

**GOSSIPING ABOUT SEXUALITY:**  
A critical discourse analysis of a gossip blog

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GOSSIPING ABOUT SEXUALITY:

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Tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää miten julkisuuden henkilön seksuaalisuutta käsitellään juorublogissa. Tutkielmassa vastataan kysymyksiin 1) miten blogiformaatti ja bloggajan taustat muokkaavat juoruja julkisuuden henkilön seksuaalisuudesta? 2) miten diskurssirakenteet ja pragmaattiset keinot rakentavat julkisuuden henkilön seksuaalisuutta? 3) miten juorublogi vaikuttaa siihen kuinka mediassa käsitellään julkkisten seksuaalisuutta?

Lähtökohtana tutkimukselle ovat kriittinen diskurssintutkimus ja erityisesti Faircloughin kolmiulotteinen diskurssinmalli. Kuvailamalla aiempaa tutkimusta homoseksuaalisuudesta ja juoruilusta pyritään antamaan kuva siitä, mihin aiempi tutkimus on keskittynyt ja mitä havaintoja on tehty aiemmin. Analyysi toteutettiin Bellin uutistarinoiden diskurssirakenteen mallin avulla. Tutkimuksen materiaalina käytettiin tunnetun juorubloggaja Perez Hiltonin blogikirjoituksia.

Tutkimuksessa havaittiin, että blogissa ei esitetä negatiivisena homoseksuaalisuutta vaan homoseksuaalisuuden piilottelua. Juorublogin ei havaittu edustavan tai edistävän heteronormatiivista ajattelua. Blogiformaatti antaa kirjoittajalleen paljon vapauksia julkaisunopeuden, -määrän ja laadun suhteen. Blogiformaatti antaa myös enemmän mahdollisuuksia juorun rakenteen suhteen. Juorun rakenteen analyysissä voitiin myös todeta kuinka erilaiset aukot tarinoissa johtivat tulkinnan epämääräisyyteen. Lisäksi havaittiin, että juorun tapahtuma ei ollut merkittävä vaan se mitä juorulla pyrittiin vihjailemaan. Usein mitään uutta ei ollut tapahtunut vaan tarinaa pyrittiin pitämään käynnissä ja epäilyksiä vahvistamaan. Hiltonin juorublogin todettiin vahvistavan käsitystä siitä, että julkisessa diskurssissa on sallittua käsitellä julkisuuden henkilön seksuaalisuutta ja yksityiselämää.

Asiasanat: Sexuality, Gossip blog, Critical Discourse Analysis, Three-dimensional model of discourse, Discourse structure of a news story, Heteronormativity, Ambiguity

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Gossip and gossiping about celebrities and their lifestyles is not a new phenomenon. However, the Internet provides the audiences a way to follow celebrities almost 24 hours a day in real time. The Internet provides a venue for people to find out and comment on events immediately. It is no longer necessary to gossip face-to-face as the Internet provides a vast body of venues for discussion. One of these venues is a blog, which is reminiscent of a journal. The present study introduces a blog by Perez Hilton as a research subject and strives to connect critical discourse analysis (CDA) with data from the field of popular culture.

Blogs are a relatively new phenomenon. However, they are a very popular and accessible way for individuals to get their voices heard. Blogs have gained a lot of influence as well as popularity. Many people write, read and comment on blogs daily. There are different genres of blogs; diaries, political, different fan based blogs that concentrate on a particular phenomenon or celebrity, blogs written by celebrities, blogs about fashion, hobbies, gossip (see, e.g., Solove 2007: 18-24). News is created based on what people write in their blogs. Blog writers have gained power to influence how stories are presented. Readers actually care about individual bloggers' views. One blog might have millions of readers and some blogs may cause a reaction in the mainstream media as well (Solove 2007: 61). Perez Hilton's blog is one of the blogs that has managed to do this and therefore it is an extremely interesting subject for further investigation. Moreover, entertainment blogs have a vast readership, it is not just a handful of people who read them. Therefore, it is important to take an entertainment blog into a closer inspection. Entertainment blogs have a large audience and therefore they reproduce and reconstruct discourses as any other media text. Thus, they should not be ignored.

Heterosexuality is still presented as the normal form of sexuality and diverse sexuality is still represented as out of the ordinary, or as Fuss (1991: 1-10) puts it homosexuals are seen as outsiders and heterosexual as insiders. However, while people are more open and

excepting of homosexuality, it is still not accepted and openly discussed in all areas of life. Celebrities' sexuality has been one of the subjects of gossip. However, nowadays it is no longer such a taboo for a celebrity to be homosexual and it is no longer something that might destroy a career. However, it is still something that sparks the interest of audiences. Moreover, homosexual characters are presented increasingly in the popular culture, for example television shows. Therefore, it is important to examine how a popular blogger such as Perez Hilton contributes to discourses about celebrities' sexuality. His own status and background as a gay man are likely to influence the way he represents sexual minorities.

The reason why I am interested in Hilton's blog is because I have been reading Perez Hilton's blog for over a year and I am amazed of his popularity and the whole phenomenon that is Perez Hilton. Hilton frequently comments on the sexuality of different celebrities and, therefore, the present study focuses on only postings about one celebrity, Lindsay Lohan. The reason why I chose the Lindsay Lohan postings as my primary data is that the postings about her occur frequently, provide an excellent overall view of Hilton's blogging style as well as raise many questions about the representation of her sexuality. The blogger Perez Hilton is open about his homosexuality and promotes gay rights. However, he frequently comments on Lindsay Lohan's possible homosexuality and often uses language that is derogatory in his comments about Lohan and people associated with her. This creates ambiguities in interpretation. At first glance it might seem that his remarks are simply derogatory and typical representations of homosexuality. However, after a closer analysis of the text with consideration of the background and the overall concept of gossiping this might not be so simple. The purpose of this present study is to introduce entertainment blog Perez Hilton as a research subject and to consider how his speculation about Lohan's sexuality contributes to discourses about sexuality and what are the implications of these discourses.

Critical discourse analysis provides the theoretical framework of the present study. More specifically, the present study will draw on the three-dimensional model proposed by Fairclough (1992) and the textual analysis of discourse structure of a news stories

proposed by Bell (1998: 64-104). Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis provides the present study the opportunity to take into account more than just the textual aspects of Hilton's blog. In particular, it provides the opportunity to consider content and context as well as the social meaning. Critical discourse analysis is the best way to examine the present study's data because it allows the investigation of text on different levels; the text in itself, the writer of the text and where the text is produced and who reads it and also it takes into consideration the society and culture and where the text stands in the overall discourse hierarchy that is determined by the dominant society and culture. Since critical discourse analysis does not offer any specific method for analysing texts (Pietikäinen 2000: 191-192), Bell's (1998: 64-104) framework for analysing discourse structure of news stories provides excellent tools for analysing the text level in more detail. In particular, Bell's (1998: 64-104) framework takes into account what the story is saying happened as well as what the story is not saying.

Gossip blogs and blogging in general have not been researched much in the field of critical discourse analysis, thus the present study aims to fill this gap. Hilton's blog provides a vast body of data and interesting opportunities to view the data. Its popularity and wide readership have gained him power to influence and to bring awareness about things such as the equal rights of sexual minorities. Therefore, it should not be ignored as just gossip and trash.

The present study is organized as follows. First, critical discourse analysis and approaches to it will be described in more detail. Further, Fairclough's the three-dimensional model of discourse and Bell's framework for analyzing discourse structure of news stories will be described. Second, previous gay and lesbian research will be presented and it is explained how it relates to the present study and critical discourse analysis. Third, blogs and gossip as a genre will be represented. Also, previous research on Perez Hilton's blog will be represented and discussed. Fourth, the research set-up of the study will be represented. Fifth, the analysis of the data will be presented and finally the conclusions and implications of the present study will be discussed.

## **2 BACKGROUND AND THEORY**

### **2.1 Critical discourse analysis**

#### **2.1.1 Main principles of critical discourse analysis**

The present study strives to apply critical discourse analysis (CDA), Norman Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis, in particular, as the theoretical framework. Therefore, some of the main principles of critical discourse analysis are viewed and discussed in this chapter.

Critical discourse analysis is one of the latest versions of discourse analysis. It combines both linguistic and social study of discourse (Pietikäinen 2000: 191-192). Both discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis are focused on ways of using the language. In critical discourse analysis language is seen as a social act. Language, discourse and its relation to society cannot be separated (Fairclough 1997). Critical discourse analysis involves a critical thinking of the text (as in all academic research) and it tries to explain and describe the texts from a critical point of view. By critical thinking of the text it is meant that the reader should be aware that there are always reasons why a particular text is written. The reader should consider for whom the text is written and in what kind of social, cultural, historical context it is written. After considering these facts the reader can form a more accurate opinion about the text.

Fairclough (1992: 63-64) describes language as a form of social practice. He continues that language is action where a person acts upon the world and upon others. It is also a mode of representation. Language is never neutral and it always has some implications of the world that surrounds us or at least it is not neutral on a personal level. Discourse is a practice that does not just represent the world as it is. The world is also signified, constructed and constituted in meaning through discourse practices (Fairclough 1992: 64). Fairclough (1992) suggests that the three functions of language are identity, relational and ideational functions. "The identity function relates to the ways in which

social identities are set up in discourse, the relational function to how social relationships between discourse participants are enacted and negotiated, the ideational function to ways in which texts signify the world and its processes, entities and relations” (Fairclough 1992: 64-65). To put this in other words, language functions as a way of defining our own and other’s identities. People who are part of a particular discourse have different roles in the society and that is visible in the discourse.

Critical discourse analysis strives to bring out and explain different power relations of texts and how they effect and are effected by society (see, e.g., Fairclough 1989,1992,1995b,1997; Pietikäinen, 2000: 191-217; Van Dijk, 2001: 352-353). Fairclough (1989: 31-36) explains power relations as the control and the power in economic, state and ideological level. This is to say that these power relations can be seen in texts and discourses as well and that they effect discourses as well as are effected by discourses. In turn, Janks & Ivanic (1992: 306) explain it more simply, there is always someone who dominates and therefore is in the position to set and maintain the societies standards. Critical discourse analysis strives to connect analysis of texts to the broader social context they are used and produced in.

Critical discourse analysis strives to bring forth broader social issues in language use and thus language use in the media has been an interest of many previous studies. Fairclough (1995b: 202) notes that it is important for people to be critically aware of culture, discourse and language of the media. He suggests four questions that are important for one to know how to answer about any media text:

1. How is the text designed, why is it designed in this way, and how else could it have been designed?
2. How are texts of this sort produced, and in what ways are they likely to be interpreted and used?
3. What does the text indicate about the media order of discourse?
4. What wider sociocultural processes is this text a part of, what are its wider social conditions, and what are its likely effects? (Fairclough 1995b: 202)

As Pietikäinen (2000: 191-192) suggests, critical discourse analysis is an approach that has different variations and is not restrained to one strict method of analysis. This is to say critical discourse analysis is a multidisciplinary approach to language study that goes

beyond the text in its analysis. Or as Fairclough (1995a: 9) puts it, analysis should not only focus on textual level of discourse. Moreover, critical discourse analysis should be considered as an approach that constantly evolves as it spreads into new disciplines (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999: 59).

In this section I have explained the main characteristics of critical discourse analysis. Next, feminist critical discourse analysis is briefly presented and compared to Fairclough's views of critical discourse analysis. Then Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse will be presented. In addition, Bell's framework for analyzing discourse structure of news stories will be presented. Finally, it is articulated how the present study benefits from critical discourse analysis.

### **2.1.2 Different approaches to CDA**

As mentioned above critical discourse analysis in general shares the view that language is a social act and that there is always some kind of power skew in the society that needs to be brought to attention. As mentioned above there are various different approaches to critical discourse analysis. In this section feminist critical discourse analysis is briefly mentioned since it is quite closely related to Fairclough's (1992) views as well as the issues the present study deals with. There are some differences, which are discussed each in turn in this section.

#### **2.1.2.1 Feminist critical discourse analysis**

Feminist critical discourse analysis should be noted, because many of the previous studies that relate to the presents studies topics, which is sexuality and representations of it, are connected to the feminist critical discourse analysis. The feminist critical discourse analysis shares the general view of critical discourse analysis that language is a way of dominating and maintaining dominance and power. However, the main focus of the approach is to discover the differences in gender and sexuality representations and power relations in discourses related to gender and sexuality (Lazar 2007: 141-164). For example, Lazar (2007: 143) suggests that a specifically feminist approach to critical

discourse analysis is needed because many studies already adopt a critical feminist point of view and are motivated to change the existing power relations in the area of gender differences and sexuality.

Feminist critical discourse analysis strives to bring forth the role of the researcher into attention as well. Lazar (2007: 155) suggests that the researchers, who conduct critical discourse analysis, should consider his/her position to the area he/she is researching. As Lazar (2007: 155) puts it, researchers should make it more clear who they are in position of their research. Further, she adds that researchers should not claim the position of authority in matters of a group she/he does not belong to. Lazar (2007: 155) adds that the researcher does not need to belong to the minority in order to be able to say something about it, however, the researcher needs to take his/her position into account as well when conducting a research on a minority group. As an example, Lazar (2007: 141-164) points out, feminist researchers often tend to forget that there is variety in women, not all women are white straight middle class women. Lazar (2007: 153) adds that it is important for feminists to remember not to contribute even more to the hierarchy by forgetting that not all women are in fact white and of same sexual orientation. In other words, she argues against thinking that all women are the same.

Critical discourse analysis is usually focused on written or spoken discourse (see, e.g. Fairclough 1992) and other forms of meaning making are not always taken into account as much. The feminist critical discourse analysis takes into account that not only texts are a way of creating meaning. For example, pictures and images contribute to meaning making as well as the text. Lazar (2007: 156) mentions the importance of images in meaning making and suggests that the multimodal approach is suitable approach for analysis. By multimodal approach she means the analysis of text combined with other elements that create meaning such as pictures. For more detailed description of multimodal approach see Kress & Van Leeuwen (2001). Although multimodal approach would be suitable for studying blogs, it does not serve the purposes of the present study. Furthermore, Fairclough (1989: 27-28) mentions briefly that visuals are important factor in conveying meaning, however, he notes that the text is more important. The present

study focuses on the text, although blogs offer an rich area for multimodal research since blogs often include in addition to pictures, sounds and visuals and not only texts to provide meaning. The present study strives to focus on language and story construction and there is no room for taking the pictures and all the other visuals into account in the analysis. Moreover, for the purposes of the present study multimodal approach is not necessary.

Although the present study strives to connect Perez Hilton's blog to a broader social context involving discourses of female celebrities' sexuality, feminist critical discourse analysis is not the most suitable for the purposes of the present study. The present study is not particularly focused on gender differences in presentation sexuality. Therefore, Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model of discourse seems more fitting for the purposes of the present study. As this section introduced a different approach to critical discourse analysis the following section introduces Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse in detail.

## **2.2 The three-dimensional model of discourse**

Fairclough (1992, 1997) suggests a three-dimensional model to analyze and comprehend discourse. The first level is the actual text. The second level is the discourse practices and the third level is the social practices. The first level determines the linguistic choices that are made in the text for example, words and grammar. The second level tries to determine how the text is produced and to whom the text is aimed at. In addition, it determines how the text is received and interpreted by the reader. The third level tries to determine in what kind of social, institutional, cultural, political and financial situation the text has been produced and read (Fairclough 1992: 65-73.) However, critical discourse analysis does not always focus on all of the three levels of analysis; rather it can sometimes focus only on some of the levels in more detail. Therefore, critical discourse analysis is not considered to be such a strict method of study since it can be adapted in different ways depending on the question one wants answers to (Pietikäinen 2000: 208-212).

Fairclough (1992) offers an analytical framework for critical discourse analysis based on his three-dimensional model of discourse, which will be presented next. First, what is meant by the textual level is presented in more detail, then the discourse practice level and social practice level, respectively.

### **2.2.1 Text**

As mentioned above, Fairclough (1992: 73) suggests that the first level of the three-dimensional model of discourse is the textual level, which can mean written or spoken language. The text level influences the other levels and the other levels influence the text (Fairclough 1992). The text analysis can be as detailed as needed depending on what is in the interest of the study (Fairclough 1992: 75). For example, Fairclough suggests that “Text analysis can be organized under four main headings: ‘vocabulary’, ‘grammar’, ‘cohesion’, and ‘text structure’” (Fairclough 1992: 75). Fairclough adds that “vocabulary deals mainly with individual words, grammar deals with words combined into clauses and sentences, cohesion deals with how clauses and sentences are linked together, and the text structure deals with large scale organizational properties of texts” (Fairclough 1992: 75). Fairclough (1992) does not offer any specific methods for analyzing the texts, as mentioned in sections above the analysis and its focus depends on the questions one is interested in. Therefore, one strict method for analyzing texts would not work. For the purposes of text analysis the present study will use Bell’s framework for analyzing discourse structure of news stories. Thus, Bell’s (1998: 64-104) framework will be introduced in detail in section (2.2.5).

As critical discourse analysis strives to combine the textual level, discourse practices and social practices (Fairclough 1992), the levels in the analysis are often connected as well. As Fairclough (1992: 75) puts it, “three more headings can be added even though they are more related to discursive practices. These headings are as follows the force of utterances (threat, request, promise, etc.), the coherence of the text and the intertextuality of the texts.” Coherence is the way the readers try to interpret and make sense of the

text. There are as many interpretations as there are there are interpreters and writers and still all of them are capable of making sense of the text (Fairclough 1992: 134). Intertextuality is the way texts are connected to other texts and how texts include elements from other already existing texts (Fairclough 1992: 101-103; Fairclough, 2003: 17). This is to say that texts often draw references from other texts and connections to other texts create meaning.

### **2.2.2 Discourse practice**

Fairclough's (1992: 78) second dimension of discourse is discourse practice, which he describes as processes of production, distribution and consumption. As Fairclough (1992: 78-79) explains, texts are produced in specific ways in specific social contexts and they are also consumed differently in different social contexts. Consumption and production can be individual or collective. This is to say that one needs to consider who has produced the text and what for is the text produced. Moreover, the reader needs to know who has written the text and in what conditions, to whom the text is aimed at and in what conditions is it read, and finally where and how it is published (Fairclough 1992.)

As Fairclough (1992: 71-72) suggests, when analyzing texts one needs to take into consideration how the actual text is effected by the elements he calls discourse practice. This is to say that a text always has an author, a medium where it is published and an audience who it is attended at and they all have an effect on the text. This is to say for example, an author of a text is not neutral and makes linguistic choices accordingly. The author brings forth his conceptions of the world in the text. Fairclough (1992: 79-80) adds that the consumer of the text interprets the text according to his/her conception of the world and thus contributes to the meaning.

The way a text is produced and distributed needs to be considered when analyzing texts (Fairclough 1992). According to Fairclough (1992: 78-79), the distribution and production of the text have an effect on interpretation of the text. In addition, it does

make a difference whether a text appears in a printed medium or for instance on the Internet, since both offer a completely different amount of space and possibilities. There are various different genres of texts and Fairclough (1995a: 173) points out accordingly that genres are associated with particular type of interpretation and the interpretation of the text is dependent on the way a text is generically contextualized.

