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).
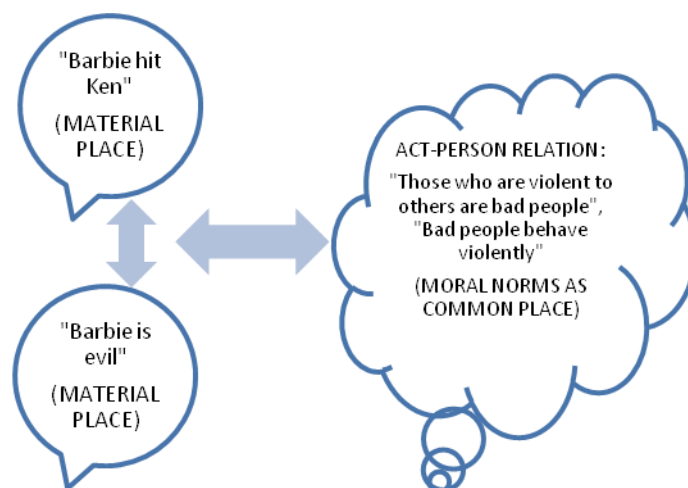
Picture 1. Enthymeme as a moral concept.

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.
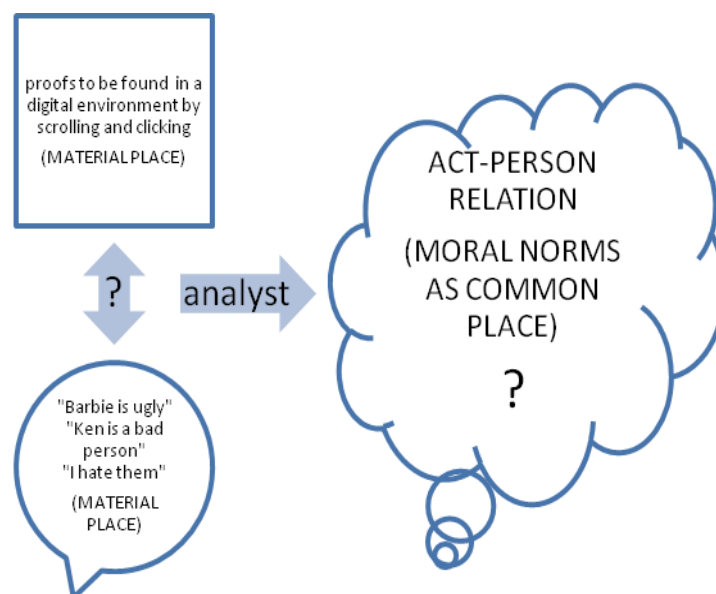
Picture 2. Analyzing digital enthymemes.

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.
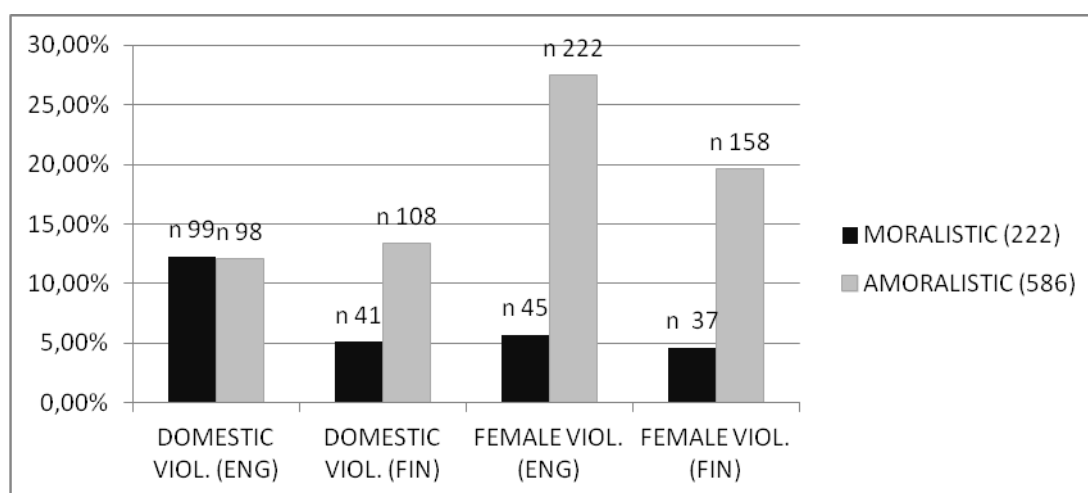

Figure 1. Types of digital enthymemes on celebrity gossip sites.

