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## Discursive Construction of Sexuality among School Going Adolescents in Kenya

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Adolescents grapple with many social issues as they strive to cope with the physical, social, and emotional changes that they are experiencing. This is not made any easier by the dictates of the social cultural values in the communities they live in. However, due to socio-economic and political changes many of these values are gradually being abandoned as the adolescents negotiate for their space and construct their individualities in ways they so choose. This paper focuses on one aspect of these individualities: adolescent sexuality. The paper argues that language as an element of culture and identity is important in understanding the adolescent's world of sexuality. Through Discourse Analysis particularly van Dijk's framework adopted from "Politics, Ideology and Discourse" this paper explores the discursive strategies in the construction of adolescents' sexuality. Seven strategies are discussed as featuring dominantly in adolescents' discourse on sexuality: disclaimer, authority, categorization, euphemism, metaphors, number game and hyperbole. These strategies are seen as a means by which adolescents naturalize and rationalize their sexual behaviour. It is hoped that these findings will add to the existing body of knowledge on sexuality discourse and inform stakeholders involved in designing youth sexuality programs in Kenya.

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## INTRODUCTION

Adolescents' sexuality has gained a lot of scholarly attention in the recent years (Izugbara, 2005). Generally, human sexuality has been defined as the totality of a person's physical, emotional, and spiritual responses, thoughts, and feelings (Jerrold, et al., 2016). The World Health Organization (WHO) adds to this definition by stating that sexuality includes sexual feelings, thoughts, attractions, preferences and sometimes behaviour (WHO, 2002). From these definitions, it is evident that the concept of sexuality is multi-faceted and probably then cannot be described or understood in a simple straightforward way. Thus, an important question for a linguist would be: how do individuals describe or understand sexuality? This paper is a linguistic exploration of the discursive strategies in the construction of sexuality among adolescents in an attempt to understand their perception of sexuality.

### Adolescents, Sexuality and Language

This study defines an adolescent on the basis of the World Health Organization (WHO) report of 2014, that is, any individual who is aged between 10 (ten) and 19 (nineteen) years. Arguably, adolescence is seen as a stage in an individual's life characterized by specific health and growing desires and truths. It is a period of time where the individuals are developing knowledge and life skills such as how to manage sentiments and relationships (WHO 2011). Of importance to this study is how amidst the changing times, adolescents are able to navigate the period as they seek their sexual identity. According to World Health Organization, (2011), cases of early sexual debut among adolescents went up by more than 45% all over the world. These among other studies in Sub-Saharan Africa have confirmed this increase as well as its effects such as: unwanted pregnancy, abortion, and sexually transmitted infections. This trend implies that young adults are

becoming aware of their sexuality earlier than before and hence the early involvement in sexual activity. This finding resonates with the current situation in Kenya especially among school-going adolescents. For example, according to the Kenya Demographic Survey report, eighteen percent of adolescents who are 15 to 19 years old have been pregnant or are pregnant. Moreover, the (Kenya Statistics, Population Reference Bureau [KNBS], 2011) reports that 13,000 girls drop out of school every year due to pregnancy. As a result, the government loses approximately 60 million Kenyan Shillings annually since it sponsors most of the schools based on the number of students enrolled. In view of this, adolescent sexuality should be considered as a major health and social issue in Kenya where 26 percent of the whole community are adolescents (National Council for Population and Development [NCPD], 2015; 2011).

Weinstein & Rosen (1991) claim that one of the main issues in the growth and identity of adolescents is the construction of sexuality. In their argument, during adolescence, sexual maturity is accompanied by a strong desire to be sexually active. As a result, adolescents spend much of their time engaging in conversations about issues relating to sexuality and sharing ideas-implicit and explicit (Rice, 2001). In all these, language remains a key tool of expression. Indeed, according to a study in Kenya among university students, it was noted that, to succeed in dealing with the AIDS epidemic, stakeholders needed to take into consideration the kind of language that the students use (Ogechi, 2005). In agreeing with that argument Ward contends that the discourses are a form of adolescents' way of constructing and controlling their sexual world (Ward, 2004). Informed by such arguments, this paper moves a step further since much of what has been documented has been on how "others" understand, think, and talk about adolescents leaving out the adolescents. This paper therefore outlines the adolescents' sexuality

discursive voices that may inform why adolescence might be regarded as a special transitory period necessitating singular consideration in terms of guidelines and programs.

