ARTICLES

‘Outward sex’: Ways of managing morality in the construction of grinding

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ABSTRACT

HIV is an ongoing public health concern in South Africa, particularly with regard to high rates of HIV infection among youth. We adopt the viewpoint that the study of sexual behaviour is most usefully framed in terms of sexual practice – where sexual behaviours are understood as constituted of socially negotiated meanings shaped in the context of complex interpersonal, social, cultural and historical factors. This study took grinding, a highly physical and sexual hip-hop dance, as a means to explore how youth explain their sexual practices. Seven participants were interviewed. Using discursive psychology and conversation analysis, we found that when participants constructed grinding as a sexual practice, their ‘morality’ became at stake and this was evidenced by the four ways in which they managed their morality: Norming, blaming external resources, reframing and contrasting. We propose that the morality of sexual practice was a central concern for our participants, and on a broader level any interventions regarding safe sexual practices need also to engage young people in dialogue regarding their identity and the moral conflicts and dilemmas they face.

Keywords: accounting; discursive psychology; discourse; sexuality; grinding; morality

Grinding, a physical and close-contact hip-hop dance, is cited in literature as being linked to sexual activity, for example leading to arousal on the dance floor, being a means to attract sexual partners at clubs, and being a precursor to sexual activity (Hutchinson, 1999; Munoz-Laboy, Weinstein, & Parker, 2007). This article demonstrates how clubbers construct grinding as being of a sexual nature and orientate to grinding as an accountable, and therefore moral, behaviour. Through an analysis of interviews undertaken with clubbers who grind, four main methods of accounting were found. Analysis of the interviews was approached from a discursive psychological framework, informed by conversational analysis, which understands talk-in-interaction as a locally performed accomplishment, doing something within the interactional sequence. The moral methods deployed in accounting for grinding are taken as valuable insights into the moralisation of sexual practices. Our discussion includes the relevance of some of these insights in relation to HIV prevention and safe-sex interventions in South Africa.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Twenty two and a half million people in the Southern African region are Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infected; this constitutes 68% of the world’s cases (UNAIDS, 2010). Five and a half million people are HIV positive in South Africa, making this country’s epidemic the largest in the world (UNAIDS, 2010). Of real
Concern, in South Africa, are the high infection rates of HIV among youth, particularly young women (Abdool Karim et al., 2011; UNAIDS, 2010). For example, the HIV prevalence rate for 20-24 year old women is 21% (a sharp increase from the prevalence rate of 6.5% for 15–19 year old females) (UNAIDS, 2010). The apparent intractability of HIV infection rates to public health interventions and the monolithic health education message: ‘ABC: Abstain, Be faithful, Condomise’ is at issue, given that prevention campaigns do not appear to have reduced infection rates among youth. Despite these educational prevention efforts, Hunter (2010) nevertheless reports some sectors of youth expressing fatalism and a sense of inevitability of being infected with HIV.

The reason for this fatalism, despite prevention and empowerment efforts remains unclear; thus research into sexual behaviour and HIV prevention strategies continues. Admittedly, accessing details of individuals’ sexual behaviour can be challenging, particularly in cultures where sex may be seen as a sensitive, highly personal, if not taboo, topic. Thus, the veracity and accuracy of individuals’ reporting of sexual behaviours remains a concern for researchers (Catania, 1999; Gribble, Miller, Rogers, & Turner, 1999; Tourangeau & Yan, 2007). This concern is evidenced in quantitative behaviour researchers’ efforts (for example those who create surveys or questionnaires to gain measures of sexual behaviours) to develop different methodological means to facilitate and ensure veracity in the reporting of sexual behaviours (Cleland, Boerma, Carael, & Weir, 2004; Gregson et al., 2004; LaBrie & Earleywine, 2000; Van der Elst et al., 2009).

Whilst the utility of quantitative research methods in obtaining seemingly precise measures of sexual behaviours is acknowledged, abstracting sexual behaviour from its web of social and moral meanings risks rendering it unintelligible (Eyre, Davis, & Peacock, 2001). Kippax (2008) cautions that framing and researching sexual behaviour as an individually regulated, reasoned action where interventions, assumed unmediated, impact on individuals is highly questionable. Rather the sphere of sexual behaviour is more usefully understood as sexual practice – practice constituted of socially-negotiated meanings, which are shaped in the context of complex interpersonal, social, cultural and historical factors (Kippax, 2008).

