

Sexuality

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Sexuality can bring misery through sexual violence, HIV/AIDS, maternal mortality, or marginalisation of those who break the rules, such as non-macho men, single women, sex workers, people with same-sex sexualities, and transgender people. Sexuality can also bring joy, affirmation, intimacy and well-being. How can we make possible more joy and less misery? This *In Brief* hopes to inspire thinking on this question – with an overview and recommendations on gender, sexuality and sexual rights, an article on Girl Power Initiative’s sexuality education programme in Nigeria, and a piece on the *Travesti* Museum promoting transgender rights in Peru.

Gender, sexuality and sexual rights: an overview

SUSIE JOLLY, *BRIDGE*, & PINAR ILKKARACAN, *Women for Women’s Human Rights*

‘EVERYONE...WARNED ME...that the males would chase me with great gusto. The onus was therefore upon me to preserve men’s morality. The teachers were more hilarious. They showed us scary movies of sexually transmitted infections: gaping vaginas, infested with sores, looking terribly unlike what I was familiar with. How this “transformation” occurred we were not told. The underlying message was virginity, virginity, virginity; not for myself, but for the husband who would love me forever and for my parents – read my father – who would make so much money out of the mythical groom.’

Everjoice Win, 2004, p.13

Why are gender and sexuality important for policymakers, practitioners and activists? Sexuality and gender can combine to make a huge difference in people’s lives – between well-being and ill-being, and sometimes between life and death.

Ideologies claiming that women should be pure and chaste, and virgins until marriage, can lead to female genital mutilation, honour killings, and restrictions on women’s mobility and economic or political participation. Ideas that men should be ‘macho’ can mean that sexual violence by men is expected instead of condemned. Gender inequalities and taboos around sexuality can exacerbate the spread of

HIV/AIDS. And 68,000 women still die each year from illegal abortions (World Health Organization 2005). In many places, to be considered a 'proper man' or 'proper woman', you need to act one hundred per cent heterosexual, and stay in line with gender stereotypes. Thus being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender can result in marginalisation or violence (Samelius and Wagberg 2005).

But just as sexuality has repercussions related to poverty, marginalisation and death, it can instead lead to enjoyment, fulfilment, and well-being and can enhance human relations with shared intimacy or pleasure. In fact, sex can be a place where women escape the pressures of reputation to satisfy their desires to the full, where men let themselves enjoy being vulnerable, where transgender people affirm their sense of self with lovers who see them as they wish to be seen.

How can the dominant gender ideologies around sexuality be challenged? How can fulfilment, well-being and pleasure become more possible for all? One answer is sexual rights. Sexual rights is a promising framework because it already has some clout, emerging from years of mobilisation by rights activists in the South and North (women; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people; people living with HIV/AIDS; and sex workers). Furthermore, a sexual rights framework can help identify the links between different sexuality issues, and ground a broad and diverse alliance for change. Sexual rights can include rights both to be free of violence and coercion around sexuality, and also to explore and pursue pleasures, desires and fulfilment.

Landmark agreements on human rights related to sexuality have been reached in the United Nations in Vienna, Cairo, and Beijing in the 1990s, and work on this issue has continued since within various United Nations bodies. Today's resurgence of religious fundamentalisms, whether Christian, Muslim, or Hindu, makes work on sexual rights more difficult. And political battles continue to rage over

World Health Organization Working Definitions

There are many diverse understandings of sexuality and sexual rights (see the *Supporting Resources Collection* for more on this, details on back page of this bulletin). In 2002, the World Health Organization convened a regionally diverse group of experts to come up with working definitions. The results are below.

Sexuality

'Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors.'

Sexual Rights

'Sexual rights embrace human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international human rights documents

and other consensus statements. They include the right of all persons, free of coercion, discrimination and violence, to:

- the highest attainable standard of sexual health, including access to sexual and reproductive health care services;
- seek, receive and impart information related to sexuality;
- sexuality education;
- respect for bodily integrity;
- choose their partner;
- decide to be sexually active or not;
- consensual sexual relations;
- consensual marriage;
- decide whether or not, and when, to have children; and
- pursue a satisfying, safe and pleasurable sexual life.