Intertextuality and genre mixing are things that often affect the interpretations of text and add to the ambivalence of text. Fairclough (1995a: 173) explains that genre mixing creates ambivalence because people are used to certain genres to have certain ways of presenting news and people interpret them accordingly. Mixing different genres and therefore mixing different ways of representing news creates confusion. There are ways that are considered normal use of language depending on the situation or group people are in, which is a discursive practice that Fairclough (1995b: 55) describes as “orders of discourse”.

### **2.2.3 Social practice**

The third dimension in critical discourse analysis is social practices, which are ideologies, hegemonies and hierarchies that are in power in the culture and society the discourse is produced in (Fairclough 1992: 66). According to Fairclough (1992), social practices are the things people have accepted and learned from the environment, culture and society they live in. Further, discourses are always a part of a particular social practice and are always produced in a certain cultural, historical environment. Therefore, it is an important part of analyzing discourse. As Fairclough (1992: 64) argues, discourse contributes to the social practices by reconfirming and by reconstructing it. Language or text can reconfirm, reconstruct, recreate or change already established discourse structures or hierarchies (Fairclough 1992). In the following section I shall explain in more detail what Fairclough means by ideology, hegemony and power relations.

#### **2.2.4 Ideology, hegemony and power relations**

Fairclough (2003: 9) suggests that “ideologies are not simply beliefs and values, they are representations of aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations”. Fairclough (1992: 87) states that ideologies are “the significations/constructions of reality (physical world, social relation, social identities) which are built into various dimensions of the forms/meanings of discursive practices, and which contribute to the production or transformation of relations of domination.” To put this in other words, ideologies are the beliefs and conceptions people have about the world and how it should be and they affect and are affected by the world. Ideologies are not simply learned they are reconstructed in the all the aspects of life. Fairclough (1992: 87) suggests that the ideologies that are embedded in discursive practices are most effective when they become naturalized, and people see them as common sense, which need not be questioned. In addition, Fairclough (1992: 90) notes that people are not always aware of the ideologies they practice. People do not always realize them because the ideologies are so natural and automatic.

Fairclough (1992: 92) describes hegemony as leadership and domination over the economic, political, cultural and ideological domains of society. Hegemony according to Fairclough is power over society as a whole. According to Fairclough (1992: 90), hegemonic power is under constant struggle. This is to say that the ones who have the dominance want to keep it and maintain the hegemonic power and the ones not in hegemonic power challenge, question and want it. Fairclough (1992: 66-67) suggests that these struggles over power can be seen in discourses. In order to analyze these discourses Fairclough (1992) suggests the use of his three-dimensional model of discourse.

Fairclough (1989: 32-33) explains power relations as for instance, the economic, political and ideological power different institutions and groups have. He adds that people are not usually aware of these power relations and they often go unnoticed until there is a special situation where the use of power comes visible.

Fairclough's (1992) suggestion for critical discourse analysis takes into account all of the three dimensions of discourse mentioned in the sections above. The analysis is conducted on all of the three different dimensions or levels and the analysis can start and focus on any of the three dimensions (See, e.g., Fairclough 1992; Pietikäinen 2000: 208-209). The analysis moves from one dimension to another and depending on what one wants to focus on there are various options for analysis on each dimension (Pietikäinen 2000: 209). To put this in other words, analysis involves looking at the text, looking at the production and consumption and finally considering the overall social surroundings of the discourse.

In this section Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse was described. As it was mentioned above Fairclough does not provide any specific methods for analyzing texts, therefore, the following section will introduce Bell's (1998: 64-104) framework for analyzing discourse structure of news stories. In addition, it is articulated why Bell's (1998) framework is suitable for the purposes of the present study.

### **2.2.5 Bell's discourse structure of news stories**

As Fairclough (1992: 75) suggests, on the level of the text one can analyze elements such as vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and text structure. Bell (1998: 64-65) points out, the importance of thorough analysis of story construction before one can find the ideologies and power that is present in the stories. Bell (1998: 76-80) provides a detailed guide to help analyze text's discourse structure as well as ask it more in-depth analytic questions. The present study will draw the textual analysis from Bell's (1998: 76-80) guide and concepts. Bell's (1998) concepts and how the present study makes use of them are explained in more detail in section (4.3.4).

Bell (1998: 66) suggests that ambiguity is often present in the news and story telling. Ambiguity is often one of the reasons why it is difficult to interpret texts. Moreover, it is also important to consider what is left unsaid in the text not only what is being said in

the text (Bell 1998: 65-66). Furthermore, when the context of the text is taken into account, the interpretation of a text can become even more confusing. Thus, Bell (1998: 64-104) suggests a framework for analyzing news stories and provides a detailed description of the elements a typical news story includes. Bell (1998:66) suggests that by examining the structure of the story one can form a more accurate description of the news. In addition, Bell (1998: 66) points out that news often include the information about what and who, but not why it is reported. This is to say that the reason for reporting the news is often left ambiguous.

Bell (1998: 67) suggests that news stories include elements such as attribution, abstract and story. Attributions include the sources of the story, place and time when the story has occurred. Abstract includes the headline and the possible lead of the story. The story includes episodes that consist of events and the events can consist of again attributors, action, actors, setting, follow-up, commentary and background. The episodes and the events they consist of are not in any strict order and the elements which are included in the events may not always all be appear in every episode (Bell 1998: 67-69.) Bell (1998: 66) suggests that by asking the text questions such as what, where, when, who and why, one can find answers to what is actually being said in the text and more importantly what is left unsaid.

Bell (1998: 65) suggests that it is important to analyze the construction of texts closely in order to discover the possible underlying ideologies behind the stories. Bell (1998: 65) adds that the close analysis of the text construction is important so that the audience learns how stories are made. Bell's (1998: 77-80) guide is suitable for the purposes of the present study as it provides the tools for a very thorough analysis of Hilton's blog's on the level of text and, further, it helps answer the question of what is actually said in the texts and what is not. In order to make sense of Hilton's gossip it is important to analyze what it is he is saying. Furthermore, Bell's (1998: 77-80) guide provides tools for answering more in-depth questions such as what are the implications of what is said and what is left unsaid in Hilton's blog. Although Bell's (1998: 64-104) framework is intended for analyzing discourse structure of news stories, it is suitable for the purposes

of the present study since it compliments the principles of critical discourse analysis which is to go beyond analyzing the text and bring out the ideologies behind the text. It is clear that gossip does not contain trustworthy or particularly newsworthy information. Nevertheless, gossip is reported and passed forward in Hilton's blog, and therefore has a structure just as any other reported news item. Next, it will be articulated how critical discourse analysis is relevant to the present study.

### **2.3 CDA's contribution to the present study**

Fairclough's three-dimensional of discourse is relevant to the present study, as the present study strives to take into account not only the text, but also the social implications of the blog and how the blog format and the blogger contribute to the construction/interpretation of the text. The present study strives to take the context of Hilton's blog into account in the analysis as well as the content of his writing. Because, it is interesting to find out, if Hilton as a homosexual man discussing other homosexuals in a public blog offers any alternative or diverse presentation of sexuality than the naturalized one, which is heterosexuality. Moreover, the present study strives to find out how Hilton's blog contributes to the discourses of homosexuality. This is an interesting set-up for the present study and by using critical discourse analysis the contribution of the blog format and blogger can be taken into account in the analysis and one does not need to simply focus on grammar or words.

Moreover, the present study strives to place the discourses in Hilton's blog into broader social discourses about celebrities' sexuality. Hence, critical discourse analysis provides concepts useful for this purpose. Since the present study strives to examine issues of how sexual minorities are discussed on more than textual level, critical discourse analysis provides an excellent framework for it. By using the principles of critical discourse analysis as the theoretical framework the analysis can go beyond the text and bring out the underlying ideologies the blog might have.

In addition, critical discourse analysis is rarely used when studying discourses on the Internet. Therefore, it is important to introduce material from the Internet such as blogs as one of the areas where critical discourse analytic theory can be applied. After all Internet is a powerful media outlet that the field of critical discourse analysis cannot ignore. This is to say that blogs too have vast readerships and contain power relations, ideologies and have the opportunity to distribute them to almost anyone with a computer.

This section introduced the theory and the theoretical framework the present study draws from. For the purpose of finding out more about what has been done in the previous studies in the field of queer studies and in the field of blogging some previous studies on both fields are represented, respectively.

## **2.4 The field of queer studies and previous queer studies**

As the present study investigates the representation and discussion of homosexuality, it is necessary to take a look at the field of gay, lesbian and queer research to get an overview of what has been the focus and interest in previous work in these fields. The following studies are examples from different areas of gay, lesbian and queer studies mostly in the field of critical discourse analysis with some exceptions. However, not all of the studies are strictly speaking critical discourse analytic. Many of the following studies introduced in this chapter have used multidisciplinary approaches. It is important to remember, however, that there is a great diversity within in the field of gay and lesbian and queer studies (Weeks 2000: 1-3), which makes it a very difficult field to cover entirely.

### **2.4.1 Diversity in the field**

Previous studies in the field of gay and lesbian language studies, also known as lavender linguistics, have mainly focused on language use, narratives of homosexuality, self-representation and homophobia. Previous studies are from multiple disciplines such as

the field of psychology, sociology and linguistics. I shall describe some of the studies conducted in the field in the following chapter in detail, since it is important to cover a general overview of what is going on in the field. Moreover, it is important for the purposes of the present study to form a view of what are the issues researchers are concerned with on the level of social practice, when discussing homosexual issues.

There is great diversity in the field of gay and lesbian studies (Weeks 2000: 1-3). Moreover, the diversity is shown in the vast body of studies as well as in the body of diverse opinions of researchers. However, the present study does not strive to be particularly a gay and lesbian study. Instead, it is a critical discourse analysis of a subject related to the field of gay and lesbian studies. Previous studies in lavender linguistics can be divided into two main categories: studying homophobic verbal abuse or studying language use between gay people. Research has focused on debating appropriate terms for gay people, categorizing and documenting the terms and finding out about the history of the terms (Peel 2005: 24.) As Peel (2005: 34) points out, there is a need for more research on content and context together because most of the previous studies focus on only one of these aspects and does not take them both into consideration together. As mentioned above the three-dimensional model of discourse introduced by Fairclough (1992) provides the present study an opportunity to consider content and context more thoroughly.

Peel's (2005) work explored how sexualities are socially constructed through slang words and phrases. Peel (2005) examined the types of terms and associations people produce when invited to generate language connected to lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and heterosexuals. She discovered that the terms people produced could be divided into two main categories, which were gender role inversion and sexual practices. Peel (2005: 33) noted that it was not difficult for the participants to create words to describe different sexualities even when the participants said they did not really use the words themselves. Peel (2005: 34) concluded that, although the views about diverse sexuality are more liberal nowadays, people do not have any difficulties producing the slang terms to describe different sexualities and that the views people have about diverse sexual

practices have not changed. In addition, Peel (2005: 34) stressed the importance of considering content and context when dealing with terms related to sexuality.

The difficulty in combining content and context together in studies related to presentation of homosexuality is illustrated in Jones's (2001) analysis of Hanns Heinz Ewers's book *Fundvogel*, which dealt with homosexual and transgender themes. Jones (2001) considered the book's relationship to the nationalist German society of the time it was written in and to the author's background and previous work. The ambiguity and confusion was due to the fact that the author Ewers had previously taken a rather sympathetic and open-minded view of homosexuality and the *Fundvogel* presents a more intolerant view (Jones 2001: 320-321). Jones (2001) tried to make sense of the contradicting views about homosexuality by taking into account the effect the era the book was written in might have had as well as the effect of the author's previous tolerance toward homosexuality. Jones's (2001) work, however, is not straightforwardly critical discourse analysis. It does, however, take into account similar factors as Fairclough's (1992) model does as for as the analysis of discourse practice and social practice. Furthermore, Jones's (2001) study focused on similar features the present study is interested in such as the effect of the background of the writer and data that possibly is in many ways contradicting.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, some of the previous studies have focused on gay and lesbian subcultural language research. For example, Queen (1998) studied the linguistic strategies gay and lesbians use to build social networks and their way of using language. Queen's study is a typical example of a gay and lesbian subcultural language study. She (1998: 205-210) noted that shared cultural understanding, playing with gender stereotypes, covert communication and co-narration are all used in a way of identifying oneself amongst gay and lesbian speakers. In her study she analyzed a conversation between a group of gay and lesbian people. Queen (1998: 211) concluded that gay and lesbian people may use the same linguistic strategies to create social networks as heterosexuals.

As Fairclough (1992) suggests, there are different institutions that determine the social practices that are in use in specific institutions. Therefore, it is not surprising that there are several lesbian and gay studies conducted in different types of institutional settings. For example, Moita-Lopes (2006: 31-50) conducted an ethnographic study of gay-themed discourses in a fifth-grade class in Brazil. Moita-Lopes (2006: 35-41) analyzed gay-themed discourses in a literacy context and tried to offer ways for teachers to be prepared for homosexual themed discourses and how they could teach that there are many ways of life. Moita-Lopes's (2006) work relates to critical discourse analysis in that it tries to offer ways to create a different social structure. In turn, Curran (2006: 85-96) tried to challenge heteronormativity in his work by answering and analyzing students' heteronormative questions in an Australian ESL class. Blackburn (2005: 89-113) studied the language use in a youth center and she focused her analysis on black queer youths. Her work is based on the principles of critical discourse analysis. Blackburn (2005: 89-113) discovered that the young people's language had unique features and created a way of emancipation for the users. Blackburn (2005: 110) argued that although the language often seemed very offensive to an outsider, the youth should be allowed to use the language since it gave them a sense of power.

Some of the previous studies draw from the history of homosexuality. For example, Juvonen (2002) studied the perceptions people had of gay and lesbian people in the Finnish community in 1950's. Juvonen (2002) investigated gossips and scandals of homosexuality in Finnish tabloid newspapers. She tried to discover how homosexuality was seen and what homosexuality was made out to be through linguistic constructions. Juvonen (2002: 288) suggested that through the investigation of gossip one could gain a perspective on how people saw homosexuality and homosexuals. Juvonen (2002) analyzed letters to the editor in three magazines and also described how homosexuality was described in these magazines. Her study also included personal interviews of gay people and of people who knew gay people in that era. Juvonen (2002: 289) concluded that the belief that homosexuality is a sensitive issue that needs to be hidden is still very strong in Finland. In addition, she noted that dealing with homosexuality in new ways is still difficult (Juvonen 2002: 289-290).

LeBesco (2002: n.pag.), in turn, studied a more modern way of distributing gossip and discussing homosexuality. LeBesco (2002: n.pag.) studied fan discourse on the Internet about the lesbian and gay characters in the TV-reality show Survivor I, II and III. She studied how the show represented the sexualities of the characters in them and considered how the fans of the show discussed and reacted to the different characters, especially those whose sexuality was not clear. Moreover, she also considered the impact reality-shows have on public discourse about lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) people. In her work she used various material such as video, newspaper articles, popular press and fan authored recaps in order to understand how the audience constructs characters sexuality. She discovered that fans did not feel negative about homosexuality rather they felt negative if the characters sexuality was not made clear in the TV-show. In addition, she discovered that fans did not consider a character to be negative because of their homosexuality rather they were seen as negative characters if their behavior was negative.

LeBesco (2002: n.pag.) noted that homosexuality was not the reason why characters were disliked. She adds that the openly homosexual characters in the show were represented as villains or effeminate or partying and promiscuous and gossipy. The negative response to homosexuality was on characters, who seemed too openly and stereotypically homosexual to the audience. LeBesco (2002: n.pag.) concluded that explicit homosexuality irritated both tolerant and intolerant viewers. She noted that tolerant viewers did not like the stereotypical representation of homosexuality and intolerant viewers did not like to see homosexuality at all. LeBesco's (2002) arguments confirm the idea that people are not necessarily against homosexual people; rather, they are against not being upfront about it. Her study shows that homosexuality as such is not an issue for the audience rather the individual's actions are the thing that is critiqued. LeBesco (2002: n.pag.) concluded that the ambiguity of certain characters sexuality was more annoying to audiences than the sexuality itself.

Both studies mentioned above illustrate the ways in which homosexuality is seen (LeBesco 2002) and how it has been seen (Juvonen 2002) in public discourse. Both

Juvonen (2002:288-289) and LeBesco (2002: n.pag.) discovered that too explicitly expressed homosexuality was seen as negative. Hence, their discoveries provide the present study a perspective of what the discourses about homosexuality are like and how do people perceive homosexuality.

In order to understand how homosexuality is portrayed in the media, how researchers think it should be portrayed, and what the stereotypical or naturalized perceptions of homosexuality are, it is necessary to take a closer look at what previous critical discourse analytic studies have focused on and discovered.

## **2.5 Previous CDA research connected to queer studies**

As the previous section illustrated, there is much diversity and different approaches in the gay and lesbian research. Previous studies have mainly focused on investigating how heteronormativity, which basically means that heterosexuality is seen as the only natural manifestation of sexuality (see, e.g. Butler 1990: 5), is manifested in language use. However, there has not been much work on texts that do not promote the idea of heteronormativity, but portray homosexuality. In this chapter, gay and lesbian studies related to critical discourse analysis will be discussed in detail.

### **2.5.1 Representation of homosexuality**

There is a vast body of studies of how homosexuality is represented in the media. Here, I shall describe a few studies that are not strictly in the field of critical discourse analysis, but which focus on finding or discussing the appropriate terms for the representation of homosexuality. First, I describe studies about how mainstream media represents homosexuality. Second, studies of hate speech are described and finally, I report on studies about the self-representation of homosexuals. This is to get a view of what is considered to be appropriate representation and what is not.

The mainstream media's representation of minorities, especially homosexuality has been the interest of many researchers. For example, Gouveia's (2005) study focused on gays and lesbians as discursive subjects in a Portuguese newspaper. Gouveia (2005: 230-231) used Fairclough's critical discourse analysis and Halliday's systemic functional grammar as methods of analysis. Gouveia (2005: 232) analyzed a newspaper that had a gay power theme for a week. He analyzed the articles and the headlines of the newspaper and tried to find out what they say and what it may imply about homosexuals and the power they are presented to have. His focus was mostly on the grammatical aspects of the text. Gouveia (2005: 246-248) concluded that the discourses in the newspaper confirm the difference of homosexuality and portray homosexuality and homosexuals as dangerous. Gouveia (2005: 247) noted that the purpose of the newspaper was not to discriminate homosexuals, however, it did end up doing so by portraying stereotypes such as homosexual men as feminine.

Moritz (2004), in turn, studied how the first lesbian characters were presented on American television. She (2004: 121) discovered that lesbians were often presented as feminine. However, they were not portrayed as sexy and often they were apologetic of their sexuality. Moritz (2004: 108) noted that humor was often part of the television shows and the issue of homosexuality was not dealt seriously or in depth. There was also a detective show *Hunter* that presented lesbians very negatively as dangerous. Moritz (2004: 122) concluded that although the lesbian characters and their sexuality were not presented as normal, it is a positive thing that the subjects that once have been taboo in television are at least represented.