Given the aforementioned issue of sensitivity to sexual surveys, we sought an approach that would not alienate, but rather enable access to the realm of sexual practice in young people’s lives. This is consistent with the ethnomethodological approach that examines how social life is constructed in the ‘ordinary’ activities of members (Hammersley, 2003). Thus, we observed and interviewed youth around their involvement in the popular culture genre of dance called grinding. In the light of the broadened conceptualisation of sexual practice, grinding was viewed as a ‘public sex-analogue’ (Durrheim, personal correspondence, 2011). By adopting this stance, we hypothesised that grinding transgresses the public/private boundary of sexual practice and makes accessible, in bringing to public view, aspects of bedroom intimacies.
The ethnomethodology of grinding and sexual practice

Munoz-Laboy et al. (2007) found that hip-hop grinders emphasise the erotic and sexual elements of grinding dance, to the extent that grinding is viewed by participants as setting the stage for further sexual activity beyond the club. Likewise, Hutchinson’s (1999) study described grinding as simulating the physical act of sex, and participants indicated that grinding moves were evaluated as an indication of sexual ability. However, to label grinding as an instance of sexual practice to suit our research could be challenged as an instance of intellectual hegemony, where the researcher frames a phenomenon according to their agenda (Schegloff, 2006). Rather, consistent with ethnomethodological theory, this study approaches how participants construct grinding, what is oriented to as a participant’s concern, and whether or not the construction is topicalised as a matter of morality. These are matters we will approach by applying the methods of conversation analysis and discursive psychology.

Discursive psychology and conversation analysis

Discursive psychology (DP) examines the ways in which people conceptually construct realities through discourse (Potter & Edwards, 2001). This approach analyses the way discourse is both constructed – built and shaped through talk, and also constructive – how it creates a version of the world (Potter & Edwards, 2001). Furthermore, it recognises that discourse occurs in a context: possibilities of talk are oriented, occasioned and situated. DP also attends to the action orientation of talk – that discourse is deployed and managed to accomplish interactional tasks (Billig, 1999). In essence, DP makes peripheral both aspects of ‘real’/external world phenomena, and internal mentation and cognition. Rather, what is examined is how constructions of phenomena are produced and deployed in talk to perform a social, interactional purpose (Edwards, 2006). In analysis, the activities accomplished and the resources employed in talk are made the focus, rather than the content of talk (Schegloff, 2006; Silverman, 2010). In conjunction with this, conversational analysis (CA) takes into consideration two core aspects regarding talk: what interactional business is being brought about and how orientation to that interactional business is manifested (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). Thus, DP and CA dovetail in their attention to and analysis of what is accomplished through talk-in-interaction.

The use of interviews in ethnomethodology

It is from this dovetailed perspective of DP and CA, that participants’ talk around grinding is approached. It is noteworthy that such talk occurred in interviews – a particular instance of social interaction. Our taken-for-granted ability to interact with one another (be it in an interview setting or our daily lives) is a remarkable capacity that forms the ‘sociological bedrock’ made possible by embodied common
sense (Schegloff, 2006). What makes the interview as an ethnomethodological tool different from other ways in which interviews are utilised, is that interviews are “seen as instances of settings... in which members use interactional and interpretative resources to build versions of social reality and create and sustain a sense of social order” (Baker, 2003, p. 396). Therefore, analysis of interviews is based on approaching the talk of participants as not mere reporting, but rather the active choice of participants in selecting ways of presenting versions of reality (Antaki, 1994). It then becomes of significance as to how and what participants are ‘doing’ in their interaction with the interviewer.

In interviews participants are usually recruited as members of categories of interest – in this research ‘clubbers’ who grind (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). The interview is then oriented to and conducted on the basis of that assumed category incumbency (Baker, 2003). Simply by virtue of a person’s membership of a category and the common knowledge about that category, certain understandings regarding the purpose of members’ behaviour are made available (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). Additionally, during interviews participants orient to and manage identity in relation to various categories that are invoked and made relevant. This creates variability and moral dilemmas, which become apparent in the accounts participants provide. In accounting, participants orient to displaying that they are moral beings, rationally competent and adequate in their behaviour (Baruch, 1981).