The responsible exercise of human rights requires that all persons respect the rights of others.'

World Health Organization, 2004, Working Definitions

issues ranging from abortion to abstinence to sex work. At the same time, progressive movements are organising for change.

Several exciting initiatives support sexual rights for women – such as human rights trainings in Turkey which include a module on 'sexual pleasure as a women's human right', organising to support single women 'outside the safety net of marriage' in India, tackling female genital mutilation through the promotion of pleasure in Kenya, or the Girl Power Initiative in Nigeria featured below. Creative work is also taking place with men as partners of women, as well as explorations of the sexual rights of men themselves. And transgender people are mobilising, as illustrated by the Travesti Museum in Peru presented in this bulletin.

New alliances are being forged that take an integrated approach to sexuality, such as the Coalition for Sexual and Bodily Rights in Muslim Societies, founded in 2001, made up of more than 60 non-governmental organisation (NGO) activists

and academics from the Middle East, North Africa and South and Southeast Asia, including those working on women's rights, sexuality education, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues, HIV/AIDS, and sexual and reproductive health. The network has enabled people to look beyond their own issue and see the interconnections with other themes, and move towards building a common movement for sexual rights.

Recommendations

International institutions, governments, NGOs, development agencies, the women's movement, human rights activists and others all have a vital role to play in contributing to greater well-being by supporting sexual rights in the following ways:

Recognise the importance of sexuality

- Recognise the importance of sexuality and sexual rights in people's lives.
- Recognise that sexuality is more than a health and violence issue. Identify the

interconnections with well-being and ill-being, wealth and poverty, integration and marginalisation, and the significance of sexuality in political struggles.

Take an inclusive, gendered and positive approach to sexuality

- Recognise the links between different sexuality issues. Support integrated approaches to sexuality which challenge gender, race, class and other structures of power.
- Build strength for inclusive sexual rights movements, through supporting alliances between different groups and at the same time challenging the gender and other inequalities within and between these groups.
- Take an inclusive and gendered approach to sexual rights open to all – women who may be denied their rights by gender inequality, transgender whose very existence may be ignored, and straight men who may be assumed not to need these rights as they are perceived to already have it all.
- Go beyond rights to be free from violence, to support positive rights and rights to pleasure as well.
- Draw inspiration from and connect with the exciting initiatives already happening!

This article summarises the *Overview Report* on 'Gender, Sexuality and Sexual Rights' (see back page of this bulletin for full details).

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Beijing Platform for Action Paragraph 96

'The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. Equal relationships between women and men in matters of sexual relations and reproduction, including full respect for the integrity of the person, require mutual respect, consent and shared responsibility for sexual behaviour and its consequences.'

The Beijing Platform for Action was adopted at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995.

Find the full text at:

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>

'I BELIEVE I AM the owner of my body, I am in control and should take all the decisions.'

Pearl Osakue, 23-year-old female sociologist and GPI graduate

'... in GPI I [learnt] that I had rights ... nobody deserves to be raped, women and men are equal, and nobody is inferior to another. I also learnt to have confidence in myself. GPI is a place where you can air your opinion, and someone will listen and be ready to answer your questions ...'

Merylyn Okwechime, GPI graduate

In Nigeria today there are lots of pressures on girls to have sex – from their boyfriends, their peers, or in exchange for goods they need. Yet there is also huge pressure not to have sex – from parents eager for girls to remain virgins until marriage, from the Churches, from teachers, and from the abstinence programmes. The United States is promoting abstinence-only education through their HIV/AIDS assistance, and the resurgence of conservative Christian doctrines in parts of Africa reinforces this push. Virginity testing for girls has also been revived in some areas. This entails physical and emotional health risks for the girls tested, and is seen as a way to avoid HIV infection, giving people the false impression that they do not need to use condoms.

There are indeed good reasons for young girls not to have sex – catching HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted infections, getting pregnant, dropping out of school, ending up in poverty. However, the risks can be massively reduced if condoms are used. And whatever the pressures, some girls choose to be sexually active. At GPI, we say 'make your own decision, but if you are not ready to buy a condom, you are not ready for sex'.