Gauntlett's (2002) work is, in turn, a more detailed description of how homosexual characters have gradually emerged into British and American television and movies. Although Gauntlett (2002: 82-90) does not go into any detailed analysis, his description of how homosexual characters have gained visibility in television and movies is an interesting one. Gauntlett (2002: 82-90) noted similar representations of homosexual characters in television shows as Moritz (2004) suggested. For instance, Gauntlett (2002:

82-84) argued that the affection between homosexual characters was not shown and that homosexual characters had only minor comical roles.

Stewart (2008) focused on advertisements that promised recovery from homosexuality, aimed at homosexual people and their families. He used critical discourse analysis to study advertisements of reparative therapy for homosexuals and their homophobic implications and tries to link social cognition with critical discourse analysis. Stewart (2008) analyzed the narratives of advertisements that contained stories of cured former homosexuals. He (2008: 79-81) found out that the advertisements present arguments that reflect and advocate negative and stereotypic beliefs about gays and lesbians. These beliefs are according to Stewart (2008: 79) such as homosexuality is marked by unhappiness, disease, drug and alcohol abuse and promiscuity. He noted that stereotypes such as these are all things that are believed to be in the individuals' control. Stewart (2008: 80-81) also concluded that while the rhetoric of recovered homosexuals' might not convince people that homosexuality is not biological, it has an important role in creating and maintaining the link between the biological beliefs and attitudes about homosexuals. Although Stewart (2008) found the advertisements to include highly stereotypical representations of homosexuality, he did not see it as hate speech.

The present study does not strive to focus on appropriateness of certain terms per se. Problems related to the choice of appropriate terms and representation are, however, related to the broader social issues considered in the present study. It should be acknowledged that certain representations and terms are problematic and when taken out of context or used in a derogatory way they can indeed offend people. Sometimes the way homosexuality is represented can turn into more than stereotypes. Specifically, more purposely hurtful and directly hate filled speech. Therefore, in the next section research on homophobic hate speech is introduced.

### 2.5.2 Hate speech

It seems that not much work has been conducted on the positive side of gay and lesbian language use or positive or neutral representation of homosexuality. This is to say that previous studies have focused on discovering derogatory or homophobic ways that language is used in different discourses. Previous research has focused on data that are explicitly related to homosexuality and where homophobia and hate speech are rather clearly visible. I will briefly discuss two studies on hate speech more thoroughly. This is to illustrate what researchers consider hate speech in the field and what hate speech is like.

Lillian's (2005: 119-144) study is an example of work which integrates the study of homophobic discourse with critical discourse analysis. Lillian (2005: 119) analyzed the writings of the Canadian neo-conservative author, William D. Gairdner. She (2005: 119-144) focused especially on his discourse about homosexuals and homosexuality. Lillian (2005: 120) examined Gairdner's lexical choices, discussed neo-conservatism and Gairdner's role in it, and discussed other social and linguistic researches aimed at identifying and resisting homophobia and homophobic discourses. By this, she illustrated the ways in which Gairdner's discourse can be understood as part of the broader neo-conservative agenda with respect to race, gender and sexual orientation. In her analysis, she takes into account all of the Fairclough's levels of the three-dimensional model of discourse.

As Lillian (2005: 121) points out, fiction has not been studied much when it comes to homosexuality issues. In addition, there is not much critical discourse analysis on discourse of entertainment. Lillian (2005: 130) argues that "it is often the more rational-sounding and seemingly 'neutral' discourse which is the more insidious, precisely because readers may be less likely to realize that through reasonable-sounding prose they are being led toward a radical position." This is to say that sometimes the explicit display of homophobia is not so dangerous, because it is more easily identified. The danger lies in the implicit forms of homophobia. In the present study it is important to

consider if the Perez Hilton blog is implicitly homophobic and what are the implications of its possible homophobic discourse in general. Lillian (2005: 140-142) concludes that Gairdner portrays homosexuals in a stereotypical manner as violent, one-dimensional persons consumed by sexual desire, suggesting also that they can be cured out of homosexuality.

Another study where homophobia is shown to be connected to hate speech is Reddy's (2002) work on homophobia as a form of hate speech. In order to illustrate this, he analyzed the grammatical themes and lexical choices of political and public discourses about homosexuality in Africa. Reddy (2002: 173) concluded that the data clearly demonstrated that presenting homophobic views is a form of hate speech that has the purpose of recuperating the heterosexual order of society.

Both Reddy's and Lillian's work focused on texts that were very clearly homophobic and dealt directly with homosexuality. Therefore, implications to hate speech were not that difficult to discover. There is a lack of studies that concentrate on data where the homophobia is not so clearly present. There is a need for work that focuses on data that is ambiguous or more implicit. There is a lack of research on how homosexuals might use homophobic hate speech to represent themselves or other homosexuals. However, the problem of self-representation is an area where research has been conducted. The following section will represent some of the work that deals with self-representation of homosexuality.

### **2.5.3 Self-representation**

Self-representation is a problematic issue, since there are so many different opinions to what is appropriate and what is not. As mentioned above, Peel (2005) studied the terms people generated about different sexualities. The issue of what the appropriate term is to describe homosexuality, and who are allowed to use the terms is of great interest. For example, Jacobs (1998) conducted a case study of a gay and lesbian print media *XTRA!* He concentrated on the discussions over what the appropriate term is for self-reference

of gay people and covering the history of the term *gay*. Jacobs (1998) tried to locate in the writings by gays and lesbians in the paper a term to describe homosexuals which is not derogatory and would be generally accepted by gay people. Jacobs (1998: 193) argued that the choice of appropriate terms of self-reference by the oppressed group is always difficult. Further, Jacobs (2005: 199-200) concluded that terms that are originally derogatory should not be used in the mainstream media as the intended meaning of the way the term should be interpreted could be mixed.

Wong (2005) described a similar issue of finding the appropriate term as Jacobs (1998) did. Wong (2005: 763) studied in his work the reappropriation of the term *tongzhi*, which is a Chinese word which originally meant 'comrade' and which was later appropriated by gays and lesbians and sexual minorities to refer to themselves. Wong's (2005) work focused on the problems of figuring out an appropriate term. Moreover, the difficulty of reclaiming a word or maintaining the word's original non-offensive meaning, when for instance, mainstream media uses the same word in a derogatory manner (Wong 2005: 785-786). However, not all research on self-representation of homosexuality is focused on appropriate terminology. Next, Jones's (2000: 33-61) study that applies Fairclough's three-dimensional framework for analyzing discourse will be presented.

Jones (2000) studied homosexual self-representation in two newspapers by using Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse as framework for his study. Jones (2000: 36) investigated the relationship between language, culture, and identity in gay personal ads in two different publications in Hong Kong. The other publication was a free entertainment newspaper and the other a subscription newspaper aimed at gay and lesbian readers. Jones (2000: 44) found that on the text level the structural components differed between the stated race and cultural background of the authors and their target audience. He (2000: 44-49) found that on the level of discourse practice, the authors appropriated various different voices from the larger cultural arena, which he noted to either amplify or limit the participation of certain classes of individuals. On the level of

social practice Jones (2000: 57) discovered that the ads reflected and re-created both racial stereotypes and heterosexist ideology.

Alexander (2002) studied how homosexuals represented themselves on the Internet. Although Alexander's (2002) study is not directly in the field of critical discourse analysis it is connected to topics related to the present study, and therefore worth discussing in further detail. Alexander (2002) studied how gay individuals construct identities, communities and social agency on the Internet. Alexander (2002: 86-87) noted that there are markers such as the color pink and rainbow symbols to indicate that the web page is gay or gay friendly. In addition, many of the pages contained coming out stories. However, not all the pages were so explicit and there was not much difference in self-representation between gay and lesbian sites. Alexander (2002: 98-101) suggested that although the pages provide a lot of information such as advice and support, the representation of gay people is very narrow. By this he means that there is not much ethnic, cultural and racial diversity and the professional identity of the writers is not portrayed in the pages.

In this section previous studies of self-representation were presented, particularly from the perspective of critical discourse analysis. In the last section of this chapter it is articulated in more detail how these previous studies relate to the present study.

## **2.6 How do the previous studies relate to the present study?**

By presenting a number of different studies in the field of queer studies I have tried to illustrate that the field is very diverse in opinions as well as in use of different disciplines. In addition, the previous studies illustrated the stereotypical and heteronormative views that are still presented in the media and society. Moreover, I have tried to illustrate some general problems and issues that homosexuality still raises such as the stereotypical and heteronormative views that are still represented in the media and society. This is to say that in order to say anything about the implications a discourse

might have on a social level, one needs to know what the underlying issues and problems are in homosexual communities.

Studies that cover the mainstream media presentation of homosexuality are a major area of interest in previous gay and lesbian research. On the other hand, there is a vast body of research on media that is aimed at a particular group or minority. There seems to be very little, if any, research on discourse that falls somewhere between what is heteronormative and what is not heteronormative. Entertainment-oriented media and texts have not been researched much by using critical discourse analysis, or more particularly, Fairclough's approach. One task that this present study strives to perform is to correct the lack of analysis of such discourse by introducing the blog by a gay man, Perez Hilton. Hilton's blog is not really aimed at any particular group of people or a particular audience. It is easily available for anyone, and it is a well-known blog that has generated interest in the mainstream media, too. Therefore, it would be important to consider how discourses, such as ones in Perez Hilton's blog contribute to the idea of heteronormativity. The present study aims to consider the ways Hilton's blog represents homosexuality as he gossips about it and in what ways does, he entice the reader to follow the continuing saga. Since Perez Hilton publishes in a blog format, it is necessary to inspect the concept of blog and blogging in detail. Moreover, it is important to take a closer look at the previous research conducted in the areas of blog, blogging and gossip.

### **3 BLOGS AND GOSSIPING AS A GENRE**

In the chapters above the field of queer studies and research conducted in that area were described. As the present study is focused on gossip and story construction in a blog format with respect to Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse, a few words on blogs, blogging and gossiping as a genre are in order. This chapter will begin with a definition of a blog and blogging and will introduce some of the previous research conducted in the field of blogging. Further, in this chapter gossip as genre will be introduced and some previous studies on gossip will be presented. Moreover, previous studies on Perez Hilton's blog will be introduced.

#### **3.1 Blogs**

Blogs are web-based entries that resemble a journal or a diary. Blog entries are displayed starting from the most recent entry to the earliest, which is to say they are in reverse chronological order. Blogs often invite the readers to participate in the discourse by providing a comment section. This basic definition of a blog is a commonly shared by researcher (see, e.g., Bruns 2005: 17 and Tremayne 2007: preface). Blogs can have one or several authors (Bruns 2005: 171). Blogs usually provide links to other web content and to a blogroll, which is the blogger's list of his/her favorite blogs (Tremayne 2007: preface). Blogs are numerous in amount and style. Links connect blogs and this forms what is called a blogosphere. As Tremayne (2007: preface) puts it, is difficult to generalize about the blogosphere because of its size and, diversity of content and variation in format. This is to say there is an unaccountable number of blogs and blogging styles, and, consequently, making generalizations about them would be impossible. This is to say that covering even one particular genre of blogs would be overwhelming. Hence, the present study focuses on one particular blog and blogger.

Although blogs are often used as electronic versions of personal diaries, they have a better and faster way of linking to outside resources (Bruns 2005: 71-172). This is to say that blogs have the advantage to provide its readers with great amount of sources and

information that for instance a regular newspaper could not provide. In addition, Bruns (2005: 175) suggests that blogs are used for creating original news and commenting on news found elsewhere. This is to say that blogs no longer function only as personal diaries, they function as outlets for people's opinions.

### **3.2 Blogging**

Anyone can create a blog and become a blogger. Although one does need to have access to a computer and the Internet in order to become a blogger. The term blogger refers to the writer of the blog. As Tremayne (2007: preface) defines it, a blogger is someone who writes the blog and not someone who reads the blog.

The Internet provides a fast way of distributing information and provides almost anybody the opportunity to do so (Solove 2007: 35-37). In turn, Solove (2007: 4-5) suggests that blogging provides people the opportunity to publish their ideas instantly. Solove (2007) discusses in his book, *The future of reputation gossip, rumor, and privacy on the Internet*, about the problems and implications the Internet has on our privacy. He considers how gossip and rumor are able to spread much faster and how it is almost impossible for a gossip to be forgotten since it is next to impossible to get anything completely vanish from the Internet. Bloggers do not share the same ethical codes as the mainstream media does. Bloggers have no ethical restrictions but their own personal restrictions that vary from individual to another (Solove 2007: 59). Accordingly, Solove (2007: 59) adds that bloggers have some limits to what they can write about. However, in practice there are not many restrictions. In other words, blogging is a fast way for anyone to put out any information out there and there are no rules on how one chooses to represent the information. For example, one is free to use very informal language and language commonly used in computer-mediated communication, which is "the communication produced when human beings interact with one another by transmitting messages via networked computers" (Herring 2001: 612).

Thurlow et al. (2004: 118-128) have listed the most common features of computer communicated language. They suggest that the language used in the computer communication can be called netlingo and netspeak. The most common features of netlingo are word compounds and blends, abbreviations and acronyms, minimal use of capitalization and punctuation and hyphenation or non at all and generally less regard for accurate spelling and/or typing errors (Thurlow et al. 2004: 124). The typical typographic strategies used in netspeak are letter homophones, acronyms and mixture of both, creative use of punctuation, capitalization or other symbols for emphasis and stress, onomatopoeic and/or stylized spelling, keyboard generated emoticons or smileys, direct requests, interactional indicator and with more elaborate programming, colored text, emotes or other graphic symbols (Thurlow et al. 2004: 125).

In this section it is illustrated what is meant by blog and blogging. In the following section a more detailed description of what has been done in the field of blogging research will be illustrated.

### **3.3 Previous blog studies**

Blogs are a fairly new phenomenon. However, as Schmidt (2007: 1410) suggests, there has been a considerable amount of research on the uses of blogs, the impact of blogs, the relationship between journalism and blogging and political blogs. In his work Schmidt (2007) proposes a general model for analyzing and comparing different uses of blog format. His study finds different uses of blogs and how people or groups interact according to certain rules and expectations in blogging. The study is useful when comparing differences or similarities between blogs, however his framework is not very useful for the purposes of the present study. This is because the present study focuses on one particular blog.

A great deal of the previous research on blogs has focused on political blogs. A number of different studies on political blogs can be found in the book edited by Mark Tremayne (2007), *Blogging, Citizenship, and the Future of Media*. For example, Eveland and

Dylko (2007: 105-126) studied who the readers of political blogs are and why they read them. They (2007: 120-121) discovered a connection between blog reading, online news use and online political discussion. Eveland and Dylko (2007: 121) concluded that people who read blogs still use traditional media sources as well. In other words, people read blogs because they are allowed to participate in the discussion and blogs offer an alternative view than the traditional news.

The other major concern in previous studies on blogs has been the influence blogging has on traditional journalism. Earlier, there was a lot of debate about whether tabloids are real journalism and if tabloidization of news makes journalism to lower its standards (see for instance, Sparks and Tulloch 2000). Now, blogging seems to have become the cause of a similar kind of worry (see for instance, Tremayne 2007). Blogging is seen as threat to real journalism. However, many bloggers get most of their materials from news items written by real journalists. For instance, Tremayne (2007) concludes that blogs do not pose a real threat to traditional journalism. Tremayne (2007: 268) suggests that blogging in its current form will not replace real journalism since bloggers do not have to report on anything they are not interested in. Traditional journalism has the obligation to cover news such as small local events that might not be of any interest to any blogger to report. At the same time, bloggers have the opportunity to bring a story to public knowledge or maintain a story in the public even though mainstream media would not be interested in the story anymore (Solove 2007: 20).

### **3.3.1 Sexuality and gender on the Internet and in blogging**

While many studies have focused on political blogs, some of the previous studies have focused on more entertaining forms of blogs. However, some of the previous studies mentioned earlier were not purely on blogs and blogging. For example, although Alexander (2002: 85-106) studied gay self-representation on the Internet, his main focus was not on blogs or blogging. Similarly, LeBesco's (2002) work on the representation of homosexuality in the fan discourse on the Internet did not focus on blogging.

Nevertheless, there are studies on blogging which investigate gender differences. For example, Macafee and Pedersen (2007: 1473) studied gender differences in British blogs, and found out that women bloggers are not so visible in the blogging as men are. They discovered that both men and women see blogging as a past time activity. However, more than men women saw blogging as a creative outlet (Macafee and Pedersen 2007: 1488).

Self-representation in blogs has not been studied very much. However, Calvert and Huffaker (2005) studied how teenagers represented themselves in their blogs, and how much personal information their blogs contained. They discovered that the blogs contained a great number of personal information such as full names, locations and sexual orientation. They concluded that the blogs were authentic representations of the bloggers real lives rather than fictional representations of their lives. They also discovered that there were not so many differences between the style and amount of personal information in blogs by male and female writers. They concluded that blogging of this kind should be studied more.

By introducing the previous studies in the field of blogging it was illustrated how there are only few studies about blogs that are entertaining. Moreover, there are studies of how bloggers represent themselves but not how they represent others. Thus, there is a need for more studies on how sexuality of others is represented on the Internet and blogs, in particular. Hence, the present study strives to discover how gossip and stories are created and maintained both linguistically and through blogging format. Moreover, the present study focuses on representation of others not self-representation. Having described some previous research related to blogs and blogging in section (3.4), I shall now describe gossip as a genre, previous gossip studies and previous studies on Perez Hilton's blog, specifically.

### 3.4 Gossip

Gossiping is a social practice and people gossip, and have always gossiped about other people. As Solove (2007: 11) puts it, people have always gossiped, circulated rumors and shamed others. In turn, Pendleton (1998: 70) describes that, “gossip consists of observations and expressions of opinions or characterizations (often unflattering) about other people.” To put this in other words, gossiping is something that usually involves people exchanging information about an absent party.

There are different types of gossip as well. As Solove (2007: 11) points out, gossiping is now moving on to the Internet and this gives the gossip a new permanent form altogether. Gossiping that happens on the Internet provides readers with the possibility to trace back to the very origins of a story. Gossip can be private and it may not have any significance to people who do not have the inside knowledge (Solove 2007: 60). Gossip can also involve public figures and celebrities. It should be noted that the present study focuses on celebrity and entertainment gossip blog, which only includes gossip about public figures and not private persons.

Gossiping about celebrities is nothing new and magazines and tabloids have done it for as long as they have existed. Gossip blogs are no exception to this; bloggers often get their materials from tabloids and entertainment magazines and therefore, could not exist without them. Often enough gossip blogs do not offer any new relevant information about the gossip, rather, they repeat a story that has already been published somewhere else, a story that might not contain any new information. It is the repetition of the story and how the gossip is spread forward and how the gossip is speculated is what makes it meaningful to the gossipers. This is an interesting aspect of gossip and story construction, which is the main focus of the present study, is how a gossip story is told forward and how a story with no real substance can have meaning to a person with knowledge of background and context. In the following section studies that have focused on gossiping and the construction of gossip will be presented.