**Theory**

This study was guided by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory specifically van Dijk’s (2005) framework adopted from Politics, Ideology and Discourse. Fairclough (2003) notes that CDA is a modern approach in the study of language and discourse. Further Fairclough argues that CDA is viewed as an assessment of how language communities use language. van Dijk (2011) agrees with Fairclough by observing that CDA identifies the linguistic concepts, different genres as well as the social and cultural elements that contribute to the interpretation and understanding of different texts and different types of discourses. The central idea about critical discourse analysis is the fact that language is a social product; that language reveals and at the same time produces the beliefs and values of the community in which it is used (Zhang 2014). The proponents of this theory hold that the main resource of analysis in CDA is the text. In CDA it is argued that the lexical and grammatical characteristics of the text have the responsibility of creating and representing the real and social worlds; and constructing and influencing social relationships (Halliday, 1985).

Because of the broad nature of CDA, scholars like Fairclough (2003) have tried to compartmentalize the various dimensions of the theory into a number of tenets. In the context of this research the axis that views CDA as dealing with social problems was central because the issue that was addressed is a social problem. By focusing on the axis that

discourse performs ideological work, in this study it was considered that to abstain or not to abstain is an ideological issue. Van Dijk (2006) argues that texts are not only used to communicate but are also used to create facts based on the ideology and position of the participant. According to him, then, one CDA axis is identifying discursive strategies that are used to create or maintain ideologies and behaviours in various contexts. This study not only identifies the discursive strategies but also critically analyses them. CDA further investigates and analyses texts to discover the sources of authority, domination, and discrimination and how these sources are initiated, maintained, restructured, and interrupted in social, political, and historical contexts (Van-Dijk, 1993). In the construction of sexuality among the adolescents, which is a social context and one of the tenets of CDA, it was interesting to see how these social factors are manifested.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study utilized qualitative approaches which sought to discover how subjects understand, experience, interpret and construct their social realities. The strength of this approach lies in the fact that it is pragmatic and also grounded in the living experiences of people. Thus, it was the most suitable for realizing the construction of sexuality among adolescents in a dynamic and ever-changing society. The study population was made up of 1,876 form 1 to form 4 adolescents from three secondary schools (a girls’ boarding school, a boys’ boarding school and a mixed day school) in Nakuru County. The sample was made up of 104 adolescent boys and girls who were selected randomly using the random number generation software (see *Table 1* below).

**Table 1: Sample selection**

School Type		Form 1	Form 2	Form 3	Form 4	TOTAL
Only boys	Boarding	10	10	8	8	36
Only girls	Boarding	10	10	8	8	36
Mixed	Day	B	4	4	4	16
		G	4	4	4	16
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>28</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>104</b>

Twelve focus-group discussions were held, four in each school. Each participant was given a

confidential identification code that was used whenever he or she wanted to contribute. The

researcher, rather than develop the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide questions, decided to use a text from one of the major dailies in Kenya reporting on the issue under study. After each focus-group discussion participants were asked to write down on a piece of paper all the terminologies that they had encountered among themselves in relation to sexuality. These were collected by the researcher for further analysis. The data was coded and put into lexical categories. The words were further categorised semantically to allow interpretation and establish the discursive strategies. This was informed by the fact that social relations are encoded and implemented through language.

## FINDINGS

In this section, the paper first gives a short description of the discursive strategies found in the adolescents' construction of sexuality. The paper then moves on to highlight and discuss in particular how these strategies are actualized and used to legitimize adolescents' sexuality behaviour. The study found out that the construction of sexuality among adolescents is governed by seven key strategies as follows:

