

Advocacy, policy and support on male sexualities

Working with MSM – a socio-cultural perspective



**First National Consultation Meeting on MSM, HIV and Sexual Health
Negombo, Sri Lanka
18th – 21st November, 2009**

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 South Asia,

NFI uses MSM to mean *Males Who Have Sex with Males*.

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What is sex?

People will define sexual activity according to the meaning and significance they give to it. Further social values will also be relevant.

For many sexual intercourse means only vaginal sex. Anything else, such as oral sex, anal sex, or thigh sex will not be significant or meaningful enough to be defined as sex!



Example

In some parts of South Asia, husbands define sex with their wives as DUTY

While wives define sex with their husbands as WORK

While non-vaginal sex is defined as PLAY/MISCHIEF

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The same issues of definition, context, meaning and significance can be said for:

**Gender
Masculinity and Femininity
Sexuality**

To a great extent gender, masculinity, and sexuality are framed by performance.



**We need to think in pluralities:
Gender (s) variance, masculinities, femininities, sexualities**

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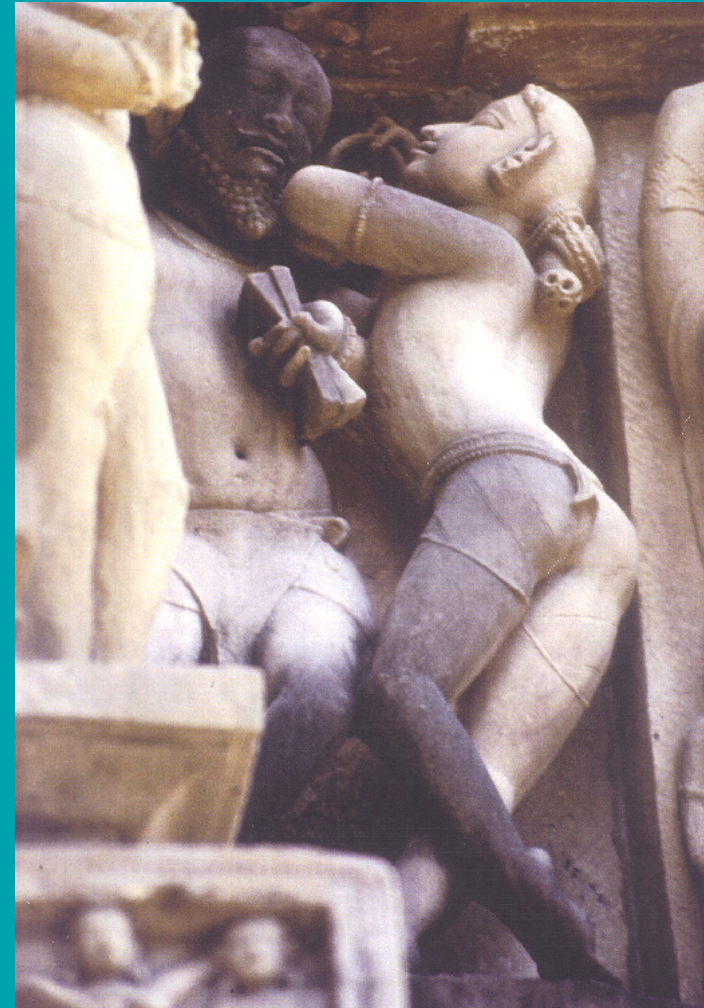
Contexts

Religions:

Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity

Colonialism, conflict

Socio-cultural value systems that involve compulsory marriage, adulthood defined by social obligations, shame instead of guilt, gender segregation, male bonding, male honour,



Religious belief, denial, ignorance, illegality, myths, fears, violence, abuse, exclusion, and invisibility create a discourse that denies much of male-to-male sexual behaviours in society.

At the same time, current discourses on sexual identity, sexual orientation, and “sexual minorities”, also increases the invisibility of much male-to-male sex.

The problem with naming!

First gay 'marriage' in Pakistan...

A gay couple have become the first to get "married" in Pakistan, according to reports from the region. Witnesses said a 42-year-old Afghan refugee held a marriage ceremony with a local tribesman of 16 in the remote Khyber region bordering Afghanistan.....

BBC news 5 October 2005

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A binary world

Mind

Body

Man

Woman

Male

Female

Masculine

Feminine

Young

Old

Heterosexual

Homosexual

Straight

Gay

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A trinary world

South Asia

Man

Not-man

Woman

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Identities or behaviour?



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Many males from the general male population will also access feminised-identified males or “beardless boys” for anal/oral sex . These males do not see themselves as “homosexuals”, or even their behaviour as “homosexual”, since they take on the “manly” penetrating role in male to male sex. Nor do their partners see themselves as homosexuals because they either see themselves as “not men”, or they are involved in play - not sex.



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Toxic masculinity and genderphobia

A penetrative sexuality along with a gendered construction of male-male sex roles leading to high levels of discrimination, abuse, violence and rape of feminised males and boys.



In a gendered framework of male-to-male sex, the issue of feminisation, as much as that of sexual receptivity practice, itself leads to violence, abuse and harassment.

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Key issues

- Sexual diversity and polymorphous sexual behaviours
- A primary gendered framework of male-to-male sexual behaviours
- Many 'MSM' perceive themselves as a part of a 'real man'/'not-man' binary
- Marriage as socially compulsory
- Early sexual debut often arising from gendered performativity
- Gender segregation and social control of females
- Often male-to-male sex perceived within a context of play - not sex

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Addressing the challenge

- Review, amendment, or repeal of prohibitive and discriminatory laws
- Sensitisation of law enforcement agencies, the judiciary and the legal community
- Male-on-male rape a specific offence
- Public awareness and education of differing sexualities
- A rights-based approach to sexual health and well-being
- Increasing understanding and education of genders, masculinities, femininities and sexualities
- Informed sex and sexualities education
- Community development and mobilising
- Access to social justice and equity
- Social inclusion

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Thank you