

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THAI LADYBOY FIELDWORK INTERVIEWS: GENDER
VARIANCE

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Today's Date:
Location of Interview:

Name:
Pseudonym:

Year of birth:

FAMILY BACKGROUND:

Family ancestry:
Mother's Side:
Father's Side:

Age of Mother at birth:
Age of Father at birth:

Family social status

Where lived when growing up (anywhere other than native land?)
Position in birth order: #__ out of ____ total children
of older brothers:
of older sisters
of younger brothers:
of younger sisters:

Attitude and closeness of S (subject) toward Mother:

Attitude and closeness of S (subject) toward Father:

Attitude and closeness of S (subject) toward siblings:

Attitude and closeness of S (subject) toward grandparents:

Attitude and closeness of S (subject) toward other relatives:

GENERAL SOCIAL ATTITUDES TOWARD GENDER VARIANCE

Do you prefer to use the word kathoey, or ladyboy, or something else?

Define in your own words what is a _____
(it is important to use local term for Alternative Gender, androgynous or Transgender)
ex. mahu, fa'afafine, le-le, banci, baklak, kathoey, etc.)

Is that word acceptable to use in polite conversation?

If not, when would it be used?

Other words meaning the same thing?

Do you have any relatives who are _____ (use local term)?

If yes, who?

How did you think of them when you were a child?

How did family treat them?

How did community treat them?

When do you remember first seeing or meeting a ladyboy?

What was your reaction to that person?

What are the reactions of other people in your community to a person who is a ladyboy?

What are the reactions of non-Isan Thai to ladyboys?

How does their reaction differ from those of Isan people?

Did you ever hear any stories about the position of ladyboys years ago, in the old days?
(any pre-modern knowledge?)

Did ladyboys have anything to do with the native religion?

Did that religion have any special ceremonial role for ladyboys?

Is ladyboy ever mentioned in the Buddhist temples?

What is the attitude of the Buddhist leaders, monks, and active followers to ladyboys?

Did you ever travel to other areas outside your native Isan area?
If yes, did you notice any different attitudes toward ladyboys there?
(this part should be kept strictly general, not about S himself,
unless he brings it up himself).

PERSONAL BACKGROUND:

In this section it is important to be as open-ended as possible, to allow S to set the direction. Don't use questions that are too constructive of the choices for answers. Emphasize there are no right or wrong answers. Don't let S think you prefer one answer over another. Keep repeating your desire to get as accurate a view of S's viewpoint as possible.

Did you have any particular skills or abilities as a child?

What kind of play did you enjoy doing as a child?

Did you play mostly with boys, girls, both, or by yourself?

Did you see yourself as typical of other boys?
Were you in any way different from other boys?
If different, How?

Did others see you as different from other boys?
Who? Mo, Fa, Sibs, friends

If different, did they ever call you names?
What names?
How did you feel when they called you this?

Did your Mother try to encourage you to act like other boys,
or did she allow you to act the way you wanted?
How much or little pressure?

Did your Father try to encourage you to act like other boys,
or did he allow you to act the way you wanted?
How much or little pressure?

When you were an adolescent, what activities did you most enjoy doing?

Who did you spend most of your free time with?

In adolescence, who were your closest friends?

(girls, boys, both, or none?)

Did your Mother support or resist your activities?

Did your Father support or resist your activities?

AFFECTIONAL HISTORY:

Be careful here not to make S feel uncomfortable. Emphasize he should not answer any question which makes him feel uneasy. Emphasize I am not asking these questions because I am just being nosey. It is important that we gather accurate information so people's life histories can be compared in different cultures around the world, to see how alike or different these life experiences are. Depersonalize as much as possible, and periodically throw in some detail about my own sexual experiences to make S more comfortable and not to feel he is the only one divulging personal information. If S reveals something really personal, I try to do the same. Otherwise, few people will talk about such matters to a person who is just listening.

How old were you when you went through puberty?

At what age do you remember feeling erotic thoughts as a child?
Toward whom?

What age did you first engage in sexual behavior?
With whom? (category of that person; age? sex?
relation to S?

What specific sexual acts did you do (optional if S not comfortable):

How did you feel about this experience afterwards?

Did you tell anyone?
If not, why not?
If yes, Who?
How did they react?

Did this experience affect your long-term development?
If yes, in what positive ways?
If yes, in what negative ways?