- The disclaimer strategy where a speaker says or introduces something positive first, and then refutes it via use of words such as *but*. This may be intended to maintain his or her positive position.
- The authority strategy in which the subject refers to people perceived as prominent in society in order to be able to persuade the other subjects to agree with them. The main objective of this strategy may be to justify the matter and give it authenticity.
- The categorization strategy where subjects just as in the wider community are either in groups or are self-identifying as members of a particular group. In terms of this study about sexuality, there was a clear categorization of "we" versus "them" especially about virginity. The main aim of this strategy is to classify or separate the good people from the bad people. Virgins view the non-virgins in a negative manner labelling them immoral and social deviants while reserving the positive or favourable references for themselves.
- The euphemistic strategy is deemed essential in fulfilling some social dictates such as maintaining politeness in communication and face keeping. The adolescents were found to use terms like "*finya* (squeeze), *finywa* (squeezed), *ingia* (enter), *ingiwa* (to be entered), *tafuna* (chew)". This strategy is employed by adolescents to reduce the exasperation of that that cannot be explicitly said. This strategy serves the adolescents with a means and a chance to talk about sensitive issues in the community without feeling embarrassed.
- The metaphorical strategy constructs a language-oriented perspective and thus creates a basic structure in which adolescents' understanding of sexuality and all that revolves around is learnt and given meaning. Adolescents who participated in the research gave metaphorical terms like *transformer*, *pens*, *support documents*, *doors*, *book and constitution*, *chocolate*, *juice*, and *tomato*. From such terms, it is the conclusion of this paper that construction of sexuality among Kenyan adolescents is influenced by the metaphors they use and thus affects their interpretation about sexuality-related issues.
- The number game strategy is usually used for promoting reliability through statistics by representing the level of spread and or participation and involvement in the said issue or event. This strategy, like the authority strategy, is used to justify the matter. This is a handy strategy for adolescents when they want to show that their sexual activity is at the minimum/maximum level of acceptance.
- Hyperbole strategy as a semantic strategy serves the purpose of saving meaning and is generally supported by other strategies such as euphemistic and metaphorical strategies. From the data collected, adolescents seemed to exaggerate a sexual issue by use of phrases such as "*For me I see that it is ridiculous and absurd to be single sometimes coz being single is being selfish and denying yourself life*". This was found in this paper to be a popular strategy in

reference to the outcome, abstaining or losing virginity.

## DISCUSSION ON THE FINDINGS

Van Djik (2005) discusses several ideological strategies that fall under two broad categories: positive and negative representation. This categorization is important in the realization of the basic strategy of the positive representation of 'self' and the negative representation of 'others' by the adolescents. A positive representation as van Djik describes is an ideological event that is used to portray oneself 'better' than others. A negative-other representation on the other hand, portrays the others as inferior or weak. Interestingly, it was found that this strategy is double edged where on one hand, adolescents would portray themselves as superior simply because they have been sexually active while those who were inactive were seen to be 'laggards' and on the other hand the 'laggards' would view themselves as 'good' and the sexually active as 'bad' ones. This 'we' versus 'they' was evident in the construction of sexuality among the adolescents. This paper argues that this negative-other representation is the basis of these seven discursive strategies.

### Disclaimer Strategy

This strategy defines the way in which the speaker says or introduces a positive object or remark first, and then refutes it by use of words such as *but*, *though*, *however* as stated by Van Djik (2006) and Van Leeuwen (2007). The purpose of such language use is to maintain the subject's view as noted by van Djik (2006). The subject uses this strategy as a positive balance of personal legitimacy and the negative impact of others. In the study of adolescents' discussions about sexuality, this strategy emerged clearly as can be seen from the excerpt below.

*Mwenyewe sina lolote baya kwa mavajo lakini jo si ni ushamba. (Personally, I do not have anything against virgins **but** it's so backward).*

In excerpt above, the participant first indicates that he has nothing or any negative feelings about those who are virgins. This is a positive expression that performs the role of face keeping. However, immediately after the positive statement, the

speaker adds a remark that contains a negative connotation with regards to virginity, that is, through the use of *but*: *but it is so backward!* The term backward is used in reference to lack of knowledge on something. Through these words, the speaker cleverly disclaims his assertion that he has got nothing against virgins. The participant is amplifying the negative side and thus for the speaker it not a good thing to be a virgin. This is the sole reason why the participants portray virginity as an issue that is outdated and anyone who is a virgin is backward. Analytically, these are two opposing statements and thus the disclaimer strategy is evident as supported in the excerpt below.

