



Gender Variance & Male-to-Male Sexualities in the Pacific





The Pacific Region



(Source: the Secretariat of the Pacific Community)



Components of Gender

- Masculinities
- Femininities
- Gender Roles
- Socially Constructed
- Cultural Specific
- Gender Identities & Expressions
- Gender Stereotypes & Labels



Gender Variance

“**Gender Variant** – refers to those who cannot or choose not to conform to societal gender norms associated with their physical sex.”

“Transgender is an umbrella term used to describe gender variant people who have gender identities, expressions, behaviours not associated with their birth sex... Transgender can also mean anyone who *transcends* the convention definitions of “man” and “woman”.

(Source: Gender Education and Advocacy Inc: 2001)



Gender Variance....cont

“I always feel growing up as a fa’a’afine, I have lived outside the square, looking at the square and my thinking is that if you were to twist the square slightly, you find that **we** are all diamonds.”

Tuisino Ymania Brown

(Source: Love Life Fono 2: Auckland, New Zealand)



Indigenous Identities

The Polynesian Societies

Fa'a'afine

Samoa

Fakaleiti

Tonga

Mahu

Hawaii

Laelae

Cook Islands

Indigenous Identitiescont

The Melanesian societies

- PNG - Ritualized homosexuality in Melanesia
- Fiji - *Vakasalewalewa*



Contemporary Identities

- Tonga *Leiti*
- PNG *Palopa*
- Cook Islands *Akavaine*
- Indo-Fijian No definite self identity term



Contemporary Identitiescont

- Indigenous Fiji -
Vakasalewalewa
- Other homosexual men
in Pacific?



- One identity for all?



Social Roles & Stereotypes

- Cinderella's of the Pacific - household chores and looking after the old and the young.
- Sew your clothes and make your hats.
- Arrange flowers for the church.
- Style your hair and do your makeup.



Social Roles & Stereotypes....cont

- Sexual roles?
- Attitudes of other people?



Emerging & Changing Roles

- Outside of mainstream job options
- Sex work



Emerging & Changing Roles....cont

- Professional sports
- Fashion industry
- Visual Arts
- Entertainment
- Trade



Gender Based Violence

- Culture of violence and double standards
- Gender based violence confined to women and girls
- Homosexual aspects are condemned
- Violence and harassment from the very men who seek sex with them.



Case I

A visible MSM was kidnapped by a taxi driver who lured him into sex. The intention of the taxi driver was to take this MSM into an isolated area rob and assault him. The MSM had to jump out of the moving vehicle. (S)He escaped unharmed.



Case II

A young transgender was violated by a group of men who inserted a cassava (tapioca) stick up her anus that later lead to her death. The deceased was drinking wit these men in an isolated cassava patch. A similar case was reported some years back in Nadi.



Role of the Church

“Homosexuals and lesbians will not inherit the Kingdom of God and are polluting the nation.”

Pastor Atu Vulaono
Head of the New Methodist Church

(Source: Fiji Shadow CEDAW Report)



Other Challenges

- Power Structures within informal MSM Networks
- Survival Mechanism
- Monolithic understanding male-to male sexualities
- Local MSM working for Agencies
- Sexual Predation of Young Males



Civil Society Response and Human Rights

- The PSDN Advocacy Report



Civil Society Response & Human Rights...cont

- Amithi Fiji
- Equity Fiji- a coalition of NGOs in Fiji with support from ACON and AFAO
- Fiji Shadow CEDAW Report 2009



Way Forward

- Explore and develop links on the issue of gender variance among males and challenge monolithic understanding of males-to-males sexualities and identities.
- Encourage research into masculine gender issues



Way Forward...cont

- Motivate governments and decision makers to enact policies that are sensitive to gender variance and extend rights
- Create linkages amongst the activist communities to enable mutually beneficial and supportive strategies towards addressing the social and sexual health needs of gender variant males



Thank You





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