### 3.4.1 Schely-Newman's study on gossip columns

Schely-Newman (2004) studied Israeli gossip columns and how they created the feeling of intimacy between the reader and the writer through language choices. Schely-Newman (2004) suggested that similar features could be found in written form of gossiping as in oral form of gossiping. She (2004: 471-488) considered the content and context as well as the linguistic elements of gossiping. This is to say she tried to discover features that were unique to Israeli gossip columns. Her work draws from Fairclough's media studies and from Bell's framework for analyzing discourse structure of news stories.

Schely-Newman (2004: 474) suggests that the columnist, audience and the celebrity form a triad. She suggests that the column could be considered a persona, even though there may be different writers. The illusion of the column as a persona derives from the use of personal pronouns, the use of personal voice and verbs that describe emotions, experiences and feelings (Schely-Newman 2004: 474-475). Schely-Newman (2004: 474) argues that often no news is news and this is a way to continue the story. Schely-Newman (2004: 474) suggests that only the readers who follow the ongoing saga know why the story is published.

Schely-Newman (2004: 484) argues that by addressing the audiences the writers created the feeling of false intimacy and created the feeling of belonging to the inside. Schely-Newman (2004: 484) adds accordingly that creating intimacy also creates the reader's interest in following the ongoing stories. Schely-Newman (2004: 481) suggests that although the use of slang is very typical in gossip columns there are slang words that are specific to the Israeli gossip columns and cannot be traced elsewhere. In addition, Schely-Newman (2004: 883) notes that Israeli gossip columns did not feature any minorities. Homosexuality was one of the subjects that were not gossiped about at all. In other words, Schely-Newman (2004) was able to discover many features that were specific to Israeli gossip columns.

Schely-Newman's (2004: 471-488) work is quite closely connected to the present study. Schely-Newman (2004) studied more than the textual elements of the gossip columns. Her study also covers the unique features of gossip columns. The present study is interested in features of gossiping and strives to take into account how the blog format contributes to the meaning making as well as the blogger's background. Therefore, Schely-Newman's (2004) discoveries on gossip columns provide concepts that can be looked at and compared in the analysis of the present study. Thus, it is important for the purposes of the present study to introduce Schaffer's (1995) work that touches on similar concepts as Schely-Newman's (2004) work does.

### **3.4.2 Schaffer's study on headline and intimacy creation**

Schaffer (1995: 27-46) conducted content analysis of tabloid newspaper headlines and studied the linguistic devices used in the headlines to attract the reader's attention. Although Schaffer's (1995) study is not strictly speaking a gossip study, it is closely related to the topic of false intimacy creation that Schely-Newman (2004) discussed in her work. For example, Schaffer (1995: 31) discovered that some linguistic devices were used in the headlines in order to make the reader feel more intimately involved in the news. Schaffer (1995: 31) suggests that to make the reader feel more intimately involved in the news, the headlines contained only the first names of people, well-known nicknames of famous people and pseudo-quotes. She adds that by using only the first names implies that the readers and the ones written about know each other well enough to be on the first name basis and that there is no need for last names because everyone knows who is meant. According to Schaffer (1995: 31), the use of nicknames of celebrities reinforced the intimacy and sense of familiarity because the reader can feel as an insider as she/he knows whom the nickname refers to. Accordingly, Schaffer (1995: 32) points out that pictures that often accompany the headline help in identifying the person in question and readers do not only have to rely on first name and nickname knowledge. She adds that the use of nicknames and first names are still an efficient way of attracting the reader's attention and making the reader feel included in the story as an insider.

Schaffer (1995: 32) discovered, that headlines often included what she calls pseudo-quotes. She describes them as quotes that are not always marked as clear quotes and often seem like direct quotations. She notes, however, that many of the pseudo-quotes are not verbatim quotes although they often seem to be. She suggests that pseudo-quotes are a way of claiming access to the person's mind and thoughts and this is a way of creating intimacy and the illusion of knowing someone's mind. To add to this pseudo-quotes are often misleading since meaning of a quote can change very much if parts of it are changed. The present study does not include what Schaffer (1995: 32) calls pseudo-quotes. However, Schaffer's (1995: 31-32) discoveries of the linguistic elements that are used to involve the reader more intimately into the stories are beneficial for the purposes of the present study. As Schaffer (1995: 34) points out, the features in involving the reader are so frequently used it must be deliberate. This is say that a typical way of involving the readers is to create feeling of false intimacy. This is an important aspect of how a gossip blog might be constructed. Since the present study strives to discover the ways in which celebrities' sexuality is gossiped about in a gossip blog, similarities to what both Schaffer (1995) and Schely-Newman (2004) discovered can be compared to the discoveries of the present study.

### **3.4.3 Benwell's male gossip study**

Benwell (2001) studied masculine identity and discourse in letter pages of men's lifestyle magazine. Benwell (2001: 20-32) discovered that the magazine uses the same kind of language as the readers use in order to connect with them on a personal level. She suggests that the magazines use the same kind of language men use in real life in order to interact with them and to make a connection with the readers.

In addition, Benwell (2001: 21-23) discovered that discourse could be seen as a form of male gossip. She suggests that the gossip worked as way of strengthening the bond of masculine identity. She (2001: 20) noted that by excluding people considered as others, men bonded. Benwell's (2001) discoveries about creating intimacy between the reader

and the writer are similar to the discoveries of Schely-Newman (2004) and Schaffer (1995) mentioned above.

As the previous studies on gossip suggest, there are some common features in the presentation and construction of gossip. Even when gossiping happens in a public domain, such as a gossip column, it still contains features that create the feeling of intimacy and private one-on-one gossiping. Moreover, gossip excludes others and creates inside groups that are in the know. These can be seen as a discursive practices common to gossip. Thus, the discoveries of the pragmatic features used in gossip made by Schely-Newman (2004), Schaffer (1995) and Benwell (2001) are important when analyzing Hilton's gossip. Because the present study strives to take into account how the blog format and blogger Hilton shape the gossip about celebrities' sexuality. In the next section previous studies on Perez Hilton's blog will be presented.

#### **3.4.4 Previous studies on Perez Hilton's blog**

Perez Hilton's blog has been the subject of some previous studies. Petersen (2007) and Fairclough (2008) have discussed Hilton's blog in their papers. Both of the papers draw from Richard Dyer's work on celebrity production. Petersen (2007) focuses on Hilton's role as both producers and consumers of the star image. Drawing on Dyer's five aspects of star production, economics, manipulation, fashion, magic/talent and the nature of the medium, Petersen (2007) discusses Hilton's blog. Petersen (2007: n.pag.) suggests that Hilton both effects and values celebrities through these five aspects.

For example, Petersen (2007: n.pag.) suggests that if Hilton says some celebrity is disliked, he is making it a reality, even though it would not be true. She adds that it is enough to deteriorate celebrity's image if a rumor is circulated enough. She claims that a blogger like Hilton with vast a readership can influence on people's perception of a celebrity. Petersen (2007: n.pag.) claims it could be possible Hilton could influence so much so that people would actually boycott for example films if he asked his readers to do so, and thus influence the economic aspect of star production. Petersen (2007: n.pag.)

notes that if a celebrity is “outed” as a homosexual nowadays, it may no longer economically destroy the celebrity, but being a target of Hilton’s blog very well may.

Petersen (2007: n.pag.) suggests that Hilton’s blog contradicts the claim that Hollywood can manipulate the public to like any star image. She points out that Hilton and other gossip bloggers contribute to the star manipulation as well, but not necessarily the way the celebrities would like. Petersen (2007: n.pag.) suggests that Hilton is a fan and a critical observer. She suggests that Hilton has clear favorites that he adores as a fan and promotes the things he likes and does admit to it clearly in his posts. Petersen (2007: n.pag.) adds that Hilton divides celebrities into the ones who deserve to be famous and the ones who do not. According to Petersen (2007: n.pag.), this does not necessarily mean that the celebrity needs to have any special talent, but if the celebrity is good at manipulating their image and media it is enough for Hilton.

Petersen (2007: n.pag.) suggests that Hilton has initiated a new way of perceiving celebrities, by using a value scale where one needs to be good or bad enough to be good. She adds that the new media has made it so that there are no longer larger than life stars. Further, she suggests that Hilton’s blog is addictive because he feeds the readers exactly what they want, which is making the signs of production visible and telling them where to direct consumption. Petersen’s paper covers most of the aspects of Hilton’s blog. It provides a great general overview of Hilton’s blog and what the blog is about. However, it is a very broad description of Hilton’s blog and focuses very briefly on each aspect of a star production.

Fairclough’s (2008: n.pag.) paper on Hilton’s blog adapts, in turn, a post-feminist point of view. Fairclough’s (2008) main focus is on how gossip blogs contribute to the different kind of treatment of male and female celebrities in the media. Her data consist of several different gossip blogs, however, Perez Hilton’s blog is the main source of her work. Unlike Petersen (2007), Fairclough (2008) has taken a much more critical approach to Hilton’s blog. She considers Hilton’s blog from a broader social perspective.

Fairclough (2008: n.pag.) suggests that gossip blogs such as Perez Hilton's contribute to the objectification of women and the evaluation of female celebrities with different standards than male celebrities. However, she does not offer any evidence to support this in that she does not provide any examples of male representation in the blogs. Fairclough (2008: n.pag.) argues that female celebrities are more frequently evaluated for their looks and conduct, and not for their professional achievements.

Fairclough (2008: n.pag.) suggests that blogs are part of the creation of the modern celebrity culture and the deconstruction of celebrity images, much like Petersen (2007) suggests in her paper. Further, Fairclough (2008: n.pag.) argues that bloggers often use what she describes as a bitch narrative, which is a derogatory and mean way of commenting and confronting others. She also suggests that in the post-feminist world, empowerment is often masked as having to be overtly sexual. Further, suggesting that post-feminist discourses often include the idea that women are able to do well in life, but they still must take care of their appearances and physical beauty. Fairclough (2008: n.pag.) suggests that bloggers scrutinize female celebrities more harshly, especially, on their appearances.

Fairclough's (2008) almost completely ignores the role of audience as an interpreter of the text and also the responsibility of the celebrity for their own actions. In addition, many of Fairclough's (2008) examples have been taken out of context and, for example, in the case of Perez Hilton she suggests that due to Hilton's gay diva persona he only appreciates women who are traditionally feminine. Fairclough (2008: n.pag.) provides an example of Hilton calling women who do not fit this description as 'manly' and 'trannies'. Suggesting this only on the basis of Hilton's choice of words is not a fair judgment. There is more to these stories than simply suggesting that these women do not confirm to the feminine ideal of Hilton.

Fairclough (2008: n.pag.) claims that Hilton has managed to "out" homosexual celebrities. However, she fails to consider that Hilton has only suggested and speculated about the homosexuality of celebrities. Therefore, it cannot be said for certain that he

has “outed” anyone. In addition, Hilton often objectifies and judges men’s appearances as well as women’s appearance. He often says men have ‘gayface’ and categorizes men’s pictures under headlines like ‘yummy, yummy, screw.’ Hilton also scrutinizes male celebrities for losing their appearance or gaining weight just as Fairclough (2008: n.pag.) suggests, bloggers only do to the female celebrities.

According to Fairclough (2008: n.pag.), the use of irony and humor in gossip blogs is a way of making the mockery less offensive and more acceptable. Fairclough (2008) fails to take into account the audience of these blogs. She does not consider that the readers of these blogs might actually understand the irony and the humor in a very different way since they may have followed up on a particular story and now the implications and the backgrounds to the story. Moreover, Fairclough (2008) does not consider the fact that blogs often provide the reader the opportunity to read the previous stories that have led to the most recent story and to discuss them with other readers. It would also be insightful to consider that people who read gossip blogs usually know to expect inappropriate language, irony and poking fun of celebrities. This, however, does not mean that readers do not know how to separate gossip and public images from real life personas. By only focusing on random posts and many different gossip blogs, Fairclough (2008) does not manage to analyze any of them in much detail. There is a need for more deeper and thorough analysis of gossip blogs and the difference in their portraying genders. It is, however, not fair to make such vast generalizations and in depth conclusions based on a very brief and general overview of several different gossip blogs as Fairclough’s (2008) paper does.

Further, Fairclough (2008) does not take into account that celebrities also know something about image and star production. Celebrities are not merely something media, audience and gossip bloggers can rip apart, but they still have some possibilities to influence their own image. Obviously, the standards celebrities have to measure up to are often unfair, sexist and gender biased as suggested by Fairclough (2008). That does not mean celebrities do not bear any responsibility for their own actions. Celebrities do know how to create attention and create stories.

Fairclough (2008: n.pag.) argues that gossip bloggers especially target celebrities that are not so famous and therefore prone to more scandalous behavior. Fairclough (2008) fails to notice that bloggers also keep many celebrities and many stories afloat even though mainstream media is not interested in them and their stories anymore. Hence, often keeping minorities and alternative stories in the public. Moreover, bloggers often publish pictures of celebrities that are not photoshopped next to the one's that are photoshopped. Thus, showing the readers that pictures do not always represent the reality and celebrities are not flawless either. This is something that printed magazines rarely do since they usually are the ones who have photoshopped the pictures in the first place. It could be said that it is a positive thing that people are shown that not even the stars achieve perfection without help. Thus, one cannot simply argue that unflattering photos can only be interpreted as attacks against unconventional femininity as Fairclough (2008: n.pag.) puts it. The present study does acknowledge the fact that there probably are different standards in judging female celebrities as opposed to male celebrities.

Fairclough (2008) provides a fairly one-sided view of gossip blogs and the impacts they have on celebrity presentation and feminism. Petersen (2007), in contrast, does not see gossip blogs as such a negative thing and sees them as a new means of star production and creating standards for celebrities. However, gossiping is not a new phenomenon, but blogs are simply a new way of distributing them.

Chapter (2) introduced the main principles of critical discourse analysis and the framework of Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse the present study strives to connect to. Chapter (3) introduced blogs and gossiping as a genre. In order to form a view of the topics the present study relates to chapters (2.4), (2.5), (3.3) and (3.4) presented previous research and views on queer studies and blog studies, respectively. In the previous chapters it was also articulated how the theoretical framework (2.3) and previous studies relate to the present study (2.6). In chapter (4) the research set-up of the present study will be introduced.

## **4 THE RESEARCH SET-UP OF THE PRESENT STUDY**

### **4.1 Aims of the present study**

The present study considers Perez Hilton's blog from the viewpoint that it is not homophobic and does not represent homosexuality as a negative thing. As illustrated in the previous section, there is a lack of research on the representation of homosexuality with consideration to content and context. There is a need to bring out various representations of homosexuality that can be found in the media and entertainment. Moreover, heterosexuality is still seen as the only normal form of sexuality and everything else needs to be labeled as different. Gossip blogs have not been studied previously that much either, even though gossip blogs have a large readership and therefore are in the position of distributing ideologies and beliefs and reconstructing and reconfirming them. The aim of the present study is to fill these gaps.

The present study focuses on Perez Hilton's language uses with which he continues and describes a particular ongoing saga of Lindsay Lohan and her possible homosexuality. The present study strives to place these blog posts into Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model of discourse. The textual analysis will draw on Bell's (1998: 64-104) framework for discourse structure of a news story and the previous work on false intimacy by Schely-Newman (2004) and Schaffer (1995). Fairclough's model provides the possibility to consider the background and the implications of the blog in more detail. Many researchers who have studied the representation of gays and lesbians and who have worked with CDA have called for more attention to the consideration of content and context (see, e.g. Peel, 2005). The present study does not strive to make any judgments on whether gossiping or gossip blogging is wrong or problematic. Furthermore, it argues that it is not fair to condemn gossiping and gossip blogs based on general overviews of them. Instead, it is important to focus on specific type of blog and its functions. Moreover, by focusing on specific stories in the blog it is possible to get a comprehensive view of what is actually reported and written.

## 4.2 Research questions

The present study strives to find out how a celebrities' sexuality is discussed and constructed in a gossip blog and strives to consider the writings in respect to Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse. Thus, the main research questions of the present study are as follows:

1. How does the context of production shape the gossip blog about celebrities' sexuality?
2. How does the discourse structure and pragmatic features of Perez Hilton's blog construct celebrities' sexuality?
3. How does Perez Hilton's gossip blog contribute to the ways in which celebrities' sexuality are discussed in public media discourse?

In order to answer the three main research questions each of them is followed by several sub-questions. The sub-questions are the following:

The sub-questions to the first main research question are:

- How do the features unique to blog format contribute in the story creation?
- How does Hilton as a blogger contribute to the story creation?

The sub-questions to the second main research questions are:

- How does the discourse structure of the gossip blog contribute to the construction of celebrities' sexuality?
- How does the gossip blog involve the reader in the gossiping about the celebrities' sexuality?

The sub-questions to the third main research questions are:

- What are social implications about the ways in which Hilton gossips about homosexuality?
- Is this type of gossip creation reproducing or reconfirming heteronormativity?

### 4.3 Collection and selection of data

The data were gathered from the blogsite [www.PerezHilton.com](http://www.PerezHilton.com). To be more exact, the data consist of posts related to Lindsay Lohan from the time period of August 2008 to October 2008. This period was chosen, because the posts about Lohan's sexual orientation were frequent during that time and the discussion of her possible sexual orientation and official coming out was speculated on very heatedly in the mainstream media as well as in Perez Hilton's blog. Moreover, this was a time period when everyone, the media, Lohan and Ronson themselves as well as Lohan's family members, added to the speculation. This speculation provided Hilton with endless resources for material in his blog. In addition, these posts were selected, because Lohan is one of the main subjects discussed all and all in Hilton's blog. Further, the posts about her reflect well an overall view of Hilton's blogging style.

The data include only the text part of each post. They exclude the pictures, because they are not relevant to the analysis this present study strives to do. The readers' comments are also excluded from the data, because audience reception is not the focus of the present analysis. The language within the data is not modified, which is to say that all the possible spelling errors, italics, bold letters and other features in the examples were there originally. The only thing excluded from the text is the pink colored lettering that function as links. This is because the links would have been difficult to reproduce and they are not particularly relevant to the analysis of the data. However, the links will be mentioned and pointed out in the analysis, if they serve a particular function relevant to the present study.

The specific examples discussed in the analysis were selected as they each in their own way represent typical features of Hilton's post. The present study, however, does not aim to speculate whether Lindsay is gay or not. The answer to that would be impossible to find out. Instead, the present study aims to analyze the ways in which Hilton reproduces the gossip about Lohan and what the possible implications of this are to heteronormativity as a social practice. The fact that Hilton is openly a homosexual man

himself and that gossips about other gay people are the particular factors that make the present study interesting.

In order to create some context for the stories I shall first give some background information about Perez Hilton and Lindsay Lohan and who they are. Most importantly, some background will be given to show how the speculation about Lohan's romantic involvement with Samantha Ronson began. In addition, the way in which Hilton is personally connected to the story will be discussed.

#### **4.3.1 Perez Hilton**

Perez Hilton is an alias of Mario Armando Lavandeira Junior. In his blog he provides the reader with relatively little information about himself. Although Hilton is a flamboyant character, he does show his real face and does not hide his real name in any way. Hilton does share the fact that he is a homosexual and that his family is originally from Cuba.