*Kitu iko hii kitu enyewe ni opportunity imejileta hii ndiyo **opportunity we ukiiget nice for you. Yaani ukijikuta umejikuta mtu amekuletea. Siku hizi msee aweza kuwa very appealing, attractive na kadhalika, **but** kama hajafinya/hajaingiwa.... that attractiveness is of no use and value. (What there is, this thing is an opportunity that has presented itself. This is an opportunity that if you get **nice for you. That is when you find someone just brought it to and for you. Nowadays one may be very appealing, attractive, and so on, **but** if he has not had it/or she has not given it ...that attractiveness is of no use and value.)*****

In the above excerpt, there is the English word 'but'. The speaker acknowledges that whoever is being referred to is attractive and that is positive and important among the adolescents. Despite the positive reference, the speaker disclaims with a negative situation where the participant degrades and looks down on the virgins claiming that their beauty is worthless and of no value if they have not had any sexual encounter. This strategy accentuates the urgency frame where the adolescents feel it is better to lose virginity and retain the perception of being attractive than to be looked down upon.

### Authority Strategy

Most speakers mention and refer to authority to support their claims. Usually, authorities referred to are organizations or persons with special status in society, or who are professionals or moral leaders (Creswell & Fairclough 2012). Within the context of this paper and in agreement with views of

Creswell and Fairclough the paper postulate that international organizations (such as the United Nations), academicians, politicians, journalists, the church, or the courts of justice often are seen to be a symbol of authority. As a result, and consequently then, speakers depending on their affiliations and objectives, customarily refer to different authorities as validation for engaging in certain activities or holding certain values, beliefs, and attitudes. Of importance in this strategy is the fact that the authority must be relatively highly regarded and recognized in the community.

In the construction of sexuality among the adolescents, it was noted that there was reference to personal authority. This authority according to Van Leeuwen (2007) is ascribed to someone due to their status or position of responsibility at the relevant institution. In employing the authority strategy therefore, there is a conscious and deliberate selection of statements in which the persons being referred to have some kind of ascribed authority. This was evident in the discussions with the adolescents as can be seen in the excerpt below:

*There is nothing wrong with girls having boyfriends. After all is it not true that all **First Ladies** are women to **husbands** who are **Presidents**? In fact, all girls should have maboyfies (boyfriends). Until I had a boyfriend, my friends used to tease me for not having one.*

From the above excerpt the reference and use of 'First Ladies' underscores the authority bestowed on the wife of a head of state, in this case the president. Due to the authority ascribed to the status of the First Lady, she becomes some sort of an icon to many and as such the adolescents use her position to justify their engagement in sexual relations. Furthermore, they seem to argue that we would not have First Ladies (women) if there was no president (the man) because the first lady derives her authority from the fact that she had a relationship and got married to the president or a man who became president. Both the president and the first lady have authority and power and as a result, have great influence over others. In addition, the speaker in this quotation has also used the number strategy by stating that **all** girls should have boyfriends. By introducing this strategy into the authority strategy, the adolescents are qualifying

their statements and emphasizing the importance of being in a sexual relationship. This paper suggests that the efficiency of the authority strategy in the construction of adolescent sexuality is increasingly influenced by the authority of prominent people where the characters follow and copy (albeit ignorantly at times) the examples of such people or those who have a say in the community. The president and first lady are expected to be persons who are to be emulated just like parliamentarians, governors, and other prominent community members.

### Characterization Strategy

The characterization strategy in a communication context is clear where others in the communication are being referred to in the issue under discussion. Characterization as discussed by Bowker & Star (2000), is a social construct that puts in the same category people, things or behaviour considered to have similar characteristics. These categories play an important role in the development and sustainability of social relationships. According to Hannan, Polos, and Carroll (2007) in their research on sales institutions, such categories emerge and memberships change depending on expectations and time transitions along with existing conditions. This study found that adolescents characterize and categorize themselves and their colleagues as competing groups based on their attitudes and beliefs.

There are specific words that adolescents in this study used that indicated clear categorization between themselves and others. For example, derogatory words of disrespect for non-virgins (*fisi-hyena*, *poko*-whore, used papers, terraces etc.) were common. Such words make clear the categorization of "we" and "them" in which the virgins refer to themselves as *maholy*-holy ones, *pasta*-pastor, *bishop*, *mtakatifu*-Saint, *Hail Holy Mary mother of God* while referring to the non-virgins as "*fisi-hyena*, *poko*-whore etc. This study suggests that without proper understanding of how this categorization of "we" versus "them" emerges, is perpetuated and gains significance amongst adolescents, it will be impossible to understand the world of adolescents' sexuality and how their own construction of sexuality informs and influences their actions.