One of the lessons we teach is about condoms – the shelf life, the storage, how to test if they are still okay to use, how to have the courage to go and buy one, and so on. But the lessons are about much more than condoms. The GPI programme takes girls between the ages of 10 and 19

iative (GPI) in Nigeria

BENE MADUNAGU, GPI



GPI girls on a rally in support of sexuality education

through three years of four-hour sessions once a week. The curriculum includes modules on personal skills, sexual health, human growth and development, society and culture, gender, human rights, relationships, gender-based violence, and economic skills. Rather than emphasising girls' vulnerability, this approach empowers girls to take control of their reproductive and sexual lives and realise their full potential as individuals.

'GPI girls don't hide whether they are sexually active or have an STI. They tell you point blank that they want to undergo test(s) for STIs, and those who have partners tell me they will ensure that their partners are treated. Some married women cannot say this.'

*Dr Gloria Archibong, Medical Director,
Faith Foundation clinic, Nigeria*

One example is 17-year-old GPI girl Tina, who had a 16-year-old friend who had already dropped out of school after becoming pregnant. Her friend wanted to avoid a second pregnancy so planned to take a herbal potion. Instead, Tina

explained that condoms can help prevent pregnancy as well as HIV/AIDS, and took her friend to the market to buy them.

We also had a 13-year-old who successfully intervened to stop female genital mutilation when her aunt wanted to perform this on her daughter. The 13-year-old first tried talking to her aunt. When this failed, she persuaded her mother, and dragged her over to her aunt's house. Her mother convinced the aunt not to go ahead with it. Also, a number of GPI girls have stopped girls being married off in exchange for a bride price.

The first GPI classes were held in 1994 for 16 girls – our daughters and a few of their classmates. Now, a dozen years later, GPI reaches over 50,000 girls every year through centres in four Nigerian states and outreach programmes in 28 schools. In addition, we produce a newsletter, a TV and radio programme, and have established a Gender Development Institute that promotes discussion of gender equality among NGOs, teachers, government functionaries, media staff and

politicians. GPI has inspired state and community leaders to take a stand against practices such as female genital mutilation. The organisation has also contributed to Nigeria's National Sexuality Education Curriculum, adopted by the federal government in 2000, and is currently training teachers to implement it.

The results are girls who are confident and articulate within their families, communities and wider society, who speak for themselves and others. Many of our new intakes come from families who know GPI girls and want us to give their daughters the training to be like them.

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Are two genders enough? The Travesti Museum in Peru

GIUSEPPE CAMPUZANO, *Travesti Museum*

‘IT IS INDISPENSABLE and urgent that we stop governing ourselves by the absurd notion that only two possible body types exist, male and female, with only two genders inextricably linked to them, man and woman. We make trans and intersex issues our priority because their presence, activism and theoretical contributions show us the path to a new paradigm that will allow as many bodies, sexualities and identities to exist as those living in this world might wish to have, with each one of them respected, desired, celebrated.’

International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission Latin American Office, 2005, p.7-8

1566 colonisers outlaw transgender identities

Nearly 500 years ago, Spanish colonisers came to Latin America and took control of the Inca Empire. Before their arrival, an indigenous identity existed of people who saw themselves as neither women nor men. The colonialists suppressed this identity, punishing such people with whipping and public humiliation.

Travestis, a modern term describing those throughout Latin America who cross genders, cross sex and cross dress, arose from this suppressed identity. This suppression is echoed elsewhere, such as with British colonial outlawing of *bijras* in South Asia.

21st century Travestis – inheriting the worst of both gender roles

Today’s *travestis* have inherited the worst of both gender roles. In public spaces they are perceived as male enough to be beaten by policemen, whereas within relationships it depends. Sometimes *travestis* are perceived as masculine, when they work to maintain their families; sometimes feminine, when they face violence, sometimes from the same family circle. In the labour market, discrimination means that sex work is almost the only available option. However, *travestis* are now mobilising to claim their rights and expand their possibilities.



A travesti shows her identity card, protesting that she can only obtain a card registering her as male.