In order to get accurate data, it is very important not to appear judgmental, or use value-laden terms (ex. sexual abuse, abnormal, deviancy, exploitation, etc.). Try to be as neutral as possible, and again emphasize the purpose of this research is to compare different peoples' experiences to gain an understanding of overall patterns.

Did anyone ever force or coerce you to have sex when you did not want to? If yes,
what age were you? What age were they?
What acts did they do to you (optional)?
How did you feel about it afterwards ?

Did this experience change you afterwards?
If yes, in what ways?

Did you ever have sex with a relative?
If yes, what category of relative?
Your age at first contact? Their age at first contact?
How did you feel afterwards?

Did this experience changed you afterwards?
If yes, in what ways?

Get S history of love affairs and erotic pairbondings:

Range of erotic practices (optional if S uncomfortable):

Have you ever had any erotic desires for females?
If yes, explain:
If no, explain:

PRESENT SELF-IMAGE:
Describe your ideal lover:

Would you like to marry one person permanently,
or be single with different love partners?
Why?

Do you think you can accomplish this ideal?
Why or why not?

Would you like to change your body or personality in any way?
If yes, explain how and why:

Is your body different in any way from that of a typical male?
If yes, in what way (optional)?

Do you see yourself as a boy/man or girl/woman,

or something distinct from either of those categories?

Do you identify yourself as _____?(use local word for ladyboy)

What does being a _____ladyboy mean to you?

Does your Mother accept you for the way you are,
or does she try to make you different?
How and why?

How does she feel about your erotic interests/activities?
Does she accept them,
or reject them?
What are her attitudes toward sex in general?

Does your Father accept you for the way you are,
or does he try to make you different?
How and why?

How does he feel about your erotic interests/activities?
Does he accept them,
or reject them?
What are his attitudes toward sex in general?

Other relatives' attitudes?

How do you feel about being _____ladyboy ?

What are the advantages to being _____?

What are the disadvantages to being _____?

Do you ever feel depressed about being _____?

Do you ever feel lucky, especially chosen, or blessed to be _____?

Why do you think you are _____?

Ideally, what would you like your life to be like when you are __ years old (give about 20 years into future)?

What would you like your life to be like when you are elderly?

Who do you think will take care of you in your old age?

How are most ladyboys treated in their old age?

Have you ever thought about adopting children?

Is that ever done by ladyboys?

KNOWLEDGE OF OTHER PEOPLES' AFFECTIONAL INTERESTS:

Are there other ladyboys you know?

Do you associate with them very much?

Why or why not?

Would you ever have sex with them?

Why or why not?

What is the range of their sexual behavior?

If you have sex with males, how do they identify their own sexuality?

Are there native males who are not ladyboys, but who only like having sex with other males?

How do they define themselves?

How do others define them?

Do they live together as a couple?

What is the difference between and "gay/homosexual"?

How are they similar?

Do you think there are _____ in other cultures?

Any knowledge of?

(At the end, I usually explain about American Indian berdache, and other alternative gender roles in other cultures. This provides some information of interest to the person, and lets them see they are not alone in the gender variant roles. Most find this quite fascinating, and are appreciative.

Another optional exercise is to have S draw a self-portrait.

If S is inclined to write, I encourage him to write up additional feelings about what we have talked about, and mail to me later.

INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUE:

In doing these interviews, it is important to allow S as much leeway as possible, to shape his answers without direction from me. If S brings up additional topics, be flexible and pursue them before coming back to the questionnaire later. Let the questions be a loose guide rather than a strict set of boxes to be checked off. The more relaxed and informal the setting, the better the answers will be.

I have found it is much better to get S alone before asking questions. When others are listening, many people either pontificate or do not open up or actually give distorted or untrue answers. Continually stress that my purpose is to try to find out information as accurately as possible, from as many different people as possible, so that by this means others like S will be able to have a more complete understanding of themselves and others like them, as they exist in various societies around the world. For a person who is different from the norm, and feels like they are some weird abnormality, this information can be vitally important for their psychological survival. For those who feel socially accepted, the information about similar personality types around the world can be comforting and enlightening, leading to increased self-awareness and life fulfillment.

NOTE: I am grateful to Kris Poasa in American Samoa, for suggestions on this questionnaire, and for prompting me to write down what has been my informal approach in doing interviews on gender variance over the past decade. I hope these questions, guided by the issues which have been of note in the scholarship on gender variance and sexual diversity, may be of help to other researchers working in the field. I will greatly appreciate others' suggestions for additional questions to ask, and for changes and refinements to improve this questionnaire.