**Morality as a discursive accomplishment**

From a DP perspective, one cannot just assume that a particular topic or issue has a moral texture; rather the moral texture of any topic has to be displayed and made available first before it is evaluated. Furthermore, when studying morality, it is important to begin with the participant: morality has to be the participant’s concern and not just the researcher’s concern (Tileagă, 2010). What is also important in the study of morality is considering which descriptions, implications and categories are treated as relevant by participants and what purpose these factors serve in an interaction. These are important as they are collaboratively used in an interaction to produce a moral order (Tileagă, 2010).

In order for a topic to be treated and analysed as a target of moralisation, it has to be produced by the participant as an accountable action. Baker (2003) explains how interviews can be sites of accounting where description, justification and explanation are undertaken by participants. By accounting for a behaviour, participants implicitly make that act sensitive and controversial, thus turning it into a target of moralisation (Tileagă, 2010). Thus what is morally at stake is oriented to and made answerable. When speaking about a matter that has been made a target of moralisation, the interviewee speaks from a “moral category of conduct and judgment by drawing upon moral implicit or explicit perspectives and ethical principles, as well as categories and categorical incumbencies” (Tileagă, 2010, p. 235).
In the analysis of talk on moral issues, it is important to note how speakers organise and use discursive practices to position themselves and others in relation to the target of moralisation. The analysis should also take into account how speakers negotiate issues of identity, morality and context and how these issues are used in their arguments, descriptions and categorisations of identity. As Tileagă (2010, p. 225) argues: “understanding the discursive organisation of public accountability entails a special attention to the social actor’s appreciation of the individual’s norm- or role-breaking behaviour as moral discourse”. A discursive analysis of this moral discourse looks for what is at stake and what is of interest to the social actors (Tileagă, 2010).

When morally accounting for an action, speakers use discursive resources, for example, using moral grammar or vocabulary to accomplish understating (Tileagă, 2010). Also, where social actors find themselves deviating from a moral norm, they can invoke moral understandings and beliefs to justify their deviant behaviour. The moral claims made by speakers are significant as, while expressing moral priorities, speakers display how they make sense of the situation and what they seek to achieve (Lowe, 2002). Ultimately, when participants orient to a topic as moral, they are interested in producing persuasive accounts of their moral adequacy to their interlocutor. Related to this, accounts only work if they are received as credible by the fellow interlocutor; therefore, they are situated, occasioned accomplishments voiced for an audience. Various discursive strategies to achieve persuasion are utilised. An example is extreme case formulations where statements like ‘never’ and ‘always’ can respectively be deployed to disarm possible counter challenges or to normalise a behaviour as valid or irrefutable by virtue of its frequency (Edwards, 2000). Further discursive strategies will be highlighted in the analysis section.

Accounting is a mutual accomplishment as it draws on shared cultural resources “interpretive repertoires”, which are “available cultural explanations” (Antaki, 1994, p. 119). In social interactions, people make use of moral resources that are believed to be held in higher regard than others and are more difficult to refute. These moral resources are used to validate or strengthen moral arguments, for example, ‘god-terms’ which cannot be challenged, as well as culture, which is often used to justify a moral position (Lowe, 2002). Therefore, analysing accounts and examining the way participants constitute versions of the world provides access to moral assumptions held by participants as members of society (Baker, 2003). It is the formulation of these moral accounts around grinding to which we attend in this article.
METHOD

Research aims and design
The aim of this study was to examine the ways in which club-goers manage their morality in relation to grinding. From an ethnographic perspective, behaviour and interaction are ideally observed as they happen and are best understood within their natural setting (Silverman, 2010). In this study, the researchers observed clubbers’ behaviour in a selected Hip Hop club, blending into the research-setting as participant observers.