Perez Hilton's blog as it is now was established 2005, and it has grown to be one the most popular celebrity gossip blogs. Hilton's blog started originally as PageSixSixSix.com, 2004 but the name had to be changed because the *New York Post* filed a lawsuit claiming the name resembled too much of their Page Six gossip column. Then, in 2005, he named the blog PerezHilton.com. Before getting fired Lavandeira used to be a reporter for the *Star* magazine and was an inspiring actor. He realized it would be easier to become a famous blogger than a famous actor and since he felt his life was not interesting enough to write about, he decided to start writing about celebrities (Brown 2008.) Lavandeira created the character Perez Hilton because he realized that to become famous one needed to be a memorable character (Brown 2008: n.pag.).

Hilton's trademarks are posting unflattering paparazzi pictures of celebrities and adding his poorly drawn images on them. The images are usually obscene for example, white

drippings from different body parts of celebrities and writing things like “hot mess” or “douch” on their face. Hilton is known for promoting himself and the things he likes shamelessly. It is clear which celebrities he admires and which he dislikes. He is also very well known for trying to out celebrities that he believes to be homosexual. He is open about his own homosexuality and often promotes equal rights in his blog.

Hilton’s blog attracts about seven million readers per day and he has managed to become a celebrity thanks to his blog. Mainstream media or at least entertainment media often notice his blog and report on what Hilton has written in his blog. He has published his own book and has his own TV-show, *What Perez Sez*, in the channel VH1 and has appeared as a guest star in several other reality TV-shows. Hilton has managed to build a franchise around his blog and has managed to turn blogging into his profession. In this, he is very successful. His blog is gaining more audience everyday. However, in the analysis the context of reception will be left out, as it would be rather difficult and irrelevant to take the audience perception that much into account.

#### **4.3.2 Lindsay Lohan**

Lindsay Lohan is a former child star, who became famous by appearing in advertisements, Disney movies, and later for her singing career. Lindsay Lohan has been in the public eye since she was a child and has been the interest of mainstream media for a long time. As she grew up she became the target of tabloid magazines and the paparazzi, as rumors about her drinking and drug problems started to surface. She is more famous for her personal troubles nowadays than for her acting career. Reports about Lohan’s several car accidents, visits to drug rehabilitation and other personal problems are more frequent than reports of her professional career in acting and singing. In addition, Lindsay Lohan’s family are also in the public eye, therefore, they often appear in the data and are part of the ongoing speculation of her sexuality. Lindsay’s mother Dina Lohan is also her manager and she appears in a reality-TV show *Living Lohan* with Lindsay’s siblings. Lindsay’s younger sister Ali Lohan, who appears in the reality-show, is striving to become a star as well. Lohan’s father Michael Lohan has

been to jail for white-collar crimes and is notorious for commenting on Lindsay's life to the press. He has given Hilton exclusive interviews about Lindsay Lohan. Lohan and her family members are frequent subjects of Hilton's posts and have been long before the gossip about Lohan's sexuality began. Hilton does not admire Lohan or her family and they have always been the targets of Hilton's ridicule.

### **4.3.3 The rumors**

Lindsay Lohan's problems related to weight loss, alcohol and drugs and visits to rehabilitation have gained media attention for a long time. The latest media frenzy started when in early 2007 rumors of Lohan's sexual orientation started to surface. Her frequent public appearances with celebrity DJ Samantha Ronson started the speculation that the two were romantically or sexually involved. Ronson and Lohan were openly affectionate towards each other and the paparazzi and media picked up on it. Even the mainstream media speculated and waited for Lohan and Ronson to officially come out as a couple. Even the smallest comments or gestures from Lohan or Ronson were interpreted as coming out or indication of the nature of their relationship. Ronson and Lohan have never denied or confirmed the nature of their relationship. However, they have been referred to as a couple by the mainstream media for months. The media thus no longer speculate on whether Lohan and Ronson are a couple but they have made it reality by referring to them as a couple. On September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2008 it was officially announced by several bloggers and mainstream media that Lohan and Ronson had confirmed their relationship. However, on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2008 Hilton reported that Lohan's publicist denied that Lohan had come out officially. In any case, after this it did not seem to matter anymore, and the mainstream media started to treat them as a couple. Then at the beginning of the year 2009 the gossip about their heated arguments started to surface and rumors about their possible break-up started. After months of gossip and no confirmation of their relationship, on April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2009 Lohan and Ronson finally announced that they had decided to take a break. By this time media no longer reacted to the fact that by announcing they were taking a break, they also finally admitted to being

together. Now the speculation continues over whether they will get back together or will they start seeing other people and who. The saga has not seen its closing chapter yet.

Hilton has written about Lohan's life and her troubles from the very beginning of his blog, in year 2005. Speculations about Lohan's relationships were no exceptions to Hilton either and he took part in them. Rumors about Lohan and Ronson's relationship had already started when on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2007 Lohan had a car accident and drugs were found in her possession. After the accident Hilton posted a link to another gossip blog *Celebrity Babylon* that reported that the drugs found on Lohan were actually Ronson's. Hilton then told people to blame Samantha Ronson for Lindsay Lohan's problems and called Ronson a *Lezbot*. This is how Hilton got personally involved in the story, because after the post the following events took place.

Samantha Ronson filed a lawsuit against Hilton for repeating the story that was first published in the gossip blog *Celebrity Babylon* and for calling her a *Lezbot*. Ronson sued Hilton and the other website for defamation. Hilton argued First Amendment rights and the judge agreed. Ronson had to pay Hilton his legal fees. Occasionally, Hilton refers to the lawsuit and its end result in his blog posts. Thus, Hilton became part of the story of Lohan and Ronson, which made him seem as almost insider to the story.

#### **4.3.4 Methods of analysis**

In this section it is articulated how the analysis of the present study is organized and Bell's (1998: 64-104) concepts are made clear. In addition, it is explained how Schely-Newman's (2004) and Schaffer's (1995) concepts are used in the present study.

In order to make the analysis easier to follow the headlines are indicated with initials HL and each sentence is presented on its own line and numbered (Bell 1998: 76). Examples that contain particularly many separate events are illustrated in tables. Each separate event of the story is described in a table and each sentence that relates to the same event is marked. The events that take place in the headline, lead and within the story are

counted and compared and then it can be said what the story as a whole said happened and what is the main event of the story (Bell 1998: 76-77).

Bell's (1998: 76-80) guide for analyzing discourse structure of news stories involves answering the questions of what, who, where and when. These are the basic elements of storytelling (Bell 1998: 66). The present study strives to answer these questions quite straightforwardly; in order to illustrate what it is that the gossip is actually saying and how it is structured.

The question of who is answered by noting if the story as a whole is attributed to a source such as a news agency (Bell 1998: 77). Then it is noted if there are sources attributed within the story and what exactly are they attributed to saying (Bell 1998: 77). In addition, the news actors such as people and organizations that are mentioned in the story are noted. Furthermore, it is determined why the news actors are relevant to the story and how they are referred to in the story (Bell 1998: 77.)

Where the story happened is answered by looking at the place expressions used in the story and if the locations the story takes place in are made clear (Bell 1998: 78). When the story happened is made clear by looking at the time expressions of the story and time structure of the story such as is it in chronological order and does specifying the time somehow effect the overall events of the story (Bell 1998: 78). In addition, it is considered if any background to the story is given or is there a follow-up to any central event of the story (Bell 1998: 79). It is also very relevant for the purposes of the present study to take into account, if there is any commentary on events such as expectations over how the story might develop and are there ideologies to be discovered from the commentary (Bell 1998: 79).

Each event of the story is carefully listed, the news actors of the story are listed as well as the timeframe of the story is listed and after this they are compared together. Thus, the event structure and the discourse structure of the story become clearer (Bell 1998: 79). Then it is finally assessed if it is possible to say what the story says actually

happened (Bell 1998: 80). Bell (1998: 75-80) points out that the different elements of the event structure do not always fit together. Thus, during the analysis each element effects the overall interpretation of what the story as a whole says happened. Thus, each example focuses on the most important elements that rise in the course of the overall analysis of the text.

The importance of each element varies in the examples. Thus, examples of the data are divided under four major headings; reporting gossip, commentary, creating gossip and involving the readers. Using Bell's (1998: 77) concepts of story attribution the data are divided into reported gossip and created gossip. Thus, under the heading reporting gossip are the examples where Hilton is reporting stories from other publications or sources. If the story is not directly or clearly attributed to another publication, it is considered to be a story Hilton created himself. Since the importance of source attribution and timeframe of the story became evident during the analysis of the data, the analysis of reported gossip focuses especially on these two elements.

Hilton's commentary is introduced as one of the major headings, as commentary within the story is relevant in finding out the ideologies the story might present (Bell 1998: 79) as well as to illustrate the typical manners in which Hilton involves his readers in the gossiping. Further, in order to illustrate the ways in which Hilton involves the readers in his gossip concepts of Schely-Newman (2004) and Schaffer (1995) are used. Schely-Newman (2004: 480) explains that the false intimacy is created between the readers and the writers of gossip columns by using devices such as slang, directly addressing the audience and by excluding the ones that are gossiped about. Both Schely-Newman (2004: 477) and Schaffer (1995: 31) discovered that using nicknames of celebrities' is away of making the readers feel more intimately involved in the story.

The research set-up of the present study has been introduced by articulating the research questions and the aims of the present study. It was made clear how and why data were chosen. It was made clear how and why examples of the data are presented. Some background information about Perez Hilton, Lindsay Lohan and the rumors surrounding

her were provided as context. Finally, the methods of analysis were presented. In chapter (5) the analysis of data will be presented.

## 5 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE DISCOURSE STRUCTURE OF A GOSSIP BLOG

### 5.1 Reporting gossip

In this chapter I will now analyze the text level of the blog stories using Bell's (1998: 64-104) framework of discourse structure of news stories. Further, by analyzing the text level with Bell's (1998: 64-104) aspects of discourse structure of news stories, aspects of the discourse practice can also be examined. Bell's (1998: 64-104) framework is suitable for Hilton's blog particularly as Hilton constructs his stories in a same fashion as news stories are constructed. Moreover, Hilton's blog often reports gossip that is taken from another news publication. In addition, the pragmatic features used to involve the readers are analysed using concepts of Schely-Newman (2004) and Schaffer (1995).

#### 5.1.1 Sources

When considering how the gossip is constructed, it seems that source information is quite important so that it can be interpreted what exactly it is that the story claims to have happened. This is illustrated in example (1):

- HL THEY'RE OUT! Lohan Confirms Lesbian Relationship!  
 S1 Well the day has finally come!  
 S2 After keeping mum for months on the status of their relationship, sa**MAN** and **LezLo** have finally made it official!  
 S3 The couple called in Sunday night to *Loveline* to speak with DJ Stryker about DJ AM's plane crash.  
 S4 Stryker concluded the segment by asking how long the two have been together.  
 S5 LezLo replied with, "A very long time."  
 S6 Cute!  
 S7 Stryker wished them well with a compliment, "I hope you guys stay together, you're a very lovely looking couple" for which Lindsay thanked him.  
 S8 As one of the youngest out lesbian couples, Lindsay and Samantha are part of a new generation that is redefining what it means to be "out."  
 S9 For months they teased the public with tender public displays of affection, accompanying each other everywhere, donning matching rings, and doing everything but just saying it outright.  
 S10 In finally admitting the status of their relationship, Linds and Sam join other celebs such as **Ellen DeGeneres**, **Portia de Rossi**, **Cynthia Nixon** and **Sarah Paulson**.

S11 Congrats to the happy couple!  
 S12 Now we're gonna go barf.

First, the events that are depicted in the headline need to be determined. The headline has two events “they’re out” and “Lohan confirms Lesbian relationship”. The events mentioned in the headline are pretty clear and self-explanatory. The headline contains the most important information of the story: Lohan has confirmed she is a lesbian. The lead of the story in S1 and S2 confirm the information in the headline and add some background details to why it is so exiting they have come out.

According to Bell (1998: 75), by analyzing the events in the story it is easier to understand what exactly the story says has happened. Example (1) has several events, these are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. The events of example (1)

Event	Sentence
Lohan calls the radio show	S3
DJ asks a question	S4
Lohan answers	S5
Hilton’s commentary	S6, S11, S12
Stryker wishes well, Lohan thanks	S7
Lohan redefines what is meant to be “out”	S8
Lohan teases the public	S9
Mentions joining other famous lesbians	S10

As a whole the events of the story correspond to the headline and the lead. All the events in S3, S4, S5, S7 provide more details to the event of coming out. The events within the story confirm and provide more information about the event mentioned in the headline. The main event in the story is Lohan finally admitting that she is in a relationship with Ronson. The lead of the story describes the whole story in a nutshell, however, it does not provide information of how or what Lohan has made official. S9 recaps how Lohan and Ronson have kept the public guessing and returns to the information mentioned in the lead. It is the headline and the lead together that provide the main information of the

story: Lohan has finally admitted that she is homosexual. The events within the story are not particularly confusing.

However, as Bell (1998: 77) suggests, it is important to consider if the story is attributed to an agency or to a journalist and if there are sources mentioned within the story. The confusion of the source in Hilton's blog is clear in example (1).

On the level of discourse practice it should be mentioned that the reader is provided with a link to the original source of the story or at least it is the source Hilton has used. The reader has therefore the opportunity to find out more about the story from the original source used by Hilton. Although Hilton provides the reader with a link to the source, his own text does not make it clear what he has taken from the source and what is his own information or input. Linking a story and taking information from another source to create news of one's own is a feature that is typical for blogs.

In contrast, the reader of printed gossip columns is very much dependent on the current printed issue. For instance, if the reader does not know the background to which the story is referring, it is not as easy to locate it as it is in a blog format. For example, Hilton provides his readers with an archive where all the previous posts of Lohan can be retrieved. This is an important difference between gossip columns and gossip blogs. Thus, blogs can provide the reader with a great amount more of background information than printed gossip columns. However, it is not likely that Hilton's readers make use of all the links Hilton provides them with. Hence, the readers are left with Hilton's interpretation and construction of the story. However, the story attributor is not made clear in this story. Moreover, it is left unclear which parts of the texts are directly from the story attributor and which are Hilton's writing. This is to say that the original story might have different and additional information from Hilton's version. The only reference to the story attributor is the link, which is embedded in the words "official". Therefore, the reader does not really know what or who is the original source of the story, unless he/she actually goes on to read the link.

The source within the story in a sense is Lohan herself: the blog contains a description of what she supposedly said in the radio program. However, it is not clear where the information about the content of the radio program has been retrieved. It could be that the story's original attributor provides the information, however, it is not made explicit in Hilton's post. Hilton's readers might not read the story from its original source and even if they did, the original source might not have the information about the content of the radio show. Therefore, the reader needs to rely on Hilton's representation of what was said between Lohan and the DJ.

On the level of discourse practice the story attributor is easily traceable since it is provided as link and the reader has an opportunity to find out answers to these questions. However, it is not possible to say how many of the readers actually take the opportunity to read the original story since Hilton already provides the main point of the story in his blog. After all the audience has come to read Hilton's blog, therefore, the audience either trusts that Hilton represents the original story accurately or they are interested in what Hilton has to say about the story. Either way the interpretation of Hilton's story is difficult when it is not made clear which parts in the text are written by Hilton.

According to Bell (1998: 77), in news analysis it is also important to note who are the news actors mentioned in the story and how they are related to the story. The news actors in this story are "Lohan", "Ronson", "DJ Stryker", "DJ AM", "Ellen DeGeneres", "Portia de Rossi", "Cynthia Nixon" and "Sarah Paulson". Lohan is the main character in the news because she is a celebrity and who has now come out as lesbian, which is news in the world of celebrities and entertainment. Ronson is mentioned because she is the love interest of Lohan. DJ Stryker is in the story since he is the one Lohan called and he is the one who by asking Lohan how long she has been with Ronson got her to answer "a very long time". DJ AM is mentioned in this story because of the plain crash he was in, which was the original reason why Lindsay rang the radio program in the first place. The other news actors are mentioned in the news as examples of other openly lesbian celebrities. They do not contribute anything to the actual news item.

The story did not happen in any specific place. Instead it took place on the air and Lohan called in herself, she was not in the radio program as in interviewee. The place, however, is not relevant in this story since the main event is the coming out as a lesbian, and not so much where all this happened. The story implies that the main event that Lohan has come out as a lesbian is official and it does not question the event at all. It is stated as a fact in the headline already. In other words, the story is represented as reality and no longer as gossip. After analyzing the construction of this story it can be said that the information the story contains is very ambiguous.

After the analysis of the story construction, it is also necessary to consider what this story actually tells as a whole (Bell 1998: 79). Is it really a confirmation on Lohan's part or is it an ambiguous answer to an ambiguous question? The most important thing is that Lohan never explicitly answers a question about the nature of her relationship but only about its length. She is not directly asked about her sexual orientation, nor does she directly say she in fact is in a sexual or romantic relationship with Ronson. It is hard to tell whether Lohan's comment means she has officially come out. However, the story is constructed in a way that it at least seems that way. Hilton also reconfirms the coming out story by claiming that Lohan has come out in the headline of his post. Moreover, Hilton does not point out the uncertainty of the news and does not question it as he might do in other cases. The ambiguity again is there although, it seems Lohan has confirmed her relationship she actually may not have done any such thing. The ambiguity of sources in Hilton's posts continues in example (2):

HL Is Lindsay Really Getting Married To saMAN?

S1 Just how serious are things getting between **LezLo** and her DJ girlfriend?

S2 It seems the two might be getting more serious than we thought!

S3 A friend of Lindsay's tells *OK!* magazine, "This is the first healthy relationship Lindsay has ever had."

S4 The mag claims on their cover that Lohan and Ronson are going to be walking down the aisle!

S5 A source tells them, "Both Lindsay and Samantha have total mutual respect and love for each other."

S6 All the nonsense Lindsay's had in past relationships – the crazy fights, cheating and general immaturity – is totally absent.

S7 This is the real thing."

S8 Awwww, how sweet.

- S9 And even though Lindsay's rep denies the rumors of her being a lezzie, stating that "there was no confession" from Lindsay, friends of the barely working actress say the two are quite serious.
- S10 A source says, "Samantha and Lindsay have been 'out' to friends for a few months now."
- S11 They'll be out to the whole world soon enough, if they get married!!!

The story says Lohan's representative has denied that she has come out as lesbian. However, typical to gossiping the speculation about Lohan and Ronson continues in Hilton's blog. Hilton's post has a lot of ambiguities about who has said what to whom. The source of the story is the *OK!* magazine. The sources within the story are confusing in this case the "friend of Lindsay's" and "a source" are not said to be the same person. In addition, in S9 the source is no longer "a friend" who comments it is "friends". It is also confusing that, on one hand, the story does mention that Lohan is not officially out, and speculates about her future marriage to Ronson. Ronson is referred to as Lohan's girlfriend and the quotations from the sources reconfirm that they are a couple.

The post contains comments such as "It seems the two might be getting more serious than we thought!", which implies that the two are a couple. It has been denied that they are a couple, but Hilton still represents them as one. As Ronson and Lohan are represented as a couple, it makes no difference whether they are really a couple or not. Hilton refers to them as a couple in several ways, and even when the story does say they have denied it. This is one of the reasons the story is ambiguous. On one hand, it implies and reconfirms them as a couple and, on the other hand, it actually reports that they might not be.