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.
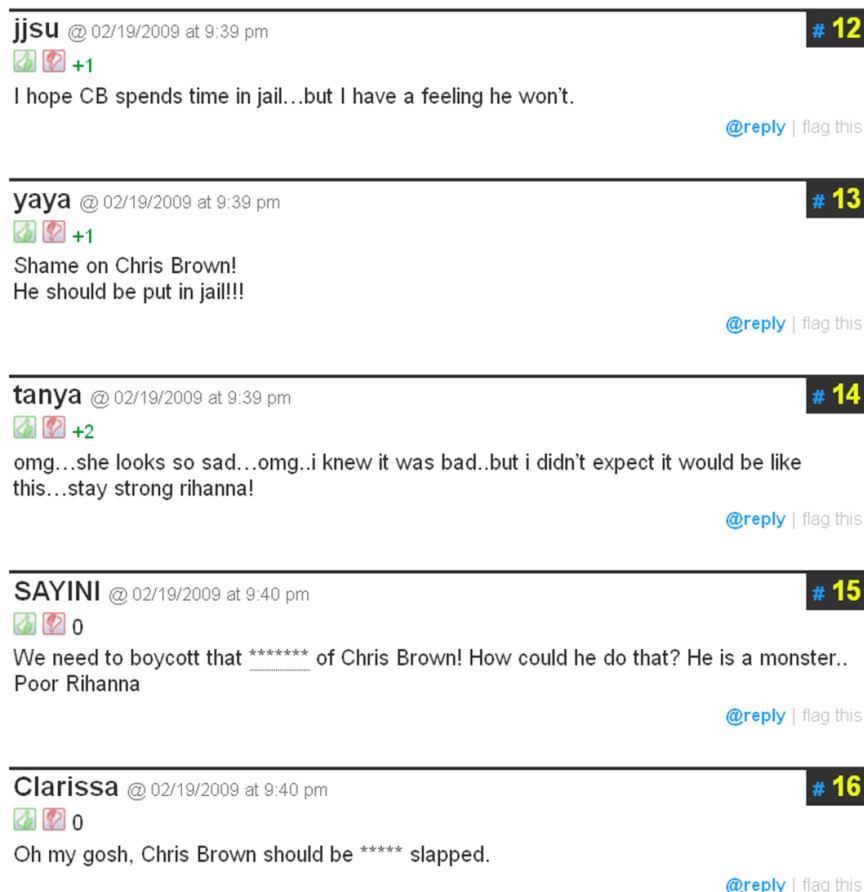
Picture 3. Examples of digital enthymemes as moralistic comments on Just Jared.

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.
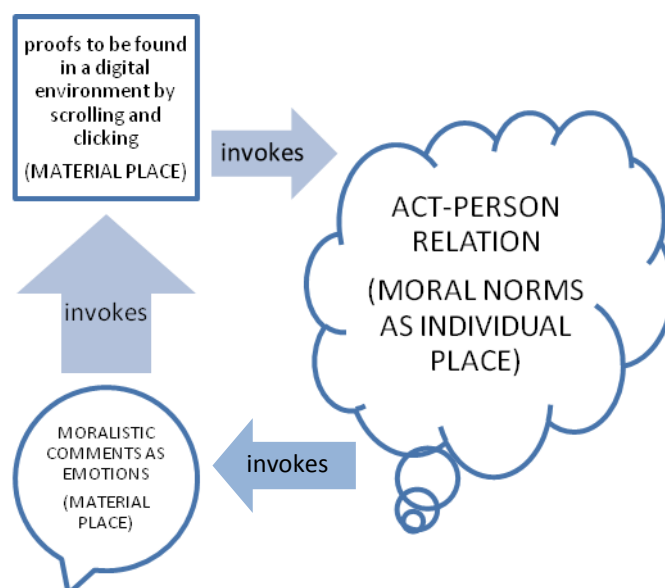
Picture 5. Digital enthymemes as moralistic comments.

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.

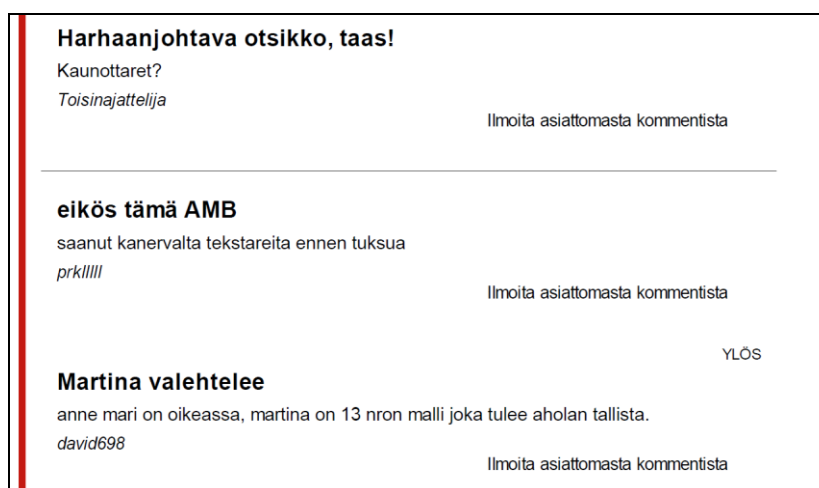## 3.2. Digital enthymemes as amoralistic comments