Sampling
Purposive sampling, in order to access the population of specific interest, was used (Neuman, 2006). Participants were chosen because they frequented the club over the time period of this study (1 month). Young club-goers, above the age of 18 were approached by the researchers at the club and asked to join the study. They were told we were exploring experiences at clubs, specifically with regard to dance routines and genres. Telephone numbers were obtained at the club. The researchers phoned potential participants the day after meeting at the club, re-explained the study, and set up an interview session with those who agreed. The sample consisted of seven participants, three males and four females. Participants were students or young professionals, single, heterosexual and of black African ethnicity. Informed consent was obtained at the interview meeting, where participants signed a form stating the aims of the study, guaranteeing anonymity, and obtaining consent for audio recording of the interviews (for later transcription to be made). Participants also agreed to the text of their interviews being used in publications, as long as no identifying information was included. Ethical clearance from the ethics review board of the University of KwaZulu-Natal was obtained according to the institution’s requirements.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION
As researchers, we attended a local hip hop club for one to two nights a week over a month. We are five females and one male, ages mid-twenties to thirties, three of black and three of white ethnicity. Following the study’s ethnographic approach, data collection initially consisted of supplementary field notes by the researchers made on cell-phones. Thus, observations regarding the activity of grinding and clubbers’ interactions around this genre of dance were noted. The field notes were then used to inform our interview questions. General questions, such as “How did you find the club last night? What do you get out of meeting there and dancing?” and
more specific questions regarding participants’ actual observed behaviour such as “Looks like you and your girlfriends like to dance in a group, why do you think that is?” were asked. Since the research was youth focused, the researchers endeavoured to meet the participants in settings that were most convenient for them, such as at their university halls of residences or a local cafe. The interview schedule was structured such that a space was created for free expression. This was intended to facilitate the expression of ‘participant concerns’, in accordance with our discursive psychology analytical approach. Thus, the arising interactional concerns were our intended focus, rather than any imposed framework. Six semi-structured face-to-face interviews (one interview was an interview with two participants, friends, interviewed together), of the duration 30 minutes to one hour, were obtained. Each researcher conducted an interview with the ‘contact’ they had obtained at the club. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using a simplified Jeffersonian method of transcription. This enabled the researchers to pay close attention to the detail and notation of the sequence of talk.

Data analysis

DP is concerned with what people do with their talk. In the case of moral accounting, DP looks at how people’s accounts are worked up in discourse to warrant and validate their accounts (Abell & Stokoe, 1999). Speech, according to Abell and Stokoe (1999) is built in opposition to potential counter speech and the speaker chooses to use the words they do in order to achieve a particular goal. In this study the transcribed interviews were analysed using combined DP and CA methods. Analysis started with how grinding was constructed by the participants. Further, texts were read and re-read with attention given to instances of variability within and between different accounts, as well as instances of ‘troubled speech’ such as long pauses or the use of repairs (Potter, 2011). Examples of analysis are given with each extract.

RESULTS

Extracts with corresponding analysis follow, demonstrating the four identified methods used by participants in accounting for grinding.

Extract 1: Reframing (P: female, mid-twenties, office professional. T: Interviewer)

38 T: So u:h (. 8) well what is grinding to you uh what does it mean to you?
39 P: Well It just means (1. 2) dancing with a different [person] as opposed to dancing with your
40 T: [mm-hm]
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41  P: frie:nds] and that’s where you can get more (. ) how can I say it uh >
   more a bit  [↑  personal]<
42  T: [okay]
43  P: [but] not too intimate with a [guy] (. ) and you get to (. ) know each
   [other] on the dance floor
44  T: [mm-hm] [↑o:Kay] [okay]
45  P: >without actually< having to talk to each other >you know< and it’s
   where you do all your (. )
46  u:m exotic moves on the gu(h)y heh ↓ heh

By asking what grinding means to her, one of the researchers topicalises grinding –
attaches a level of importance to it. Through use of the word “just” in line 39,
the participant minimises its importance. P constructs grinding as “just” a dance
with someone other than her friends. By adding “a bit personal” (line 41), she
further presents grinding as an ‘innocent’ way of interacting. She presents herself
(and her actions) as innocently wanting to meet new people. In line 43 “but not too
intimate with a guy” P alludes to the sexual nature of grinding – hence producing
grinding as not just an innocent way of meeting new people but also involving a
level of intimacy with the opposite sex. By attenuating it (“not too intimate”), she
is defending the claim presented earlier of just wanting to meet people, thereby pre-
emptively countering any implication that she is the kind of person who would get
too intimate with guys.