The 'we' and 'they' categorization is the main contribution of this strategy. It is important to note that the age of adolescents is also an important stage where young people establish their identities with regard to many social issues, sexuality and relationships included. The virgins (we) by insisting on their virtues and values see and categorize the non-virgins (they) as moral deviants who should not be emulated by the community. However, those who have lost their virginity are identifying themselves as skilled (*skilled, experts, civilized, up to date* etc.) and in doing so emphasize the qualities and significance of their life- skills and thus portray the virgins as a disadvantaged lot without any life skills, knowledge and hence are naïve, outdated and backward. It is in such categorization that heated debates emerge with each group trying to defend its position. In addition, through this type of categorization, the understanding and comprehension of the mental imagery about sexuality among the adolescents is brought to the fore.

### The Euphemistic Strategy

Gomaa & Shi, (2012) observe that euphemism is a semantic strategy aimed at neutralizing the severity/obscenity of lexical words, avoiding negative feelings or emotions about an issue either due to taboo or sensitivity of the issue being mentioned. The use of euphemism is mostly realized as the choice of a word or phrase that is most widely accepted in place of a word or phrase that is considered to be disgusting or uncomfortable by the participants in a discourse (Gomaa & Shi, 2012). While it has been argued that euphemism is an integral part of language rooted in the daily use (Warren, 1991), it is also evident that the need for euphemism use is based on social and emotional impetus for achieving dialogue on sensitive issues and sexuality is one of them.

In this study it was found that adolescents' discursive construction of sexuality was largely euphemistic. This is drawn from the lexical terms referring to body parts, beauty and handsomeness, virginity to the state of not being a virgin. This euphemistic strategy serves the goal of politeness and sensitivity to societal norms on communication. Van Dijk (2011) argues that, the euphemistic strategy is a clear and a focused

politeness and ideological strategy that reduces social disgrace in order to keep face. This in turn as found out in this study gives an avenue to communicate sensitive issues in an easier way and protect the adolescents from social retribution due to their sexual debuts. This is achieved through the use of moderate words and phrases such as *finya* (*squeeze*), *kula* (*eat*), *finywa* (*squeezed*), *ingia* (*enter*), *ingiwa* (*to be entered*), *tafunwa* (*chew*) *tafunwa* (*to be chewed*).

Sexuality among adolescents is one of the areas where the use of euphemisms is deeply rooted as illustrated in this study. This reality is based on the needs of adolescents to identify themselves as a distinct group and construct their sexuality and the reality thereof through. From the euphemistic terms, it was clear that different areas as well as different speakers will have cultural, ideological, and traditional differences as was obvious differences in euphemistic terms among adolescents based on gender. Boys have their own euphemisms which are active (*kula* (*eat*), *finya* (*squeeze*), *ingia* (*enter*), *chapa miti*) while girls have their own that are largely passive (*kuliwa* (*to be eaten*), *kutafunwa* (*to be chewed*), *kuingiwa* (*to be entered*), *kuchapwa miti*).

The lexical and euphemistic terms used by adolescents suggests a language that is very dynamic. It emerged that there is lexical substitution a subtle characteristic of euphemism. Additionally, adolescents have positive and negative euphemisms. Some of the euphemisms were found to possess the quality of duality. This paper by coming to such conclusions, establishes that socially, issues around sexuality are shrouded in mystery and are considered taboo and thus the adolescents must create their specific way of talking about them. In order to accomplish this, they use euphemistic terms with the sole aim of coping with the need and a desire to avoid words that can affect social demands and compromise the terms of modest conversations. Based on these findings, this study suggests that the main purpose of this strategy in the construction of sexuality among adolescents is to achieve politeness. As noted by politeness scholars (Eelen, 2001; Watts, 2003; Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003), politeness has an important role in human communication. The use of the euphemistic terms further serves the purpose of face

keeping and enhancing social esteem of the adolescents.