Example (3) further illustrates how it is difficult to know what exactly is written by Hilton and what is taken from a source:

- HL Lindsay Relapses????
- S1 Could **Lindsay Lohan's** girlfriend be a bad influence on her????
- S2 Or could her dysfunctional family life be affecting her?
- S3 According to *Star* magazine, Miss Lohan seems to be heading on "the fast track to another drug and alcohol-driven breakdown."
- S4 An inside source says, "Lindsay's been drinking, doing cocaine and causing all-around mayhem for the past few months."
- S5 The source adds, "She quit going to Alcoholics Anonymous and has absolutely never taken recovery seriously."

- S6 She's gotten progressively worse, and everyone in her life is really scared."  
 S7 However, ~~sa~~**MAN** Lindsay has taken to her blog to defend herself against those accusations.  
 S8 Lindsay says the drugs and drinking allegations are "ridiculous."  
 S9 She adds that, according to the mag, "I am one busy girl."  
 S10 So, could the fact that she's been so "busy" be pressuring LaLohan and affecting her private life?  
 S11 Do U think LezLo is back to her old, hard-core pAArtying ways?  
 S12 Or did *Star* make this shiz up?

In example (3) Hilton reports that the *Star* magazine is reporting that Lohan might be drinking and using drugs again. Hilton clearly attributes the story to the *Star* magazine. However, it is unclear whether it is Hilton who asks, "Could Lindsay Lohan's girlfriend be a bad influence on her?" and "Or could her dysfunctional family life be affecting her?" or is it the magazine that has raised these questions originally. The question "Do U think LezLo is back to her old, hard-core pAArtying ways?" seems to be Hilton's question because it is written in a style Hilton uses.

Within the story there is only one source mentioned, "an inside source". It is clearly indicated that the source remains the same as it is first reported that "an inside source says" and the next sentence continues with "the source adds". Moreover, a link to the source's comments is embedded in the word "says". On the level of discourse practice the link indicates that it is not Hilton's "inside source" at least.

However, the source of Lohan's comments is difficult to determine. It is difficult to interpret from S7, whether it is Hilton's note to the story or whether it is the magazine which observed that Lohan has defended herself in her blog. However, it does seem more likely that it is Hilton's commentary, as Ronson's nickname, which only Hilton uses, is used in the sentence. Then again it could be Hilton's addition to a sentence that the magazine has reported on. In terms of the interpretation, it would make a difference if it indeed were Hilton who points out how Lohan has defended herself. After all, it then would seem that Hilton is defending Lohan by bringing out her point of view. However, it is completely unclear where Lohan's comments are actually taken from. On one hand, it seems that Hilton reports directly what Lohan has written in her blog by stating "Lindsay says the drugs and drinking allegations are "ridiculous."" On the other

hand, Hilton continues “She adds that, according to the mag, “I am one busy girl.””, which clearly attributes the comments back to the *Star* magazine. Thus, it is unclear whether Lohan’s comments are all taken from her blog or has she actually commented something directly to the magazine. The way in which Hilton reports on Lohan’s comments creates confusion to what was exactly said and where.

Ironically, Hilton himself points out the unreliability of his source. Hilton ends the post with the question “Or did *Star* make this shiz up?”, which implies that there is a possibility that the whole story might be a lie. All of the questions made in the post even the question in the headline create doubt about the truthfulness of the story. The fact that Hilton reports a story of which even he himself is doubtful creates confusion to say the least. If a story seems false to begin with why report it at all? Furthermore, by reporting the story Hilton continues and recycles the speculation which the original story has started.

However, on the level of discourse practice it should be noted that bloggers often point out inaccuracies of sources and also Hilton is here merely pointing out the unreliability of the source. Thus, he is able to report news that might be false but does not have to carry the responsibility over them.

In addition, it can be noted that example (3) does not exactly report anything about Lohan’s sexuality. However, Lohan’s sexuality is represented in a very natural way in the post. Ronson is simply referred to as a “girlfriend”. Lohan’s sexuality is not made into a huge issue in the story. And the possible negative things in her life are not portrayed to be caused by her sexuality.

Hilton’s blog posts are mostly constructed, based on information he has gathered from other sources, which already creates ambiguity in interpretation. This is to say that the way in which Hilton constructs his stories creates confusion and can lead to different interpretations. To show this, in example (4) each detail of story construction is illustrated in more detail:

- HL Lezlo converting for SaMAN???
- S1 Could **Lindsay Lohan** be converting to Judaism for SaMAN Ronson.
- S2 Lindsay, who reportedly grew up Catholic, has recently updated her Facebook profile to state she's converting to a new religion.
- S3 A friend of the pair tells *Life & Style*, "Sam's family is Jewish.
- S4 Lindsay has learned a lot about Judaism from Sam and admires its beliefs."
- S5 Yea, cuz Lindsay and Sam seem like the most religious couple!
- S6 As for Lindsay being serious about it, an insider says, "I doubt it.
- S7 Two years ago it was kabbalah.
- S8 Last year it was AA.
- S9 She was into 'peace' for a while.
- S10 Whatever is of the moment, that's Lindsay.
- S11 But the one thing it does show is her commitment to Sam.
- S12 She could be any religion and Lindsay would be open to it."
- S13 Looks like Sammy boy is definitely wearing the pants in this relationship!

A close analysis of the events that take place in the story shows clearly that the all of the main elements of news story construction as suggested by Bell (1998:64-104) add to the ambiguity of Hilton's story. When focusing on what actually takes place in the story, it becomes clear that the way the gossip is constructed is rather ambiguous.

The headline contains a mention of one event, which is "Lezlo" converting for "SaMAN". It is also in a form of a question to indicate that it is speculation. Although only nicknames are used in the headline readers most likely know whom the nicknames refer to if they are following Hilton's blog and Lohan's saga.

The lead or the intro of the story reveals more on the same event. The real names of the news actors are revealed as Lindsay Lohan and Samantha Ronson. Moreover, the event of converting is made clearer and it is revealed that the religion Lohan might convert to is Judaism. The lead is still in a form of a question as it starts with "could".

The headline includes information that is also included in the lead. The headline does not provide the information to what exactly Lohan's converting to and although it excludes the real names of the participants in the story it is likely that people who follow the story know who it refers to. The lead of the story includes more information than the headline. The lead of the story includes the information about the religion Lohan might be converting to, however, the information of how this is known and how this

speculation started is excluded. However, the events within the story provide more information to the story. The events of the story are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. The events of example (4)

Event	Sentence
Lohan updated her Facebook profile about converting	S2
A friend tells magazine Lohan is learning about Judaism	S3
Hilton's commentary	S4, 12
The friend questions how serious Lohan is about converting	S5,6,7,8,9

All the events that take place within the story elaborate the question made in the headline. The lead does relate to the story as a whole since it is in a form of a question as well. The story is just speculation and it is not confirmed that Lohan is indeed converting. However, the lead is a valid representation of the whole story since it does provide the most important information in the story and is formed as question not a statement.

No background is given to the story. There is no explicit information as to why Lindsay would convert for Samantha, who they are, or why they are relevant. The only thing that provides some background information to the reader is Hilton's comments where he refers to Lindsay and Samantha as "most religious couple" and notes that "Looks like Sammy boy is definitely wearing the pants in this relationship!". Thus he is, giving some explanation to why Lohan would convert for Ronson and what they are to each other.

Hilton comments on the events of his stories frequently, and this is also illustrated in example (4). This kind of commentary is an important part of Hilton's blog and usually it is quite clear which are his comments such as in example (4) "Yea, cuz Lindsay and Sam seem like the most religious couple!". The tone of Hilton's comments is usually mocking and the comments he makes are often ironic or simply confusing. The comments clearly indicate that Hilton does not believe Lohan is very religious or that she is very serious for that matter.

By analyzing the actual sources of the story and asking the question who the sources are and how they are referred to, even more ambiguities in the story can be pointed out.

The story as a whole seems to be attributed to the *Life & Style* magazine. However, it is not made completely clear what events are part of the *Life & Style* story and whether there are parts taken from somewhere else. Several sources are attributed within the story, including a Facebook update, “a friend of the pair”, *Life & Style*, and “an insider”. Lohan’s Facebook profile seems to be the key source of the story as whole. Further, the update on the Facebook profile is what seems to have sparked the whole story. It is, however, left unclear whether Hilton has seen the update or if he has used information from another source. The friend mentioned as a source has made the comment to another source the *Life & Style*. It is left unclear whether the insider mentioned in the story is the same person as the friend of the pair who has given the interview to *Life & Style*. Both the friend of the pair and the insider seem to be quoted directly. The first one is telling and the second one is saying. It is, however, difficult to know if the quotations are really direct or indirect. This is because it is left unclear whether the two people quoted are the same person, and because both the *Life & Style* magazine and Hilton could have changed or manipulated the quotes somehow. Further, it is not necessarily clear whether the quote in the *Life & Style* magazine is new or old and whether it is related to the Facebook update story. The source attribution of the story is rather ambiguous, especially the insider part of the story. This ambiguous source attribution could create a feeling that Hilton himself has an inside source to the story. Further, the quotes from the story could easily be taken from another context and might not be related to the current situation.

There are several different actors in the story. The actors of the story are Lindsay Lohan, Samantha Ronson, Facebook “the friend of the pair”, the *Life & Style* magazine and “an insider”. The news story and the actors in it are completely irrelevant to a reader who does not know who these people are and why it is news that Lindsay is converting for Samantha. The story refers to Lindsay and Samantha with their real names as well as their nicknames. The other actors in the news story are left rather vague and it is not

possible to know if all of the other information is taken from the *Life & Style* magazine. The only thing that refers or labels Lindsay Lohan's sexuality directly is the use of nickname "LezLo" in the headline.

The story does not really have a place or a location where the events happen. However, Facebook could be considered as a location or a place. Facebook could be considered the place the whole story originated from. This is because of the update about converting into another religion took place in Facebook. The section about the update in Facebook is quite an important part of the information of this news, because it really is the only fact the story is based on. The reader can conclude from this fact that Lindsay has not in fact said anything about changing her religion, but she merely changed her Facebook profile to say that. Further, a reader who is familiar with the functions of Facebook can appreciate the fact that Facebook updates can sometimes go wrong and the source is not therefore very trustworthy. When mentioning the fact that the story started from Lohan's Facebook entry, it is clear that the original source or place of event is not very reliable.

It makes a difference, whether it is made clear in the text when the events have taken place. The time when a story has taken place can make the difference in the interpretation. When, for instance, old information is mixed with new information it can make the story harder to interpret.

### **5.1.2 Timeframe of the events**

In example (4) there are many references to time, including "Recently", "Two years ago", "Last year", "for a while", "of the moment". All of the references to time occur in the direct quotation from "the friend of the pair" except for the temporal expression "recently". The temporal expression "recently" occurs in the sentence about the update in Lohan's Facebook profile. However, the term "recently" can be a rather loose definition of time. The time structure in this story is thus very obscure, making the story even more ambiguous to interpret. Therefore, it is impossible for the reader to tell if the Facebook update happened before the things said in the two quotations, making it hard

to interpret whether the quotations can really be seen as further evidence of Lohan converting. The events that are mentioned in the friend's quotation is there for the purpose of emphasizing Lohan's changing interests and of undermining the seriousness of the whole news.

There is no follow-up for this particular story later on in Hilton's blog. However, the story of Lohan and Ronson continues, it is the subject of converting that is not addressed again.

When considering the event and time structure of this story it is clear that the story has many gaps in it. The story has many clear ambiguities like who is exactly saying what, where and when. This can be seen as one of the ways in which Hilton keeps the story of Lohan's possible homosexuality going, even though there is not really any new news to report. Moreover, the story does not speculate on whether Lohan and Ronson are a couple or not. The story presents this as a given by referring to Lohan and Ronson as "a couple" and "a pair". Similarly, Hilton's final statement "Looks like Sammy boy is definitely wearing the pants in this relationship!" does not question whether Lohan and Ronson are in a relationship. By statements such as these, he is actually making the relationship a reality. In other words, when Hilton continuously refers to them as a couple and makes it a natural part of the story, he is actually making the relationship a fact.

On the whole the timeline of example (4) is very obscure and it is not made clear when the events reported in the gossip have taken place or are supposed to take place. The timeframe of a story can thus create confusion, and the story as a whole is harder to interpret when the timeframe is unclear. The importance of knowing the timeframe of events is clearly illustrated in example (5):

HL Is saMAN a Self-Loathing Lesbian?

S1 Despite saMAN's obvious affections for **LezLo** and her recent MySpace Sarah Palin rant, the DJ turned down an offer to spin at a benefit to save West Village's lesbian institution Rubyfruit.

S2 The 15-year-old bar was named after **Rita Mae Brown's** *Rubyfruit Jungle*.

- S3 Serving as a lesbian landmark in New York, Rubyfruit has hosted the likes of dykon **Martina Navratilova** and **Tammy Lynn Michaels**, who later declared her commitment to **Melissa Etheridge**.
- S4 Recently, however, escalating rent and declining business threatened to shut the place down.
- S5 A wealthy benefactor came to the bar's rescue and it will close temporarily for remodeling and reopening as the RF Lounge.
- S6 saMAN would have DJed at the opening benefit party.
- S7 Owner Debra Fiero said that plans were running smoothly with saMAN until the DJ learned that the Rubyfruit is a gay and lesbian bar.**
- S8 Then she reportedly dropped out because she doesn't do "those kinds of venues."**
- S9 Oh, we see - "those kinds."
- S10 saMAN's spokesman, Brandon Phelps, claims otherwise, saying that they were never approached by the bar.
- S11 Denial seems to be a running theme with saMAN, especially considering her "friendship" with LezLo.

The headline “Is saMAN a self-loathing lesbian?” does not provide any information about what the story is about. In the lead of the story it is stated that Ronson has turned down work at a benefit that would have saved a lesbian bar. The mention of Ronson’s “obvious affections”, and “the recent Sarah Palin rant” link the lead to the question posed in the headline. However, it not made clear why the question is asked in the headline. Events within the story elaborate on what happened. The events and the sentences are reported on in Table 3.

Table 3. The events of example (5)

Event	Sentence
Background of the bar's history	S2, 3
What happened to the bar	S4, 5
How Ronson is related to the story	S6, 7, 8, 10
Hilton's commentary	S9, 11

The events in S6 and S7 within the story return to the event mentioned in the lead and the question asked in the headline starts to make more sense. The main event of this story is that Ronson has turned down to work in the bar after she has learned it is a gay and lesbian bar and has made a comment about the bar as one of “those kinds of venues”. The main event and Hilton’s commentary “Oh, we see-“those kind”” form a

unified whole with the headline. The events mentioned in S2, S3, S4, S5 have very little to do with the main event of the story.

It should also be noted that the original source of the story is unclear. Within the story there is a comment from the owner of the bar “Debra Fiero” and a comment from Ronson’s representative “Brandon Phelps”. However, it is not clear whether they have directly been in contact with Hilton or whether he has used another publication as a source. This story has no links either that would reveal any source. More importantly, the source that claims to know the reason why Ronson declined to come to work in the bar is not clear. It is unclear who heard Ronson’s comment, and, therefore, it is questionable whether this story actually ever happened.

The omission of the timeframe of the story is what makes this story even less believable. Moreover, the information about the time the events took place is quite important in terms of interpretation. The story does not really indicate, when the events have supposedly taken place. The only indication of the time is that the bar has “recently” had financial problems, which places the time of the story in the present. However, the term “recently” can be interpreted and used rather loosely. Moreover, the story describes events such as “a wealthy benefactor” coming to help the bar and the bar is going to be remodelled and renamed all of which are events that would not happen overnight. Hilton then reports that “saMAN would have DJed at the opening benefit party”, which could also be interpreted that the party has actually already passed. That interpretation would make the stories timeframe completely obscure.

The alleged event could also be very old, as it is not clearly indicated when it happened. Hence, Ronson might have been in a very different situation in her life. Hilton might mix the recent events of Ronson’s life with something that may have happened a long time ago. The fact that she may have “obvious affections” for Lohan right now is not a very convincing argument to a story that may have happened a long time ago. By leaving the timeframe of the events obscure Hilton is able to represent Ronson as negative towards homosexuality.

In addition, the context of Ronson's comment is rather ambiguous. Hilton makes it seem negative, as he does not provide enough information about who heard it, when and in what situation. However, the story is constructed in a way that Hilton makes it seem that Ronson did make the comment for a fact. Moreover, Hilton does not suggest any alternative explanation to Ronson's comment except "self-loathing".

When looking at the news actors presented in the story, the ambiguity of the whole story becomes more evident. In other words, Hilton mentions many news actors in the story that do not seem necessary in order to understand the main event of the story.

The story has several news actors; these include "Ronson", "LezLo", "Myspace", "Sarah Palin", "Rubyfruit", "Rita Mae Brown", "Martina Navratilova", "Tammy Lynn Michaels", "Melissa Etheridge", "Debra Fiero", and "Brandon Phelps". The only relevant news actors besides Ronson are the owner of the bar "Debra Fiero" and "saMAN's spokesman" "Brandon Phelps" as they seem to function as the only sources to the story.

For instance, "LezLo" has not done anything relevant related to the main event of the story. However, she is mentioned twice in the post. "Martina Navratilova", "Tammy Lynn Michaels" are only mentioned as famous lesbian customers of the bar. Moreover, the mention of "Melissa Etheridge" seems very irrelevant to the story as she is only mentioned as someone Tammy Lynn Michaels has declared commitment to. Etheridge is not even the customer of the bar in question. Etheridge seems to have nothing to do with the actual story and mentioning her seems unnecessary and this creates confusion. It seems like Hilton's only purpose is namedropping. However, by mentioning celebrities that are openly lesbian Hilton reminds that there are several successful openly homosexual celebrities.

In addition, Hilton provides a lot of unnecessary background information about the bar. This is to say that a story about Ronson turning down a work offer at a bar would not

require so much information about the bar's history and clients. The bar's history and what happened to it are oddly enough the only believable events in the story as they are described in such detail. However, it would be far more important in terms of interpretation to know when the alleged events took place and who the source of the story is.

As a whole the story is very unreliable. It has too many ambiguities when it comes to the source and timeframe. Hence, it does not report on anything reliable and the main event has many gaps in it. In addition, the story is never returned to again and no follow-up is given on what happened to the bar. Therefore, the only thing this post does is represents Ronson in a negative light.

On the discourse practice level the story reveals Hilton's attitude towards homosexuality. Hilton's comment "Oh, we see-"those kind"" shows his displeasure of Ronson's reference to gay and lesbian bar as a "those kind of venues". Hilton seems to believe the story at face value and does not question whether Ronson has actually said this. He is quick to condemn Ronson's comment, and does not question whether Ronson has said it or not. This kind of condemnations of negative remarks towards sexual diversity is, in fact, typical of Hilton. Further, Hilton does not joke about the situation the gay and lesbian bar is in. By providing so much background information about the bar and its clients Hilton is actually promoting the bar. As a whole the story does not present negativity towards homosexuality. The negativity is directed to not being open about homosexuality.