Further on in line 43, the participant goes back to the construction of grinding as
just a casual way of meeting new people, thereby downplaying the sexual nature of
grinding (which she herself had oriented to) and emphasising the casual, non-sexual
part of grinding. However in line 46, by talking about doing “exotic moves on the
guy”, she further re-formulates grinding as of a sexual nature. P exhibits a dilemma
in the formulation of grinding – going back and forth between sexual and non-sexual
constructions of grinding, producing and defending opposing versions (Edwards,
2000). By continuously attending to re-negotiating its nature, P shows that she is
oriented to how her descriptions of grinding will be heard by the interlocutor. As
such, by her efforts to attend to, manage and delimit the sexual nature of grinding
she is oriented to displaying herself as morally aware and competent.

Extract 2: Norming (B: 20 year old male university student, G: B’s
friend a 19 year old female university student, R: interviewer)

42  R: o(h)Kay (. ) but I mean, what’s that all about, try’na put on this (. ) sort of
   (. ) front if
43  you want to call it?
44  B: m::hm
45  R: what are they trying to accomplish (. ) by (. 3)
46  B: they trying to get laid
47  G: (unclear talk but nodding vehemently in agreement with B, trying to interject)
48  R: (giggles, laughs)
49  G: that’s the (. 2) that’s exactly it, they tryna-
50  B: yeah (G nodding in agreement)
51  R: they try(h)na get laid? (giggling)
52  B: (unclear) we all tryna get laid in th(h)ere (laughs)

A general question about clubbing and grinding in line 45, elicits an answer of “they’re trying to get laid” (line 46). The informal, slang term for having sex used by B indicates the collaborative nature of the interview interaction where shared cultural resources of talk about sexual behaviour are drawn upon. B topicalises sex and brings this to the forefront of the conversation as an identified concern. This statement, free of personal investment (“they”) and unsubstantiated by any further accounting, presents the claim as self-evident and self-explanatory, thereby formulating “trying to get laid” as a fact and a taken-for-granted normative practice. Similar to Edwards’ (2003, p. 42) argument that “the account here is an externalised one, cast in terms of what other people want and see, rather than the current speaker personally; and it is cast in terms of generalised and normative concerns rather than personal ones”.

In line 52, B states “we all tryna get laid”. By “we all” he escalates his previous statement. The “all” is an extreme case formulation producing the behaviour as commonly and generally done, thereby serving to absolve him of (personally) having to provide an account and normalising the behaviour (Edwards, 2000). Through this normalising account B works to manage his morality: His personal behaviour (indicated by his inclusion in “we”) is justified through reference to this being in common with others’ behaviour – a normative practice. This use of norming is related to the observation by McKenzie (2003) that the social-individual dichotomy is used as a resource where participants’ use of social explanations can be used to exonerate them of the need to supply individual explanations.

That B orients to this justification as potentially contestable or delicate is suggested by his laughter. Grønnerød (2004) documents how laughter can be used to demonstrate self-irony or to soften statements potentially hearable as inappropriate. I’s giggling and laughter is also notable (line 48 and 51), and is heard as alignment with and a continuer for the interviewee’s comments, as evidenced by the interviewees’ continuation and escalation of the topic. Had the interviewer’s laughter been heard by B and G as condemnatory or awkward, the subsequent interaction would arguably have been of a different nature. This demonstrates that all participants are oriented to accomplishing their identities in interviews, including the interviewer (Baker, 2003). This confirms the social, interactional nature of interviews – that they are not merely data-collection exercises, but co-constructed formulations.
Extract 3: Reframing, contrasting and blaming of external sources (P: 19 year old male university student I: interviewer) (words in Zulu translated to English in adjacent brackets)

P: yah(h), like, yah (. ) physique to physique, it gets you know ombala (arousal) kind of like, aroused nyana (a bit), you know, like ukuba (being) aroused
I: is that a good thing?
P: is that a good thing?
I: yeah
P: ehm (. 2) I guess for me it would depend uyabo? (you see?), for mina (me) personally ehm it could just end up there, uyabo? (you see?), it could just end up being a dance with someone I just met on the dance floor
I: mmmh
P: and just danced with for like five minutes and then it stops and then I move on uyabo? (you see?)
I: oh ok
P: then to the next person, whatever, but for someone else, ehm depending on what kind of person they are, like they could take, they could confuse it for hlampe intombazana (maybe a girl) you know, ehm throwing themselves to them uyabo? (you see?), and they could want to take that further (. ) and then hlampe (maybe) end up making intombazana (girl) uncomfortable uyabo? (you see?)

