

Defining terms used by NFI 2003

Gender

There are some basic biological differences between female and male bodies, linked to their different roles in reproduction. But beyond these differences, many societies define different roles, rights and responsibilities for women and men. “Gender” is the term used to refer to these socially defined differences between men and women.

Gender differences are based on widely shared beliefs and norms within a society or culture about male and female characteristics and capacities. These beliefs and norms about gender usually create inequality between men and women. In most societies, men have more political, economic, and social power than women. Such gender inequalities have a significant impact on women and men’s sexual health.

Gendered framework

The word *gender* is a classifying noun and but often when the term gender is used, it is focused on women, where men are absent as a gender in themselves. The author has used the term *gendered* as an adjective to describe a state. In South Asia where there is often fairly strict social policing of gender(ed) boundaries, and where the primary (and visible) framework of male-to-male sexual behaviours is constructed not around sexual orientation, but around gender(ed) identities, the term *gendered framework* is used as a short-hand description of this state of affairs, i.e. males/men who identified as *kothis* do not perceive themselves as males, but as “not-males” or feminised males.

Hierarchical and oppositional framework

NFI uses this phrase in the specific context of gender(ed) relationships between male and female, or masculinity and femininity, where these genders and their qualities are seen as a hierarchical and in opposition to each other. In other words, maleness is superior to femaleness and in opposition to it.

Homosocial and homoaffectionalist cultures

In South Asian countries, gender segregation of social spaces is a strong form of social policing of gender relationships. Primary relations are between the same gender (homosocial). Homoaffectionalism in the sense that the term is used in this text means social acceptance of the public display of male-to-male or female-to-female affection. For example, it is common in Bangladesh to see two males holding hands or arms wrapped around each other as they walk. Often male friends will also share beds when sleeping, wrapping themselves around each other. (See Hardman: 1993; Also Khan: 1996, where he points out that the boundary between homoaffectionalism and homosexual behaviours is very “thin” particularly in shared spaces and “under the blanket.”)

Hijra

A self-identified term used by males who define themselves as “not men/not women” but as a “third gender.” *Hijras* cross-dress publicly and privately and are a part of a social, religious, and cultural community. Ritual castration may be part of the *hijra* identity, but not all *hijras* are castrated. Sex with men is common. They also have their own language, known as *ulti*.

Kothi

A self-identifying label for those males who feminise their behaviours (either to attract “manly” male sexual partners and/or as part of their own gender construction and usually in specific situations and contexts), and who state that they prefer to be sexually penetrated anally and/or orally. *Kothi* behaviours have a highly performative quality in social spaces. Self-identified *kothis* use this term for males who are sexually penetrated, even when their behaviour is not feminised. This is the primary and most visible framework of MSM behaviours. *Kothis* state that they do not have sex with other *kothis*; however, they may also be married to women.

In Pakistan, the equivalent term is *zenana*, while in Nepal it is *meti*. In Bangladesh and India the term *kothi* is used.

Masculinities

Masculinity is interpreted as the predominant and “hegemonic” framework, which defines how a man should behave and act personally, sexually, socially, and culturally. However, it is also recognised that there are different constructions of masculinity that vary across cultures, age groups, sexual orientations, sexual preferences, actual behaviours, gender identifications, economic classes, and religions, and thus we should speak of masculinities.

MSM

This is usually an acronym for Men Who Have Sex with Men. However, the term *men* can be problematic within the context of different cultural definitions of Man, Manliness, and Manhood. In the context of NFI we will be using *MSM* to mean Males Who Have Sex with Males.

It should also be recognised that ‘MSM’ is a behavioural term and does not reflect a sexual identity. Within the use of the term ‘MSM’ and male-male sexual behaviours, there are many frameworks of ‘MSM’, from self-identified males with gender or sexual orientation, to those who anally penetrated other males as a masculine behaviour, to those who are situationally involved in male-to-male sex.

Within the framework of male-to-male sex, there are a range of masculinities, along with diverse sexual and gender identities, communities, networks, and collectivities, as well as just behaviours without any sense of affiliation to an identity or community. This statement addresses the concerns of all these diversities within the framework of *males who have sex with males*.

Panthe

A *kothi* label for any “manly male.” Male-to-male sexual behaviours are usually highly gendered in terms of sexual roles. Most male-to-male sex in South Asia appears to follow this pattern, where a *kothi* is not defined as a man, thus enabling the penetrating partner to still see himself as manly. A *panthe* is by definition a man who penetrates, whether it is a woman and/or another male. *Panthes* may also be married to women. Their occupations vary across the social class spectrum from rickshaw drivers to businessmen.

In Pakistan and many areas in northern India, the term *giryā* is used, while in Nepal, the term *ta* is used. In Bangladesh and the rest of India, the term *panthe* is used.

Parik

A *kothi* label for the “husband” of a *kothi*. The *parik* may also be married to a woman and have sex with other women as well as males. Note that the use of the term *parik* in Calcutta to mean any “real man”.

Sex

The word sex is used both in its biological sense, that is the “sex of a person”, i.e. male or female, as well as a term reflecting an action, i.e. “to do sex” or “to have sex”. However we also need to understand cultural definitions based on the meanings and significances that sex has which are socially constructed, and often distinguishes between sex for reproduction and sex for fun or pleasure, where in the latter case, the term *maasti* is often used, meaning mischief.

Sexual health

Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social wellbeing related to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.

World Health Organisation, draft working definition, October 2002

Sexualities

“Sexuality” refers to all aspects of people’s sexual lives: their sexual **desires**, their sexual **behaviours** and their sexual **identities**. It is important to focus on sexuality in HIV prevention work because it is important to understand people’s risk behaviours in the context of their sexual desires and sexual identities.

However, contemporary researchers have been discussing the concept of a range of sexualities, expressing the enormous diversity of cultural interpretations, meanings and significance placed upon sexuality.

Social constructionism

The theory, which underlies this study, is based on the principle of social constructionism, which holds that masculinities, sexualities, and sexual behaviours (if not sexual desires themselves) are socially constructed through social and sexual scripting processes.

Transgender

Broadly speaking, transgender people are individuals whose gender expression and/or gender identity differs from conventional expectations based on the physical sex they were born into. The word transgender is an umbrella term which is often used to describe a wide range of identities and experiences, including: female-to-male and male-to-female sexual reassigned persons, cross-dressers, drag queens, drag kings, gender queers, and many more. [In the Asia and Pacific region this would include *hijras*, some *kothis*, *zenanas* and *metis*, along with, perhaps, *kathoey*, *waria*, *bakla*, *fa’fa’finis*, etc.] Because transgender is an umbrella term, it is often thought to be an imprecise term that does not adequately describe the particulars of specific identities and experiences. (For example, the identity/experience of a post-operative FTM transsexual will probably be very different from that of a female-identified drag king who performs on weekends, but both are often lumped together under the term “transgender.”)

web.mit.edu/hudson/www/terminology.html, accessed 14/9/06

Vulnerability

The idea of **vulnerability** is useful in helping us to understand why some people in some places (at some times) are more likely to get infected with HIV than others. We can identify **factors of vulnerability** that influence:

- People's **exposure** to the risk of HIV infection;
- The **choices** that are available to people to deal with that risk;
- The **abilities** that people have to make safe choices; and
- People's **desire** to use their abilities to make these choices