The Travesti Museum of Peru

One such initiative is the *Travesti Museum*, which I established in 2004, to make the rich historical tradition of *travestis* visible, both to *travestis* themselves and to the general public. The museum consists of a travelling exhibition of artwork and information pieces about *travestis* from historical to contemporary times. The exhibition has already been shown in several parks, squares, boulevards, markets, universities and centres throughout Peru, including red light areas where *travestis* work and/or hang out.

On 6 April 2006, two days before the national elections, museum activists took over a busy street in San Isidro, the wealthiest district in Lima, to display huge printed versions of local press articles describing *travestis*’ identity, harassment, assassination and political resistance, in front of a large wall covered with election posters. Activists talked to passers-by, discussing among other things the meaning of the campaign message of the conservative Presidential candidate Lourdes Flores: “You are a woman, I am a woman, I will do things for you and I will do them right” (my paraphrase). As a rich, educated, white woman, which women was she talking about? Did she include non-elite women? Did she include *travestis*, some of whom see themselves as women?

Our message

The museum not only celebrates *travestis* – we also aim to show that the attempt to

categorise all humans as either male or female poses problems not just for *travestis*, but for others, too. Many people do not fit these categories. You may have female genitalia, but your bottom or breasts may not be big enough for you to be considered womanly. You may have a penis, but society may have given you a complex that makes you think your penis is too small for you to be a proper man. Or your body might perfectly fit the stereotype of feminine beauty, but you want to live as a man is expected to live.

Sex categories, like gender, are socially constructed (at least to some degree). As with gender, socialisation regulates and represses the diversity of sexes. If we challenge the categorisation of all people into male and female, this can end exclusion of *travestis*, while expanding possibilities for everyone.

Transgender rights and feminism – a common struggle?

Travestis have inherited the worst of both gender roles and need liberation from gender oppression. *Travestis*, and other transgender people worldwide, offer new insights on conventional sex/gender thinking. Thus, the demand for transgender rights is inextricably linked to the aims of the feminist movement. It is time to work together to move beyond the limiting dichotomies that constrain us all. In practice, this could mean:

- building exchange and solidarity between feminist and transgender activists
- feminists supporting transgender rights
- recognising that sex categories are at least in part socially constructed and, like gender roles, can be oppressive, and can change.

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Useful websites:

Regional and national Sexuality Resource Centres:

Africa: <http://www.arsrc.org/>

Latin America:

<http://www.clam.org.br/publique/cgi/cgilua.exe/sys/start.htm?pl=home>

South and Southeast Asia: <http://www.asiasrc.org/index.php>

Europe: <http://www.europeansexuality.eu>

United States: <http://nsrc.sfsu.edu/Index.cfm>

Behind the Mask (African LGBT site): <http://www.mask.org.za>

International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission:

<http://www.iglhrc.org>

International Network of Sex Work Projects:

<http://www.nswp.org>

Siyanda: <http://www.siyanda.org> (search 'sexuality')

IDS work on sexuality:

<http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip/research/sexrights.html>

Please note, all Internet addresses provided above are current as of November 2007.

IN BRIEF

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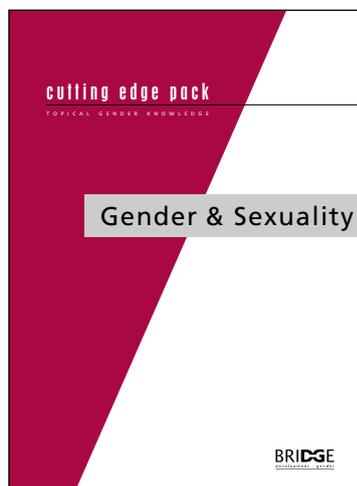
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Also Available –

cutting edge pack

on Gender and Sexuality

As well as this bulletin the pack includes:

- *Overview Report* outlining the main issues, examples of innovative practice and recommendations
- *Supporting Resources Collection* including summaries of new thinking, case studies, tools, online resources, and contact details for relevant organisations.

From February 2007, *In Brief* will also be available in French, Spanish and Portuguese from the BRIDGE website or in hard copy from BRIDGE, whereas the *Cutting Edge Pack* will be available in French and Spanish.

BRIDGE

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