P constructs grinding as a sexual activity involving physical contact and arousal (line 1: “physique to physique”, “arousal”). I’s question “is that a good thing?” is repeated by P. This repetition appears to be an appeal for clarity and confirmation of the question, as once the question is confirmed (line 4: I: “yeah”) P continues. He then orientates to I’s question as requiring an account/explanation regarding dancing and he highlights himself “for me personally” (line 6, 7). P formulates himself as someone who can manage arousal, the use of “could” (line 7) suggesting probability and possibility; he displays choice as a resource in managing arousal. Grinding is re-formulated as “just end up being a dance with someone” (line 7, 8). Shifting between these two constructions of grinding demonstrates the management of contradictory identity positions (Thompson & Kumar, 2011; Wetherell & Edley, 1999). P concurrently displays his experience as a grinder and cooperative research participant, but also attends to his identity as a reasonable, moral individual. The subsequent description comprises a contrast: a scenario is scripted up, the scenario is based on the “kind of person” (line 14), highlighting dispositional characteristics of the individual being of relevance who “confuse”(s) (line 14) the situation. P formulates himself “for me personally” as someone who can manage his arousal and “move on” (line 10). The use of a contrast serves as a means to render persuasive his account of being able to navigate and manage the situation, by presenting the
situation as potentially ambiguous to others. Others may “want to take that further” (line 16), “making girl uncomfortable” (line 17). This is attributed to ‘confusion’ implying that the situation is open to misinterpretation or that the male patron does not understand the clubbing situation/norms. This scenario displays P’s orientation to accounting for others’ (other men’s) behaviour too, as ‘confusion’ is invoked as a means of managing blame, culpability and the accountability of men. The above demonstrates how accounting is a means of managing negative evaluations of an action and to re-cast the significance of the action and associated individual responsibility (Evaldsson, 2007).

Shared cultural resources of linguistic understanding are drawn upon in the use of “want to take that further” (line 16) and “making girl uncomfortable” (line 17) – these statements are euphemisms of implied but unstated consequences. Thus ‘confusion’ leading to potentially morally questionable behaviour is constructed as a function of external factors of the girl dancing with a guy “throwing themselves to them” (line 15). P’s personal identity and moral competence are accounted for by his claim of being able to choose and discern the situation. He accomplishes this by providing a contrast, using the construction of others as confused tacitly implying his ability to discern the situation. The above analysis demonstrates how accounts are interested, in that aspects of a speaker’s identity may be at stake and speakers draw upon various resources to build a credible explanation (Antaki, 1994). It is in the formulation of those accounts that participants therefore display their sense making of the world.

**DISCUSSION**

DP examines how participants draw on mind and world states in talk and interaction. Through analysis, it is examined how these elements are used by the speaker to accomplish and account for aspects of their identity. Through the discourse of mind-world understanding, the participant offers certain “thoughts, opinions, policies and ideas as constrained by the nature of the world” (Edwards, 2003, p. 34). Therefore, it can be argued that what is done when interacting with others, is to draw on world and mind conventions – for example, embodied social practices of the membership category to which the participant was assigned. Analysis of the data collected in this study indicated that grinding was constructed as a sexual dance (“exotic”, “horny”) with elements of sexual arousal involved. Participants, recruited to interview on the basis of being someone who grinds, oriented to this identity and activity as requiring an account, shaping their talk to explain, justify, attribute and make sense of their behaviour. By proffering moral accounts for their participation in grinding, the participants topicalised the sexual nature of grinding as a target of moralisation. Eyre, Davis and Peacock (2001) argue that moral arguments about sexual behaviour revolve around the speaker judging the sexual activity as either right or wrong,
judging other people (often as being immoral) as well as using various rhetorical strategies that favour their own moral positioning. Moral arguments are particularly interesting as they “reveal the speaker’s moral concerns regarding sexual behaviour” (Eyre et al., 2001, p. 3) and provide an opportunity for the speaker to position themselves and others in relation to the target of moralisation.