Example (5) shows clearly that not only is attributing the sources of the story important to interpretation, the timeframe of the story is clearly important as well. It was also illustrated that by commenting and by providing great amounts of unnecessary details homosexuality was presented in a positive light. Hilton's commentary is one of the things that make his blog unique. Moreover, Hilton's comments are an important part of the way meaning is created to his posts. Therefore, it is necessary to take a closer look at Hilton's comments as part of the analysis.

## 5.2 Commentary of the events

Example (6) illustrates further how Hilton implements his own views into his posts and how they have an effect on the overall interpretation of the post:

- HL Lindsay Backpedals: Denies That She's Officially "Out"
- S1 Predictably (unfortunately), **LezLo's** publicist, **Leslie Sloane-Zelnik**, is trying to tell us that her client is not a lesbian.
- S2 Oh, so what was that little confession on *Loveline* then?
- S3 The rep says that Lindsay was just playing along and that LezLo and sa**MAN** are just friends. Really really close friends.
- S4 Can't they come up with something new?
- S5 Or maybe Lindsay is just waiting for *People* to pay for her confession.
- S6 What do U think???
- S7 Lindsay should take to her blog once and for all and just tell people the truth.
- S8 Stop beating around the bush - just eat it!

The events in the story are clear Lohan has denied through her publicists she is officially out. This is clear from the headline alone. However, the within the story there are several comments from Hilton that question the denial and attempt to contradict it. In any case, the story reports on the fact that there has been a denial and even Hilton's comments cannot contradict this fact. Even the source within the story is named clearly Lohan's publicist. However, with his commentary Hilton is able to create doubt and continue the speculation.

Hilton's comments illustrate the disappointment he feels about Lohan's denial that she is a lesbian. As Hilton reports on the denial, he admits it was predictable and, at the same time, he shows disappointment by adding in brackets "unfortunately". As Hilton asks the question "Can't they come up with something new?" he implies that it is no longer believable to claim that they are close friends as they have claimed for so long. In addition, close friendship is an explanation used by celebrity couples, who do not want to admit they are a couple, in general. Hilton suggests that Lohan should "just tell people the truth" and "stop beating around the bush -just eat it!" that again implies that Hilton believes she is lying and should be open about being a lesbian. In addition, Hilton speculates that Lohan is only denying that she came out officially in hopes of selling the

official story to the *People* magazine. That implies that Lohan would only come out if she could get paid for it. Hilton's clear disappointment over the fact that Lohan is not officially out confirms that it is not the sexual orientation that is problematic; it is the failure to come out with it. Example (7) illustrates this further:

- HL LoRo's Lovers Getaway- Plus, saMAN in a Bikini!!!  
 S1 It must be hard to be a barely working actor and a shiteous DJ!  
 S2 So hard that you need to go on vacation with your "very close friend" to get away from all the stress.  
 S3 And that's just what **Lindsay Lohan** is doing.  
 S4 LezLo and her girlfriend are soaking up the sun in Mexico together.  
 S5 The two have been in Mexico since Monday, spending time walking on the beach and pretending not to notice the paparazzi they love.  
 S6 How romantic!  
 S7 P.S. saMAN doesn't look too bad in a bikini, does she???

The story as a whole says that Lohan and Ronson are vacationing in Mexico. The story is from the time after Lohan had denied her officially coming out. Hilton refers to the denial by placing ““very close friend”” in quotes and by providing a link to the background story. However, Hilton refers to them as a couple several times. In the headline he uses “LoRo” to refer to Ronson and Lohan. This kind of combination of the couple's names is common practice in entertainment media. Thus, Hilton reconfirms them as a couple by nicknaming them as “LoRo”. In addition, he claims in the headline that they are on “Lovers Getaway”, which again confirms the relationship status as a romantic one. Hilton also naturally refers to Ronson as Lohan's girlfriend.

In addition, most the story seems to consist of Hilton's own comments, as the story's source is unclear. When Hilton reports that they were “pretending not to notice the paparazzi they love” he is stating two things neither he nor anyone else could know. The one is that Lohan and Ronson were pretending and the other that they love the paparazzi. Hilton could not have the information that they were pretending not to see the paparazzi. The comment about Lohan and Ronson loving the paparazzi can be interpreted as irony or as an innuendo that Lohan and Ronson actually like the attention they get from the paparazzi. Moreover, Hilton describes Lohan as “a barely working actor” and Ronson as “a shiteous DJ”, which are not exactly flattering descriptions. He ironically implies that the vacation they are on is not exactly well deserved. Hilton represents both Lohan and

Ronson in an unflattering manner. However, he does not describe homosexuality in a disrespectful manner.

The example illustrates that Hilton is frustrated over the fact that Lohan and Ronson are insisting they are not a couple. It also illustrates that Hilton makes fun of the fact they are trying to hide something that is obvious, and not of the fact that they are homosexuals. Example (8) is a further illustration of how Hilton suggests that Lohan and Ronson are only pretending for the paparazzi:

HL LezLo & saMAN Get Affectionate!

S1 Click here to watch **Lindsay** clearly give her girlfriend a hug and peck on the neck as the two play and court attention in front of the paparazzi this past weekend.

S2 Desperate!

Hilton claims that Lohan is clearly hugging and kissing Ronson on video footage filmed of the two of them. This he states as a fact. On the level of discourse practice it should also be noted that he does provide the link to the video where the alleged kiss is available for viewing. Hence, Hilton gives his readers the opportunity to evaluate the events in the video for themselves. The readers do not have to rely on Hilton's claim of what happens on the video.

Hilton implies in his commentary that Lohan and Ronson are only behaving this way to get attention from the paparazzi. Hilton's final comment "Desperate!" reconfirms that he means to imply that the two are only affectionate for the attention. The final comment could also refer to the saga of Lohan and Ronson as a whole, and to the fact that they have failed to come out officially. This post is rather complex to interpret, because in one sense Hilton is reconfirming the status of their relationship by stating in the headline that Lohan and Ronson are affectionate and stressing the fact that the video clearly shows them being affectionate. Then he contradicts the authenticity of the event by adding that they are only acting for the paparazzi. Example (9) further illustrates the contradictory way Hilton represents Lohan and Ronson as a couple:

HL Lesbians in Love

S1 saMAN Ronson turned 43 years old on Thursday and gal pal **LezLo** helped the DJ celebrate in style.

- S2 Lindsay got all dressed up for the special occasion.  
 S3 And, believe it or not, that's dressing up for Ronson.  
 S4 The gal pals enjoyed some ice cream together and held hands in front of the paparazzi as they went and pAArtied the night away at club Goa.  
 S5 How sweet!  
 S6 How long until Lohan goes back to (real) cock????

The headline states “lesbians in love”, which again reconfirms that Lohan and Ronson are in a romantic relationship. The lead has two events Ronson turning “43 years old” and Lohan helping her “celebrate in style”. The lead tells the main event of the story. However, it also claims that Ronson is 43 years old, which is a great exaggeration of her real age, thirty-one. Hilton mentions her age very casually and many might not even take notice to the fact that Hilton is representing her as far older than she really is. By mentioning the even that Lohan got dressed up for the occasion provides Hilton the opportunity to make fun of Ronson by adding the comment “And, believe it or not, that's dressing up for Ronson”.

As Hilton mentions the events that “The gal pals enjoyed some ice cream”, “held hands in front of the paparazzi” and “pAArtied the night away” his attitude is clearly illustrated. Firstly, he labels Lohan and Ronson as “gal pals”, which is usually used to describe female friends not people who are romantically involved. Then by adding that they “held hands in front of the paparazzi” Hilton is implying that they held hands because of the paparazzi. To those who are familiar with Hilton’s style know that the word “pAArtied” is purposely written this way and implies to partying too heavily. On the discourse practice level it can be noted that creating meaning in this way is a feature unique to computer-mediated discourse. In this respect, Hilton benefits from using the blog format as he can convey meaning in ways unique to computer-mediated discourse.

The last two sentences of the story do not include any new events. However, Hilton’s attitudes are again visible. He ironically states “How sweet!” to the whole story he has described. Then he goes on to ask “How long until Lohan goes back to (real) cock????”, which again speculates whether Lohan is serious about the relationship, and whether it is only a matter of time that she goes back to men. However, the question does imply that at the moment Lohan and Ronson are a couple. This is because, the going back to

something implies that she is not there right now. The question also implies the rather stereotypical view that homosexuality is something that one chooses to do and then can choose not to do.

As a whole Hilton's representation of the nature of Lohan's relationship to Ronson is conflicting and contradicting. On one hand Hilton describes them as a couple who are in love, and on the other hand, raises suspicion that they are not.

On the whole, examples (6), (7), (8) as well as (9) illustrate how inconsistent Hilton is in his reporting. In example (6) and (7) Hilton represents Lohan and Ronson as a couple several times although he contradicts it by noting that they have denied that they are a couple. Further, in all examples (6), (7), (8) and (9) Hilton also implies the two are after attention and fame. Although Hilton's reports are contradicting and derogatory towards Lohan and Ronson, the reports are not derogatory towards sexuality.

None of the examples above provide any actual evidence that Lohan and Ronson are a couple. In fact they deny it. However, Hilton continues to represent them as a couple and it can be argued that this adds suspicion. Hilton himself continuously adds suspicion by doubting the sincerity of Lohan. Thus, his representation of Lohan's sexuality is even more ambiguous.

### **5.3 Creating gossip**

Hilton does not always resort to other publications for material, as there is not always something new to report. For instance, Hilton sometimes creates gossip based on what Lohan and Ronson have written in their personal blogs. Their blogs thus function as a source for Hilton, and since Lohan and Ronson write them themselves it is a rather convincing source. This way Hilton can speculate on and prolong the gossip as well as make it seem believable, when no new developments have been reported in other sources. This is illustrated in example (10):

- HL When Will They Just Come Out With It???
- S1 They've been overeager beavers with the blogging lately!
- S2 Failed singer saMAN Ronson just posted a very boring entry on her official blog about flying down to Australia for a DJ gig.
- S3 Of note: she lists "**Miss You / Far Away Eyes**" by the Rolling Stones as the song she's currently listening to.
- S4 So, guess who is the first person to leave a comment????
- S5 None other than **LezLo** herself!
- S6 Check out what she wrote (above).
- S7 Barf!

The headline in example (10) is a question and it does not really reveal anything about the story. The headline contains no real event, and no indication of who should come out and with what, but only a question. However, readers who have been following the Lohan and Ronson saga know to anticipate something about them, since that is the question everyone is expecting to have the answer.

The lead of the story does not provide any additional information what the story is about. The lead has one event “blogging” and this does not clear what is meant by the headline. However, frequent readers know to what and to whom he is referring to since Hilton has previously discussed and posted several blogs written by Ronson and Lohan themselves. Hence, the reference to “overeager beavers” is clear for a frequent reader.

Events within the story clear up what the story is about. The events are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. The events of example (10)

Event	Sentence
Ronson has posted a new blog about going to work in Australia	S2
The song Ronson is listening is mentioned	S3
Hilton's commentary	S4, 5,6,7

Hilton's question "So, guess who is the first person to leave a comment?????" is not an event that adds any new information. However, it functions as a build up to the event that actually ties the story finally together. The main event of the story becomes clear only after Hilton reveals that Lohan has been the first one to comment on Ronson's blog entry. Thus, the main event is Ronson has written a blog entry that Lohan has been the first to reply to.

Because of the blog format, one actually needs to "check out" what Lohan wrote in order to comprehend what the story is about as a whole. Hilton provides the readers with a link to Ronson's MySpace site where Lohan's comment can be seen. Lohan's comment there is "guess who loves you...". The whole point of the story becomes clearer when considering the question in the headline with Lohan's comment. Lohan's comment can be interpreted as a public confession of love. However, the comment again is very ambiguous and might be interpreted in many ways. For instance, Lohan might not be referring to herself with the question. However, Hilton implies in his headline that it should be interpreted to mean that Lohan and Ronson are a couple. Because of Lohan's comment and the fact that by their previous blogging they have made the nature of their relationship obvious and they should simply come out with it.

Although the events in example (10) seem confusing and unrelated to those who do not follow the story of Lohan and Ronson, they are reconfirming what is already known by those who follow the saga. For example, the song Ronson is listening to seems to have very little meaning at first. However, for the whole story mentioning of it serves a clear purpose. As Hilton tries to create a story that confirms that Lohan and Ronson are a couple by mentioning that Ronson is listening to a song that is called "Miss you/ Far away eyes" creates the impression that Ronson is missing Lohan. To readers who know the complete lyrics to the song it might imply even more. This is to say that by mentioning an event that seems trivial Hilton is actually making it meaningful to those who are looking for evidence of the nature of Lohan and Ronson's relationship.

As mentioned above, this story is not attributed to any outside source. Hilton has created this post by using Ronson's own blog entry and Lohan's written comment to it as a source. In a sense both Ronson and Lohan are the sources of the story as the comments are originally from them. Ronson and Lohan are the only news actors mentioned in the story as well. By structuring the story around Ronson and Lohan's own comments Hilton has managed to create a post that seems to validate their relationship as a romantic one. The story does not reveal any new relevant information about Lohan and Ronson's relationship simply adds to the speculation.

The only factual information in example (10) is that Ronson is in Australia. It is not clear whether Lohan is there with her, but Hilton's post gives the impression that Lohan is not there. By implying that Lohan is not there Hilton is also able to use the song Ronson is listening to as a means of creating speculation.

The times mentioned in this story are "lately" in the second sentence, "just" in the third sentence and "currently" in the fourth sentence. The time structure in this story is central to show the readers that this is a current event and it is new information that other sources have probably not yet reported on. On the level of discourse practice this is an example of how the blog format enables speedy publishing of stories. Furthermore, it illustrates how the blog format enables the publications of any trivial information, since there is no restriction of space, and editorial control.

Hilton's frustration over Lohan and Ronson not coming out as well as having nothing new to report on are illustrated in his commentary. The headline alone is a clear indication of frustration. The end comment "Barf!" functions as an ironic comment on the overly sentimental comments made by Lohan and Ronson as well as of an suggestion of frustration. Moreover, Hilton mentions that the blog entry by Ronson is "very boring", which implies that nothing exiting has happened.

Example (10) does not provide any direct background information to the readers who do not follow the story. On the discourse practice level Hilton does not provide any links,

except for one which leads to Ronson's MySpace page where Lohan's comment is visible. The lack of links to background and the fact that the story as a whole does not have any conclusive new information shows that this post is aimed at readers who are already following the saga and wait for new developments to happen. Moreover, Hilton leaves this post (10) very open to interpretation of the readers, as it is not very clear what his post is supposed to report.

Again the discourse structure of example (10) is rather confusing and as a whole the story is ambiguous and without any real fact to back it up. However, to the ones who follow the saga the speculation presented in example (10) is quite meaningful. This is to say that it is additional chapter to the ongoing saga and additional prove that they are a couple. However, if Hilton would point out that Lohan's comment is very ambiguous and could be interpreted in many different ways, the whole story he has created would lose its ground. Again the story as a whole is pure speculation.

As illustrated above gossip often does not have any particular point and it only makes sense to those who know the implications of the story. Moreover, posts like example (10) cater to the lack of new developments in the ongoing saga. By following what Ronson and Lohan write in their own blogs Hilton is able to construct stories when he has nothing else to report on. Further, Hilton's posts often seem not report any relevant events. This is illustrated further in example (11):

HL Welcome Homo  
 S1 That was quick!  
 S2 **LezLo** and sa**MAN** Ronson are back from their brief lovers' getaway to Miami.  
 S3 The sapphic duo were spotted arriving back at LAX airport on Wednesday.  
 S4 Now that she's back, MAN better take care of her little car problem!  
 S5 Maybe she can get a tobacco company to sponsor her as a DJ???  
 S6 Free cigarettes for life!  
 S7 Yay!  
 S8 *And*, they'd pay her outstanding bills.  
 S9 She's got a lot of them!

When analysing the discourse structure of this story it becomes clear that the purpose of the story is to make fun of Lohan and Ronson, in particular. The headline "Welcome Homo" or the lead's comment "That was quick!" do not include information that would

explain what the story is about. The events within the story again clear up what the story is about. The events are described in Table 5.

Table 5. The events of example (11)

Event	Sentence
Lohan and Ronson have returned from their trip to Miami	S2, 3
Hilton suggests that Ronson should take care of her car problems.	S4
Hilton suggests that Ronson could get a sponsor	S5
Hilton's commentary	S6, 7, 9
Mentioning of outstanding bills	S8

The events in S2 and S3 make it clear what the story is reporting about. Since S2 and S3 are connected to the headline and the lead, the main event of the story is that Lohan and Ronson have returned from a trip. The rest of the story includes Hilton's comments that seem unrelated to the main event. When looking at what the story as a whole is saying it becomes evident that the main event is not the main point of the story. As a whole the story is again very ambiguous if one does not know what Hilton's comments refer to. The main point of the story can be discovered when considering what Hilton implies in this story. Those who follow the ongoing story can appreciate the implications of this story.

Hilton's suggestions to take care of the car problem and to get a tobacco company as a sponsor to take care of Ronson's outstanding bills refer to previous posts. In the previous posts Hilton reported that Ronson's car had been booted and that she gets a lot of parking tickets. The reader is provided with a link to this background story. However, the last comment Hilton makes can be interpreted to imply more than just the car trouble. The implication is that at the time of this post Ronson had been ordered to pay Hilton the legal fees from the lawsuit she filed against him. This is to say that as a whole the story has a lot more meaning to those who understand this implication. To a frequent reader it is a reminder of the fact that Hilton indeed is part of the saga as well.

When considering the derisive manner that Hilton presents the events in this story it becomes evident that the purpose of the story is simply to make fun of the couple and

perhaps to gloat over the facts mentioned above. The blog is full of Hilton's commentaries that have to do with sexuality. The derisive tone of the post is set in the headline as the word home is replaced with "homo". In addition, Hilton uses the nicknames "saMAN" and "LezLo" instead of their real names and refers to them as "the sapphic duo". Hilton also ironically claims that they were on a "lovers' getaway" instead of just reporting they have arrived back. All of these additional comments do not serve any other purpose than to make fun of their sexuality.

On the level of discourse practice example (11) illustrates that the blog format enables Hilton to use just as much of space he wants and is not restricted by editing. Therefore, Hilton is able to publish every little event that takes place in Lohan's life and is able to elaborate on the story with completely unrelated events.

## **5.4 Involving the readers**

Hilton's blog, which is his livelihood, needs its readers in order to maintain the status it has gained. Hilton needs his readers to keep visiting his blog to be able to retain his status as a celebrity blogger. Therefore, he needs to add his own twist to the recycled stories that are available to everybody on the Internet. Inviting the readers to be a part of his gossiping is one way of achieving this. The stories are not necessarily news to his audience, it's the way he represents them what interests the audience.