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

prkllll

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.
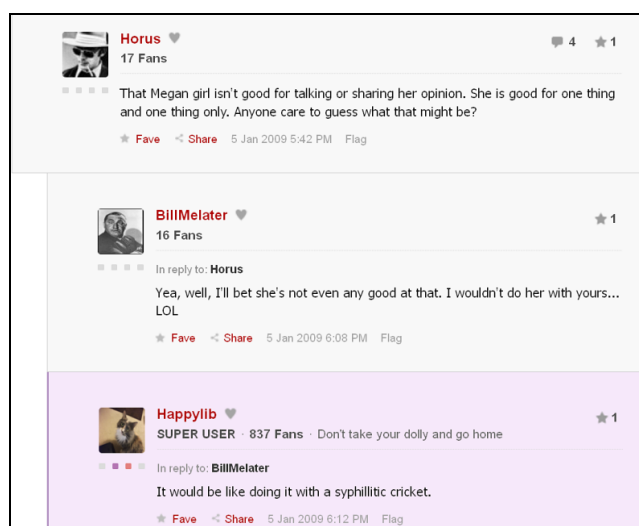
Picture 8. Examples of digital enthymemes as
sexual mockery on Huffingtonpost.com.

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.
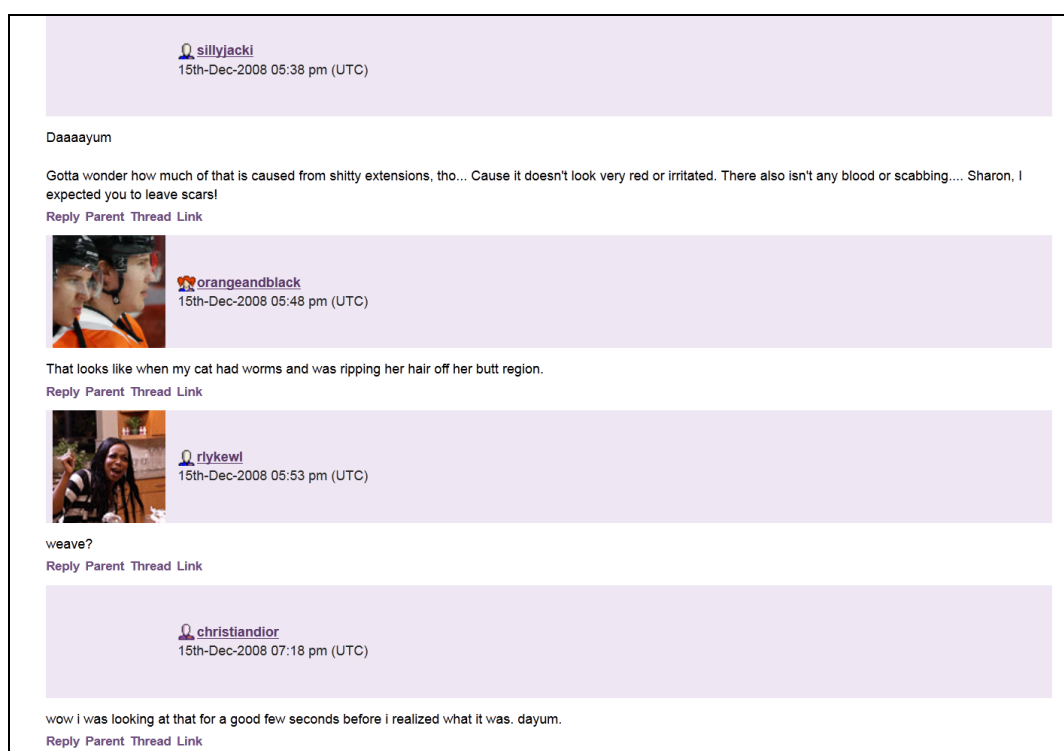
Picture 10. Examples of digital enthymemes as
aesthetic mockery in ONTD Live Journal community

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.
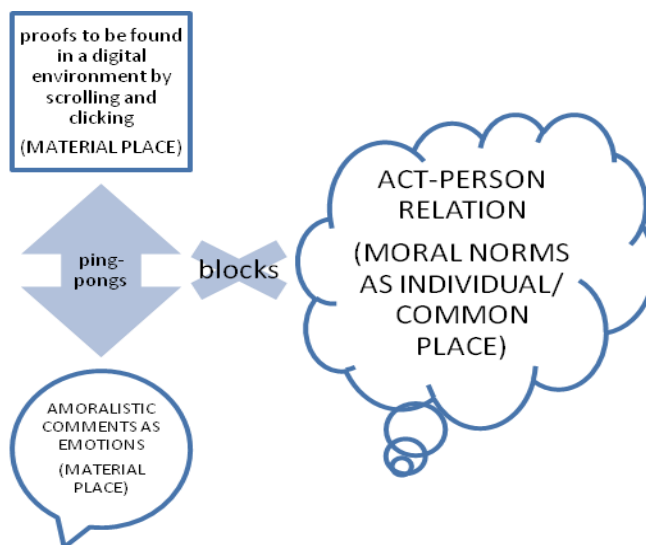
Picture 12. Digital enthymemes as amoralistic comments.

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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