**Reframing**

The participants in the study often shifted between constructing grinding as “just fun”, “just a dance” and it being a sexual activity. Reframing is achieved by manipulating the details of what is being discussed during the interaction (Abell & Stokoe, 1999). By redefining what grinding is, saying that it was just fun or a dance (extract 1 and 3), participants were able to manipulate the meaning of grinding in order to validate their moral arguments. In this way, they managed their identities – both as clubbers and also as moral beings who do not participate in sexual behaviour, but rather in “fun ways of meeting new people” (extract 1). Therefore, the participants managed their morality by downplaying the sexual nature of grinding. Where grinding was constructed as “fun” or “just a dance”, participants did not topicalise it as a matter of morality, and the need to provide an account was dismissed.

**Norming**

Indicative of norming is where cultural practices are drawn upon to justify and defend a moral position. Furthermore, “introducing the nature of the world as common knowledge, or framing descriptions as uncontentious, are ways of talking, and as such, can be ways of unpacking potentially controversial issues as nothing of the sort” (Edwards, 2003, p. 36). Cultural practices are treated as common knowledge, shared by both the participant and the interviewer. Participants frequently employed the phrase “you know” (extract 3) or “we all” (extract 2) in accounting for their behaviour at a specific instance. By claiming something as common practice, the participant managed his/her morality by exonerating him/herself from having to provide a personal account. This form of managing morality is also referred to as “common sense narrative-normative reasoning” (Edwards, 2003, p. 40). By the participant drawing on this form of accounting, an apparently accountable action is characterised as normal, factual and typical of the membership category topicalised. Furthermore, where characterised as normal, “no special account (motives, reason, etc.) need to be given” (Edwards, 2003, p. 40). Presenting corroborating evidence as experienced, factual and common knowledge creates the opportunity for the participant to draw on the-way-the-world-works, therefore exempting themselves from providing personal accounts and taking responsibility for the positioning of the self.
By the participant’s norming accounts, he or she is drawing on worldly experience and formulating their accounts as a ‘solid fact’ thereby not having to provide further accounts as this then eradicates the possibility of potential controversy between the mind and world state (Edwards, 2003). Norming is, therefore, a powerful way of managing morality as it allows the participant to draw on general common knowledge to justify behaviour in a specific context.

**Contrasting**

Where participants provide accounts it shows an orientation to the phenomena topicalised as being a matter of morality. Furthermore, accounts are interested, in that aspects of a speaker’s identity may be at stake and speakers draw upon various resources to construct their explanation as credible (Antaki, 1994). Participants utilised comparison and contrasting of their behaviour with other clubbers’ in their production of accounts. Contrasting usually took the form of showing how they behaved differently to others (“I wouldn’t have done that”; Extract 3: “but for someone else . . . they could confuse it”). Reference to others’ behaviour was therefore a resource in managing participants’ own moral identities and a tool used in providing a point of reference of questionable behaviour, thereby persuading the audience of their own moral competence.

**Blaming of external sources**

As evident in extract 3, participants assigned blame to external sources in order to account for their sexual behaviour. In this way, participants displaced responsibility for their actions and in so doing made something/someone else answerable. Attributing blame to the situation, alcohol or the “girl throwing themselves to them” (extract 3) is a rhetorical device used by speakers to defend and increase the credibility of their moral position, by constructing a version of ‘what really happened’ that is favourable to them (Abell & Stokoe, 1999). When performing actions such as blaming, people provide ‘factual’ accounts of ‘what really happened’ scripted up to diminish their own responsibility in order to manage what is at stake for them at that moment (Abell & Stokoe, 1999). What is most interesting in the accounts provided by the participants is that they assign blame to the ‘other’ or the ‘other thing’ while at the same time providing accounts that reveal their participation in the behaviour and thus indirectly assume responsibility for the act.