### **5.4.1 Creating false intimacy**

Hilton often addresses his readers directly. Direct addresses to the audience are visible in many of the previous examples, for instance, in example (10) Hilton asks, "So, guess who is the first person to leave a comment?????" and further encourages his readers to "Check out what she wrote". This direct addressing of the audience is further illustrated in example (12):

HL Lindsay's Playing With Us  
 S1 **LezLo** and hosted a party at Ultra Supper Club in Toronto this past weekend, and gal pal sa**MAN** Ronson played DJ at the event, for the closing of the Toronto International Film Festival.

- S2 There's been rumors flying that the two lovebirds are engaged.  
 S3 La Lohan loves to play!  
 S4 Look at the heart-shaped diamond ring she purposely wore on her wedding finger.  
 S5 We really don't think that's the ring Lindz would want for herself.  
 S6 Or, is it?

In the headline Hilton includes the audience by using the collective 'we', which can be interpreted to include himself, the media and the audience. In addition, Hilton writes, "We really don't think that's the ring Lindz would want for herself" again the use of "we" instead of "I" creates the feeling that he includes the readers into the speculation. In turn, Hilton addresses the audience directly by asking them to "Look at the heart-shaped diamond ring". Hilton's last question "Or, is it?" can be interpreted as a invitation to speculation as well as an question that implies that maybe the story has some truth to it.

As noted by Schely-Newman (2004: 480) gossip columns often create the illusion of conversation between the readers and the writer. Both example (10) and (12), for instance, show that gossip blogs can create a similar kind of illusion.

In example (12) there are several nicknames used of Lohan, "LezLo", "La Lohan" and "Lindz". Throughout the examples mentioned above Hilton uses nicknames such as "LezLo" and "saMAN" to refer to Lohan and Ronson. According to Schely-Newman (2004: 477), nicknames are a way of creating the feeling that celebrities are made fun of behind their back. In turn, Schaffer (1995: 31) discovered in her study of tabloid headlines that one of the devices to promote readers' feelings of closeness is to use well-known nicknames for celebrities. Schaffer (1995: 32) argued that by using the first names and nicknames of celebrities readers are strongly involved in the story and made to feel as insiders to it. Hilton's nicknames for Lohan "LezLo" and Ronson "saMAN" are Hilton's own creation and could function as a device of creating familiarity. However, Hilton's nicknames definitely also serve the purpose of making fun of the celebrities and their sexuality.

On the level of discourse practice it should be noted that the last question could be interpreted as an invitation to speculate. This is because as it is typical of the blog format Hilton provides the readers with the opportunity to discuss the events via a comments section. Thus, the interactive nature of his blog functions as an additional way to invite the readers to join in on the gossip.

Example (13) illustrates the direct ways Hilton also uses to invite the readers to participate in the gossip:

- HL Does She Make You Wet???
- S1 We just don't understand the appeal of sa**MAN** Ronson.
- S2 What does **LezLo** see in her????
- S3 Is it her personality?
- S4 Her cheery disposition?
- S5 Her stunning, super model looks???
- S6 Her amazing talent???
- S7 What is it????
- S8 Cuz she has NONE of those things!
- S9 Despite that, Lohan seems attached at Ronson's ~~hip~~ **MAN**gina.
- S10 The pair spent Monday walking sa**MAN**'s bulldog and shooting the shit in L.A.'s Larchmont Village.
- S11 Amy Winehouse-a-like Courtenay Semel would have been a better choice!

The story does not have any interesting events to report. The only event the story reports is that Lohan and Ronson were seen walking a dog. The headline alone is a direct question aimed at the audience. In her study of Israeli gossip columns Schely-Newman (2004: 475) discovered that one of the ways of inviting the readers is to address the audiences directly. The whole example (13) is full of questions that are directed at the audience as well as function as a means of making fun of Ronson. By asking so many provocative questions Hilton is bound to stimulate conversation among his readers. Further, Hilton is able to make rude comments as he masks them into questions and not as statements. As the reader is invited to gossip what it is that Lohan possibly sees in Ronson it is once again established that they are indeed a couple. It is not questioned if they are a couple in this post; instead, it is asked why they are a couple.

Although the way Ronson is described in example (13) is very rude, it is not her sexuality that is ridiculed. It is in fact her appearance. In fact Hilton even suggests that

Lohan would have better choices for a girlfriend than Ronson. What he does not suggest is that she should be heterosexual.

#### 5.4.2 Shared pleasure of gossiping

Gossip is not exactly gossip unless there is someone to discuss it with. Moreover, sharing the gossip with someone is what makes it exciting. Talking and speculating about celebrities is fun when there is someone to share it with. Hilton involves his readers into the gossiping and creates the features of mock intimacy that Schely-Newman (2004) discovered in her study of Israeli gossip columns. The pragmatic ways of illustrating this mock intimacy were illustrated above. Example (14) illustrates how Hilton expresses the excitement of discussing Lohan and Ronson's relationship:

- HL Our Fave Friends Are Back Home  
 S1 Adios, Mexico!  
 S2 Are they an item or aren't they an item?  
 S3 Are they getting married?  
 S4 Oh, who cares anymore!  
 S5 What's clear is that **LezLo** and sa**MAN** must really enjoy each other's company cuz they're attached at the hip!  
 S6 Yesterday, we got pics of the "just friends" hanging on a beach in Mexico, with Sam looking ~~pretty hot~~ not vomit inducing in a two piece.  
 S7 Now, the two are back in Los Angeles, ready to get back to not really doing anything.

Hilton calls Ronson and Lohan "Our fave friends", which ties the reader to the story as well as Hilton. Hilton recaps all the rumors that have circulated around Lohan and Ronson and notes "Oh, who cares anymore!". This illustrates how even though one might never get an answer to the gossip around Lohan and Ronson it is still rather exiting to speculate.

## 5.5 In sum

To summarize, all the examples above illustrate the ways in which discourse structure of gossip blog can be ambiguous. By answering questions such as what, who, where and when Bell (1998: 76-80) the ambiguities and inconsistencies of gossip could be brought to attention.

Hilton has the authority and power to publish what he wants in his blog. Therefore, the fact that Hilton chooses to make Lohan's sexuality a means of making fun of her like in example (11) is confusing. He could represent the gossip about Lohan in a different manner or he could simply decide not to report and create stories about Lohan's sexuality altogether. However, he continues to write about Lohan. Hilton often points out inconsistencies in gossip taken from other sources and points out alternative explanations to stories as example (3) illustrated. This is something he usually does not do with stories regarding Lohan or Ronson. He joins in on the mainstream media speculation and he further uses the speculation to get material for his own blog.

After analysing discourse structure of Hilton's post the ambiguity of his posts became clear in many ways. Firstly, the sources were ambivalent. Secondly, the timeframe of the events was unclear. Thirdly, there were contradictions between comments and representation. The ambivalence in the way Hilton presents his stories about Lohan, Ronson and their sexuality shows in every example above.

In addition to the ambivalence, the examples show the ways in which the blog format shapes the construction of the gossip. Thanks to the blog format Hilton has a lot more freedom in publishing speed, space and ethical standards than for example a printed gossip column would. In addition, Hilton does not need to describe the background information and the original sources in detail, as he can simply provide links to them and leave it up to the reader whether they want to check them.

Finally, it could be noted that Hilton uses similar devices to invite the readers to participate in the gossip as Schely-Newman (2004) and Schaffer (1995) noted in their respective work on gossip columns and intimacy creation. In addition, example (14) illustrated how the excitement over sharing the gossip could be seen in the post.

The examples above illustrated that Hilton does not represent Lohan's possible homosexuality as a problem. Hilton's blog does not represent any features of homophobic hate speech for that matter. Hilton's language is explicit and the tone is often mocking. However, he does not ridicule or mock homosexuality. Moreover, when placed within the context of a gossip blog that ridicules all celebrities in just as derisive manner, Hilton's posts about Lohan do not stand out.

## 6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the present study was to find out how celebrities' sexuality is discussed in the context of a public gossip blog. The present study approached Perez Hilton's gossip blog from the perspective of critical discourse analysis. As the means of textual analysis Bell's framework for analyzing discourse structure of news stories was applied.

Previous studies on the field of queer studies were introduced in order to illustrate the general issues that homosexuality imposes. This was to make clear what are the possible social implications of Hilton's discourses of homosexuality. Previous studies in the field of queer studies have mainly focused on self-representation, mainstream media representation of homosexuality or homophobic hate speech. By introducing previous studies in the field of critical discourse analysis and blogging it was illustrated that the field lacks studies that use more entertainment oriented data. Blogs and gossip as a genre were introduced in detail in order to provide more comprehensive view of the practices that are common for blog format as well as gossip.

One of the main discoveries of the present study was that Hilton does not promote or reproduce heteronormativity in his postings about Lohan and Ronson. In fact, he presents them doing quite normal things and does not imply that their actions have anything to do with their sexuality. Features of homophobic hate speech that Lillian (2005) and Reddy (2002) studied were not visible in the present study's data. Lillian (2005: 130) noted that implicit homophobic stereotypes are the ones that are most dangerous. No such stereotypical views of homosexuality were discovered in Hilton's commentary.

Although Hilton constantly brings forth the sexuality of Lohan with nicknaming her "LezLo" and frequently posting stories around the topic of her sexuality, the examples do not illustrate that Hilton's posts represent heteronormative views. There were no stereotypical views or representation of homosexuality such Stewart (2008), Gauntlett (2002) and Moritz (2004) noted in their studies. For instance, Stewart (2008: 79) noted

that homosexuality and homosexuals were represented as a dangerous, unhappy and violent. The data did not show that Hilton represents homosexuality as abnormal. What he does represent as abnormal is the hiding of homosexuality. That is what the posts make fun of, not homosexuality.

Hilton does not express that Lohan's coming out as lesbian might have negative implications on her or her career. Moreover, Hilton is not implying that the negative things in Lohan's life are the result of homosexuality. Hilton is not presenting that she is somehow different or unequal if she admits her homosexuality. In this sense it cannot be argued that Hilton's comments are homophobic or intolerant.

Hilton suggests that homosexuality needs to be articulated clearly, it is not enough that Lohan implies by her actions that she is a lesbian. Thus, Hilton's blog implies that homosexuality is all right as long as it is made explicit. This discovery is similar to LeBesco's (2002) argument in her study about fan discourse about homosexual characters that homosexuality is not the issue that bothers people, but it is the ambiguity of the sexual orientation which does so.

Hilton implies in the posts that it is somehow mandatory for Lohan and Ronson to publicly admit that they are indeed a couple. Hilton's posts reconfirm the idea that if someone is ambiguous about their sexuality it is all right to make fun of them and demand that they make their sexuality clear. Moreover, Hilton's blog reconfirms that sexuality can be used as a means of making fun of someone. Moreover, by demanding constantly that Lohan should come out officially Hilton is reconfirming the idea that a division needs to be made between hetero- and homosexuals.

Moreover, the way in which Hilton gossips about the developments of Lohan and Ronson's relationship is not different from how any celebrity couple's relationship is gossiped about. This is to say that Hilton does not make an exception in the way he represents a couple because they are homosexual. Hilton actually does not report that Lohan and Ronson are doing anything scandalous or even special. Hilton reports for

instance about Lohan and Ronson's various vacations, their blogging and dog walking. By representing Lohan and Ronson doing rather normal things, at least for a celebrity, Hilton is not portraying any stereotypical views about homosexuality. Hilton's blog implies that homosexual relationships can be gossiped about as openly as any other relationship and it is not off limits to discuss. This way Hilton expresses in his blog that celebrities' sexuality is a legitimate topic of gossip and that it is no longer a taboo subject to discuss homosexuality and homosexual couples publicly.

The data showed that Hilton describes Ronson and Lohan as a natural couple. For instance, calling Ronson and Lohan's vacation a "lover's getaway". Hilton's posts create the impression that Lohan and Ronson clearly are romantically involved. Hilton represents Lohan's relationship as reality even though it has not been confirmed. Lohan's homosexuality is represented as a given and the speculation is more about when it is made official rather than is the relationship real.

Evidence that reconfirms their relationship as romantic is presented far more than evidence that denies it. Hilton constantly represents Lohan and Ronson as a couple even when he is presenting evidence contradicting it. Hilton's brings Lohan and Ronson's sexuality forward by producing posts that have nothing relevant to report. Hilton is keeping the gossip about their relationship in the public eye although there is nothing newsworthy to report. Thus, Hilton is keeping the representation of diversity in the public arena.

Although Hilton contributes to the media speculation of Lohan's sexuality, Hilton does present his readers with an alternative explanation to Lohan's behaviour and refusal not to come out. He suggests that Lohan might only be taking advantage of the media attention. Thus, pointing out that not all the things we see and hear in the media are to be taken at face value.

The provocative way Hilton chooses to represent Lohan and Ronson brings up the question of what are the appropriate terms when discussing homosexuality. Hilton is

defining what he as a homosexual man sees appropriate. Everyone might not agree that Hilton's terms are appropriate. However, Hilton's posts about Lohan at least can create discussion about the appropriateness of terms used when sexuality is discussed. As both Wong (2005: 785-786) and Jones (2000: 199-200) concluded, in their work about appropriateness of terms that at least mainstream media should not use terms that are controversial and might be perceived as derogatory. In this sense Hilton should be allowed to use the kind of language he sees fit as he is not strictly speaking mainstream media and is part of the sexual minority himself. However, it can be questioned does Hilton have some responsibility on how he represents gay people? After all he does have a vast readership and is strongly part of the media discourses of celebrity culture.

Bell's (1998) framework for analyzing discourse structure of news stories clearly showed how very little news and stories such as gossip actual tells us. As there is no actual information gossip relies on, the way in which gossip is represented plays an important role. Gossip stories are not always telling us what happened for a fact. The analysis of Hilton's gossip blog clearly shows that the sources, time and commentary create ambiguity. Even the posts that seem to provide some new information do not contain much information that could be confirmed. However, gossip stories do give us representations of what happened and representations of those to whom it happened. Although gossip is not very informative, it does represent meanings and ideologies as much as any other discourses.

The data illustrated how little actual information gossip included. It became clear that gossip can be constructed in a way that it seems as if one has more information than one actually does. As the examples illustrated it does not always matter if the gossip has no credibility or even any point to it, they still add to the speculation. Gossip is not very reliable to begin with, that is after all what makes it gossip. When analyzing the discourse structure of Hilton's blog posts the ambiguities and gaps in the stories were clearly illustrated.

In addition, on the level of discourse practice it was illustrated that the many different aspects of the blog format provide opportunities in the way stories can be constructed and represented. These aspects are the fact that there is less need for background information as each post can simply be linked to the relevant background story. Thanks to the blog format the sources can be embedded within the text. This is to say that with links that are embedded into words one can give credit to the source without directly mentioning it. This often creates the impression that the story is one's own. The data also illustrated that the blog format makes it possible to prolong the stories and publish trivial stories as blogs are not restricted in terms of space. It was also illustrated that the language used in computer-mediated communication is a resource that can be used in the blog format to create meaning. Moreover, there are no restrictions of journalistic ethics thanks to the blog format. Furthermore, it is easier not to take responsibility over spreading gossip when it is taken from another source.

No aspect of celebrities' lives seems to be of limits nowadays and every single detail can and will be reported. Thanks to the Internet the stories and gossip are never forgotten. All of the old stories can be retrieved and brought up later to create new speculation. If the celebrities refuse to expose their lives to the media, stories are made up. As Petersen (2007: n.pag.) noted, in her study of Hilton's blog, the truth does not matter, if a false story is constantly repeated and represented as the truth. Celebrities lead an interesting and eventful life in the pages of tabloids, gossip magazines and gossip blogs. As Solove (2007: 74) pointed out, Internet has turned this gossip into a more permanent and wide spread form.

Celebrity couples have always been an interest of the media, and speculation over heterosexual celebrity couples relationship is not unusual at all. The twists and turns of their relationships are followed with great interest. In principle, there should not be a need to make an exception if it is a homosexual celebrity couple. The interest remains the same. Since the representation of a heterosexual couple's life is legitimate in the world of gossip then excluding the representations of homosexual couple's would

reproduce the idea of heteronormativity and reconfirm the idea that homosexuality is abnormal.

Homosexuality is no longer something that is only implied between the lines. Openly homosexual celebrities are represented in the mainstream media and events of their lives are reported on. However, it is still very exciting if a celebrity “comes out” and it most definitely has news-worth. However, it is no longer represented as a scandal nor is it utterly sensationalized. In fact, there should be more research on how entertainment media represents homosexuality and whether there is a difference in the way in which homosexual couples are presented to the way in which heterosexual couples are represented. Celebrities’ sexuality is just another aspect of the celebrities’ lives that is exposed to people. At least now homosexuality is a topic that is up for discussion publicly and celebrities’ no longer have to hide it to save their careers. Open discussion is always a positive thing. However, the topic of celebrities’ sexuality should not be the only issue ever discussed. Sexuality can be a natural topic of discussion.

The manner in which the topic of sexuality is dealt with in the media is what makes a difference. If celebrities are allowed to show diversity, and their homosexuality is not presented as a scandal and unnatural thing it cannot be harmful. Homosexuality should not be a forbidden subject otherwise it is made to seem as something negative and unnatural. Moreover, gossiping about a homosexual celebrity in general cannot be seen anymore negative than gossiping about heterosexual celebrity. However, if the gossip is based on negative views and representations of homosexuality it cannot be accepted.

Both Juvonen (2001: 289) and LeBesco (2002: n.pag.) noted that even the more tolerant people saw that homosexuality should not be displayed too explicitly and kept private. The present study’s data did not imply similar discoveries. Hilton does not in any way imply that Lohan and Ronson should be discrete about their relationship or that they should restrain from publicly showing their affections. On the contrary, Hilton encourages them to be more open.

As celebrities' sexuality is still something that creates so much publicity and interest, it is clear that people still feel the need to put labels on sexuality. It seems that people still need to know whether someone is or is not homosexual. The present study discovered similarly as LeBesco (2002: n.pag.) that the issue is not about the sexuality; it is the lack of not articulating what it is. It is still somehow expected that if one is not heterosexual, one needs to make it clear. This reconfirms the fundamental notion that heterosexuality is seen as the norm and other forms of sexualities need to be separated from it. There really should not be any need to explain or define one's sexuality to anybody. Sexuality is an important part of people's private life, however, it does not affect the way we go about our daily lives. This is not to say that sexuality should be kept hidden. It is to say that sexuality should not be a reason for division and all sexuality should be considered and discussed as naturally as heterosexuality.

It can be argued that it is a positive thing that diversity is shown in gossip as well. Since there is so much speculation and rumors about any celebrity couple it would seem strange that a couple would not be discussed simply because they are not heterosexual. That would be a division and that would make homosexuality seem like a taboo subject. However, it is not right to force someone to publicly announce his/her sexuality. It would not seem to serve any positive purpose. Moreover, it would once again reconfirm the idea that unless one is heterosexual one is somehow different.

The representation of sexuality is much more open nowadays and Internet provides a vast forum for people to publish and discuss their opinion. However, open discussion about diverse sexuality is still needed. Problematic representations, the ones that are hard to determine and create ambivalence and ambiguity in the way they can be interpreted should be studied more. The focus should be on the overall messages and context of the representation, not singled out words and terms used in the representation.

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