh]

WTF, YOU MAKE NO SENSE WHATSOEVER. If you hate Kim so much, why would you even want community about her? What. The. Fuck. (_closetome)

(22)   *UM HELLO REALITY TV?* [curiouslinh citing _closetome]

Reality TV is not REAL honey. It's scripted, so no. It is not "real violence". Now what Mrs. Sharon Osbourne did was NOT scripted under any circumstances because it would have not escalated the way it has now (curiouslinh)

WTF, YOU MAKE NO SENSE WHATSOEVER [curiouslinh citing closetome]

Let me rephrase that, I do not hate people. I dislike her. Regardless of her personality, I think she is a very beautiful woman with great fashion sense. Regardless, that does NOT give me the right to attack her and be inhuman to her. (curiouslinh)

go back to elementary school where you belong darling (curiouslinh)

(23)   *Regardless of her personality, I think she is a very beautiful woman with great fashion sense. Regardless, that does NOT give me the right to attack her and be inhuman to her.* [_closetome citing curiouslinh]

When you say you "hate" someone I don't necessarily assume you like their looks/fashion sense. Honest mistake. (_closetome)

In aesthetic normativity, celebrities' appearance, literally speaking, is understood as the basis of their evaluation, as can be seen in Example 23 above. According to _closetome, hating a celebrity and nevertheless liking the person's appearance is not expected ("When you say you "hate" someone I don't necessarily assume you like their looks/fashion sense"). In other words, the comment of _closetome indicates that curiouslinh has broken the norm of ONTD when contrasting the idea of a celebrity's moral character (personality) and her physical appearance. In aesthetic normativity, moral guidance is to be found in style and appearance – in those fields that are the most superficially persuasive (also Brummett 102). By linking together the criteria of evaluating celebrities' character and their appearance, aesthetic normativity suggests that celebrities should be treated as mere objects of their audience's changing affects. Such a sharing of *eunoia* goes hand in hand with the refusal to identify *personally* with celebrities. *Phronesis*, again, can be found in the subtext as the implied way of suggesting that celebrities are media spectacles (not moral beings) meant to satisfy the pleasures of their audience.

6   Conclusion: Moral disidentification and *ethos*

The aim of this paper was to explore the rhetorical grounds of celebrity mockery in new media contexts by focusing on types of normativity utilized to support moral disidentification with celebrities in an online community for celebrity gossip (Oh No They Didn't). In this study, *ethos* was seen as a combination of *phronesis* (moral reasoning), *arete* (moral stories and considerations indicating the rhetor's moral personality) and *eunoia* (shared emotions as the cooperative principle of *ethos*). Those comments in which participants opposed *arete* because they saw it as the sign of taking celebrities "too personally" were analyzed in detail. According to the findings, the rhetorical grounds of celebrity mockery can be found in the contradictory relationship of *arete* and *phronesis* evident in online gossipers' *ethos*. Online gossip participants contributing to celebrity mockery do not "sacrifice" their *arete* for identification with celebrities whom they see as highly artificial. On the contrary, online gossip participants of celebrity mockery highlight *phronesis* as the sign of their media-savvy character. Such contradiction of *arete* and *phronesis* was evident in all types of normativity discussed in this

study and it provides a rhetorical explanation for the popularity of celebrity mockery in contemporary media culture.

To oppose "too personal" *ethos* constructions, participants of ONTD contributed to five types of normativity: virtual, voyeuristic, playful, disparate, and aesthetic normativity. In virtual normativity, the life within the entertainment industry and the online community of ONTD, literally on *the screen*, is strictly separated from moral issues taking place behind the screen. Voyeuristic normativity, moreover, is a means of condemning ways of interfering in celebrities' actions. Such normativity highlights the pleasure of watching what happens on the screen. Playful normativity was utilized to mock participants who had identified with a celebrity as if they played the role of the hated celebrity by virtue of sympathizing with her. Disparate normativity emerged as a means of arguing that celebrities, as attention-seekers, are not comparable to other people. Lastly, aesthetic normativity involved the idea that a celebrity's appearance is the sign of his/her character.

These types of normativity are ways of *ethos* control that support the idea that celebrities are made for the pleasure of the media audience as the "crowd" of mediated displays. In other words, by not identifying with a celebrity who is seen as completely artificial, one indicates being media-savvy enough not to take superficial media content and characters seriously (see Ahva et al.194–195). Such awareness as the criterion of a media-savvy participant involves *phronesis* as a more or less implied reasoning based on the knowledge of the frivolous *ethos* of a celebrity. By highlighting their interest in the frivolous as the sign of their own credible *ethos*, gossip participants support moral disidentification with celebrities and make unserious readings the morally preferred means of participation (see Hermes 133–141). I what follows, I will explain moral disidentification through role ethics as well as Baudrillard's and Bauman's theories of communication in the late-modern era.

The types of normativity found in this study contribute to the idea that a credible *ethos* is based on excellence in role performance (see MacIntyre 200). In other words, morality in new media contexts, such as on celebrity gossip sites, is not only different from, but may also contradict a moral stance in which the sincerity (not role-playing) of participants is seen as trustworthy (see Gardner 99–106). Because role-playing is the characteristic of a trustworthy online *ethos*, *arete* as the sign of the moral self is excluded, while *eunoia* as the shared enjoyment of watching celebrities humiliating themselves in mediated displays is preferred. Although online celebrity gossipers argue that celebrities should not be taken too seriously or personally, their Schadenfreude involves affective force with the

enjoyment caused by celebrities' self-embarrassment when they have "sold" their *ethos* for public humiliation. Although such affect focuses on celebrities as amoral beings, it nevertheless is morally noteworthy because it places certain celebrities, particularly women in entertainment industry, beyond moral concerns. Such dehumanization of particular types of female celebrities contributes to sexist oppression in which certain groups of people are seen as mere objects to be laughed at.

The refusal to naively identify with "artificial" media characters is not only an individual, but a communal basis of *ethos* in online gossip. In the demotic turn, not only celebrities, but also ordinary people are playing roles. It is a paradox that such role-playing becomes the sign of a trustworthy *ethos* in online gossip, since online co-participants are not more authentic or personal than celebrities as the objects of their common disidentification. Essential in online *ethos* is that participants are expected to form a community with their interlocutors who remain unknown and never reveal themselves (Miller, "Expertise and Agency" 212–213). In Bauman's terms, such communication involves a moral problem in which individuals become part of a faceless crowd (*Postmodern Ethics* 115; 130–131; 155). I a wider, cultural sense, celebrity mockery is a sign of the disempowered celebrity audience that is now seeking moments of empowerment by making fun of celebrities as well as celebrity media industry. As the examples analyzed in the present study showed, such mockery involves a paradox of *ethos* in which online participants reject media-made celebrities as too artificial for identification in order to cooperate with gossipers whose *ethos* derives from the same sources of media-made celebrity culture they first rejected.

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