Using Abell and Stokoe’s (1999) understanding of this discursive device, it is important to note that the participants in the interviews spoke from the social category of a grinder and this presented the participants with a dilemma to be managed. By explicitly awarding blame to external sources, the participants ran the risk of their credibility as a grinder being brought into question – they could not appear to know anything about grinding. But at the same time, the participants diminished their
responsibility by distributing either some, or all, of the blame to external sources. This attention to accounting for grinding as a sexual activity demonstrates that the sexual nature of grinding was oriented to as a moral matter. The participants managed their morality while at the same time maintaining their credibility throughout the interviews. Buttny (1993, as cited in Abell & Stokoe, 1999, p. 300) provides the following explanation: “When people are involved in the conversational business of accounting it is important that they present their own actions so as to render them sensible, normal, understandable [and] proper . . . ” in relation to the social category from which they are speaking.

RESULTS SUMMARY

Our study found a pattern of four methods of accounting. We propose that the common sense nature of these arguments renders them invisible, and their very invisibility is what makes them potent. Edwards and Stokoe (2004, p. 8) state that DP enables us to understand the ordinary “accounting practices by which people actually live their lives” (our italics). That these patterns are the means by which young people ‘live their lives’ in explaining, justifying and making sense of their sexual practices is significant, and cannot be overlooked in HIV prevention and safe-sex interventions. Furthermore, the variability of accounts was indicative of dilemmas being attended to. Hepburn and Brown (2001) show how speakers often attend to opposing issues when accounting for chosen actions. Participants displayed attention to managing their moral identities through orientation to resolving various conflicts and requirements (Speer, 2001). Thus, we propose that the morality of sexual practice is a participant’s concern and on a broader level any interventions regarding safe sexual practice need also to engage young people in dialogue regarding moral conflicts and dilemmas they face.

CONCLUSION

Skillful discursive strategies are deployed in negotiating talk around grinding, a phenomenon constructed as sexual. This, and the four identified means of managing morality, display participants’ orientation to sexual activity as a realm of moral order where accountability is required and proffered. Thus we have demonstrated that sexual practice is oriented to as a moral topic. We propose that interventions that focus on the mechanics and technical means of promoting safe sex without also engaging participants in attention to the moral matters at stake is poor practice. To foreclose exploration of issues of morality by foregrounding abstract information on prophylaxis is to disable the very means – talk – that people use to justify and navigate their sexual practices. Furthermore, since the individual-social dichotomy
is drawn upon by participants as a resource for managing morality, this is also flagged as an arena of relevance in sexual practice and interventions. With ongoing concern regarding the intractability of the HIV epidemic in South Africa, we highlight the above findings as crucially relevant. We conclude that there is a critical gap in teaching and interventions around HIV prevention: This gap is the failure to engage youth in dialogue regarding issues of negotiating identity and their moral decision-making.

**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES**

**Carmen Alledahn** undertook her Master’s in research psychology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, she recently completed her Research psychology internship at the Military Psychological Institute and is going on to work at SEAD, a social research and consultancy organisation, in Pretoria.

**Jonelle du Plessis** is 24 years old and holds a Master’s Degree in Research Psychology obtained in 2011 from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. She was a tutor in both the introduction of Psychology for first year students as well as in second year statistics. She finished her Masters Coursework in Clinical Psychology in 2012 and is currently working as an Intern Clinical Psychologist at the Department of Behavioural Medicine. Her main area of interest is based on applying traditional psychoanalytic concepts to contemporary forms of expression (such as body art). Other interests include the concept and role of attachment, transitional objects as well as personality development and pathology.

**Nelisiwe Nkomonde** has a Master’s degree in Research Psychology from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her research interests are in the fields of sexuality/sexual practices and HIV/Aids, masculinity and retention in clinical trials. She is currently working as a Project Coordinator at CAPRISA. CAPRISA is an Aids research organization. She is responsible for coordination CAPRISA 008, an implantation study for Tenefovir gel, a microbicide gel which has been found to reduce women’s chances of contracting HIV by 34%.
Reshoketswe Neo Matlala is currently studying her Master’s in Research Psychology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her interests include risky sexual behaviour, HIV/AIDS, gender relations and race relations.

Tamaryn Jane Nicholson recently completed her Master’s degree in Research Psychology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and is in the initial stages of preparation for her PhD which will begin in early 2013. Her current research is related to social psychology, stigma, HIV policies and gender.

Dumisa Sofika is an assistant researcher at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. His research interests are in youth cultural practices, social living conditions and youth identities.

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