### Metaphorical Strategy

Metaphorical use is the reality of social life especially among young people. Essentially, it is a linguistic approach that promotes unrelated relationships between objects, people, and situations in life (Underhill, 2010). Lakoff and Turner (1989) state that metaphor is a statement of defining a situation / object in relation to its characteristics and in a way that is encrypted. It assists a language user to understand something / one thing on the basis of something else. It reflects the ability of the language as a social construct to construct, reconstruct and create new meanings (Cameron, 2010). This study found that the construction of sexuality among adolescents is greatly influenced by the metaphors they use and thus affects their decisions about sexuality. In the analysis of the lexical items adolescents use in the construction of sexuality among themselves, the metaphorical strategy comes out quite strongly. For instance, sexual intercourse among adolescents is metaphorically represented by a wide range of metaphorical objects and their use.

Metaphorical terms like *katiba* (constitution), transformer, support documents, doors, and *Fimbo ya Nyayo* (Kenya's second president's rod symbolizing his power and authority), were common among adolescents in referring to their genital parts. These words indicate that the adolescents understand and construct their sexual body parts and the whole issue of sexuality on the basis of an object, its use and its benefits rather than other features such as beauty. These metaphors indicate the adolescents' emphasis on mechanics and function of the specific object. This may explain the origin of objectification where adolescents construct their sexual organs as an object to be used. In a way, the adolescent thus justifies his or her sexual activity. Lexical items like "transformer", "pistol", *kalamu* (pen) emphasize the importance of the device's use. These objects carry with them specific characteristics: qualities that make it clear the gender differences between adolescents and identifying who has authority over who and promoting sexual activity. The use of the metaphorical terms in construction of sexuality

positions the boy as the dominant and active participant. The girl is a passive participant to be dominated and conquered by the boy. This has a direct link on how boys treat girls and may contribute to sexual violence.

The girl by use of metaphorical terms like "soft pillow", *nyanya* (a tomato- that creates a superficially attractive appearance or impression), portrays the girl as an object solely in existence for the benefit of the boy. This is manifested by the use of the food metaphor. Girls are foods to be devoured or eaten by boys. For adolescent boys, their sexual organ is metaphorically represented by devices (e.g., pistol, transformer) that have great potential, are lethal and very powerful. This is equated to the perpetuation of male domination over women. Culturally, boys are encouraged to be the initiators, the hunters or the victors, a trend that even manifests itself in other words such as *striker* and *eaters*. In the food metaphor, food is used to represent the act of intercourse through the "eat" word. This act of eating a meal creates a sense of pleasure. All referred to foods symbolize sensuality and desire (*chocolate, juice, and tomato*); the temptation and arousal that are attained completely in eating.

This paper argues that for adolescents, food is associated with sexual intercourse, where food and sex are 'essential' commodities for life. The cue of taste and touch is a pointer to the construction of sexuality. From this study adolescents linguistically equate food to sex where food products are compared to body parts as well as indicators of need, desires, thirst, and hunger for sexual intercourse. Based on the study, adolescents on the basis of the imagery of this food metaphor sex, is a matter that is essentially worthwhile, pleasurable, and fun to them. For this reason, it is understandable why adolescents are regarded as risk takers. They focus more on the pleasures and sexual pleasures de-emphasize the consequences of their sexual activity. This food metaphor helps the adolescents to naturalize and justify their sexual escapades. (*I am enjoying my banana, I am eating my candy, the melon was so ripe, and I had to consume it*).

The construction of sexuality as well as sexual intercourse is also commonly supported by the door metaphor. A door is an essential key to access and



the act of opening and closing the door is a strategy for the adolescents to naturalize their sexual behaviour, to portray such behaviour as an ordinary and daily activity, especially the main issue of losing one's virginity. The metaphorical strategy has shown how adolescents as a specific group in the society use language contextually to construct their sexuality. This paper found out that through metaphors, adolescents creatively use language to construct and communicate their sexuality world as an identical group in society.

### Number Game Strategy

According to the number game strategy, substantial evidence serves to promote reliability of whatever issue under discussion or consideration. Promotion of reliability is through statistics or the use of numbers and percentages that indicate objectivity (Creswell, 2014). Further, Creswell notes that numbers and statistics are considered as more obvious ways of persuasion towards the merits of an issue. In adolescents' construction of sexuality in this research, it was found that adolescents use this strategy by referring to real numbers and percentages as well as ambiguous and or general statistics as appears in these excerpts:

*Si hali ya kujivunia kuwa bikira. Singependa. Huna lolote linalokujumuisha na wenzako.... wanafunzi wa umri wako, **asilimia 90 na kwenda juu**, wakati wa sasa.....(It is not anything to be proud of to be a virgin. You have got nothing that unites you to your friends.....students of your age, **90%** and above for now.....)*

In terms of ambiguous or generalized statistics:

According to how the situation is to get a virgin girl is impossible. Today **everyone** is doing it. It is the in-thing.)

*In my opinion it is so normal with **all** the high school students. **All** are spoilt and you see boys are demanding it very much.*

From the above excerpts, it is apparent that the adolescents are using the Number game strategy to normalize their views on sexuality. Since the society dictates when and who should be sexually active and worldwide studies have shown that adolescents

are becoming sexually active at an early age (WHO, 2002, 2014), the subjects use these numbers as evidence to support their ideas on sexuality. Through this strategy there's clear manipulation by boys since it is easy for adolescents to visualize, picture and believe that everyone is sexually active and that it is considered very normal. Those who are not in that group are regarded as deviating from the norm. 90 percent is highly believable and when referred to, there is truth and objectivity and thus normalizes and naturalizes early sexual debut among the adolescents. By using ambiguous statistics or generalized statistics, adolescents are being cunning as well as manipulative. They exploit the numbers in a way that enables them to construct their sexuality acts and deeds as normal and within acceptable standards of behaviour. Linguistically the generalized statistics is a means of evading responsibility and the adolescents could be well aware of this. This explains why it is called a number-game-strategy- one can play the numbers to their own advantage. In this study, for example, when adolescents say "everyone" is not clear whom they are referring to as *everyone*. It means a great number but at the same time it is a pronoun that expresses indefiniteness. In this scenario, this strategy meets the desires of the adolescents of not wanting to be held responsible, to be seen like everyone in the adolescents' stage is in it and thus it is justifiably right to be sexually active.

### Hyperbole Strategy

Hyperbole is a semantic strategy that is generally used to amplify meaning. Hyperbolic expressions come in form of exaggerated statements that are not usually meant to be taken literally, but rather are used for emphasis (Norrick, 2004). This study reveals that adolescents use specific metaphors that exaggerate or 'blow out of proportion' various aspects relating to their sexuality. According to this strategy and based on adolescents' construction of sexuality, positive self-representation and negative other-representation is evident thereby reinforcing the 'we' versus 'them' ideology. According to Van Leeuwen (2007), this 'we' versus 'them' occurs on the basis of authority, moral evaluation, and validation. Using authority as a hyperbole strategy (e.g., the use of the terms first ladies, presidents) in this study, adolescents are able to justify their

actions through referring to popular people who have great influence in the community.

*For me I see that it is ridiculous and absurd to be single sometimes coz being single is being selfish and denying yourself life and therefore not cool. One must experience and taste love. There is nothing wrong in girls having boyfriends. After all is it not true that all First Ladies are wives to husbands who are Presidents?*

In the above excerpt the hyperbole strategy is evident where the participant not only says that being single is ridiculous and absurd but also brings in the authority strategy of referring to first ladies and presidents. Ridiculous and absurdity are words that are used by the adolescents to exaggerate the incongruity of abstinence or 'being single'. Referring to the state of being single in such a manner is blowing it out of proportion. They seem to equate it to a disaster. With such hyperbolic expressions the adolescents are determined to negotiate for their space and stamp their importance in society, justifying their sexual behaviour and relieving themselves from blame for their actions.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the functionality of the discursive strategies in the construction of sexuality among adolescents exposes the reality of the sexual world of the adolescents. To justify their actions and sexual behaviour adolescents employ various discursive strategies that allow their sexuality as well as sexual behaviour to be viewed as a common issue that is central in their identity and their growth as normal human beings. Of importance also is the fact that Kenya being a multilingual society, how the adolescents' code mixed and code switched is an indicator of language choice and use in Kenya. Kiswahili and Sheng found its way in the adolescents' discourses. Consequently, this study suggests that adolescents' language is a rich linguistic resource that once researched upon can inform necessary policies and strategies to deal with not only sexuality related health issues among adolescents but also on language policies in Kenya.

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