

THAI LADYBOY FIELDWORK INTERVIEW: GENDER VARIANCE

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Location of Interview: Ban Soua Kin Waw

Name: Namkain

Pseudonym: Coolwater Numyow (young lady)

FAMILY BACKGROUND:

I was born in 1989, and am now 18 years old. I have always lived in this small town near Maha Sarakham, in my mother's house. My mother and father were both age 28 when I was born and now they are age 46. I have one older sister and two younger sisters. My mother has always been a good mother, and I love her very much. When I was a child she tried to make me act like a boy, but by the time I was a teenager and she saw how beautiful I was when I dressed as a girl, she stopped pressuring me and accepted me as I am. Since then she and all her relatives, who live nearby our house, accept me and treat me very nicely. My three sisters are also very kind to me, and I feel very close to them.

My father and all his family, on the other hand, do not accept me as a ladyboy and are very cruel to me. My father is from the city of Roi Et, so his relatives live there and thankfully I do not have to deal with them much. My father wanted a son very badly, and when he had only daughters and I turned out not to be the son he wanted, he felt very bad and frustrated. He took out his frustrations on me. From my earliest memory he did not like me, and he always tried to make me be like a boy. He complained all the time about me being such a sissy, and he hit me a lot. He continues to dislike me because I am a ladyboy. Even though we live in the same house, we hardly speak. I do not tell him anything about my life, so he does not know much about me. He is a rough truckdriver, and he does not appreciate at all having a feminine male offspring.

My young cousin, who is now eleven years old, is a budding ladyboy, and her father has the same disapproving attitude that my father has. My cousin is going through the same torment now that my father put me through when I was that age.

I feel good about being a ladyboy. I do not like it when someone calls me a kathoey. That is a rude word, and I get angry when someone calls me that. We ladyboys often use that word among ourselves, and that is OK for us to use it, especially if we use it humorously, but it is not good when someone else says that word.

The first time I remember seeing a ladyboy was when I was five years old. I was very happy because I had a good feeling to see someone like me. I had realized I wanted to be like a lady from my earliest memories. I remember at age four when I watched TV and

saw the Miss Universe pageant, which is very popular here in Thailand. I knew that I wanted to be Miss Universe. I wanted to be beautiful.

When I was a child I played only with girls, and not with boys at all. Even today I enjoy spending my time with ladies. I wanted to be like the other girls in every way. Since I was 13 years old, I have wanted to have breast surgery and sexual reassignment surgery. Though I do not have the money to do this now, I want to be a total woman. As a teenager I enjoyed playing girls' games, and sports like girls' volleyball and soccer. I had fun being a cheerleader. Later I got into doing makeup and painting my fingernails with my lady friends. I also enjoyed dancing a lot, and I still go to dances at every opportunity. A lot of the young men want to dance with me, but if not then I can enjoy dancing with my ladyboy friends. I love Molum music, and also American pop music.

I have never had any desire for sex with a female, I just want to be a woman. My first erotic feelings were when I was 14 years old, when I fell in love with a classmate of mine at school. He was the same age as me. The first time we had sex, it was wonderful. I enjoyed it a lot from the very first time. We did everything sexually and it felt so good to me that I wanted to have sex with him all the time. I loved him very much, and we had sex every night. I was very happy. I told two friends, a woman and a man, but they did not say anything. Looking back on it now, I am very happy that I had sex then.

My mother accepted my boyfriend and likes him. But I do not tell my father about my boyfriend. I do not say anything about my personal life, and especially my sex life, to him. It makes me sad that I cannot talk to him. Sex is very important to me, and I enjoy it a lot. No one ever forced me to have sex, but one time when I was 15 years old a boy who was two years older tried to hug and kiss me. I did not like him, and I pushed him away. That was the only time anyone ever tried to force himself on me. All my sexual experiences have been positive.

I was with my boyfriend for three years. But then a year ago, when we were 17, my boyfriend left our hometown to take a job in Bangkok. At first I missed him very much, and he has come back to visit me about every three months. But he started dating a real woman. Though she rejected him after a couple of months, and he now wants to come back to me, I would call him bisexual. That is, he likes girls and ladyboys. He does not like boys at all, so I would not call him gay.

A gay man is different from a ladyboy. A ladyboy is very feminine, like a woman. Gay men are those who do not act like a woman, but who are attracted to other men. One who likes being the top is called a Gay King, and the one who likes being the bottom is called a Gay Queen. Sometimes a Gay Queen is somewhat feminine, so they might be a little bit of a ladyboy. But a ladyboy goes the whole way, and is very feminine in character. It does not matter how they dress, and someone could dress in men's clothing and still be considered as a ladyboy. Sometimes the line between these different groups is hard to draw, and a particular person might be difficult to define exactly. A masculine female is called a Tom, from the English word "Tomboy," and a feminine female who likes other females is called a "Dee" which is short for "Lady." A person who likes more than one

gender (that is, they are attracted to both men and women, or both women and ladyboys) is called a bisexual.

I used to think that my boyfriend was my ideal lover, and I wanted to be engaged to him and then for us to marry. But now I like having sexual fun with lots of guys. Still, though I enjoy being a butterfly now, eventually I want to settle down and find a man to marry me and be my true love. To have only him, and nobody else. I am looking for someone who is even better than my present boyfriend. I want to have a man to marry me and be in true love, and have only him, nobody else. I want a man who is handsome with light skin, who has a good job and good money to pay for my sexual reassignment surgery.

Now I stay at home a lot and clean the house and do the cooking. I enjoy cooking and other feminine things. If I got married to a nice man I would like to stay at home and take care of the house and yard. If I needed more money I could get a job cleaning other peoples' houses. But the job I would most like to do is to become a hair stylist and do makeup.

I would eventually like to adopt some homeless children. I have no desire to raise a son, but I would like to have some daughters and it would be especially nice to have some ladyboy children. I would like to give them a supportive home filled full of love, rather than the rejection that I received from my father. I have not thought much about my old age, and I have no idea who would take care of me when I get too old to do things for myself. Maybe my adopted children will take care of me. I know some other ladyboys who have adopted children, and they might be a model for what I could do.

I aspire to live in a higher social position. When I visited Bangkok a year ago I saw some very high quality ladyboys. They have high ambitions and want to be rich and in high society. I think ladyboys are even more accepted in Bangkok than they are here in Isan. The ladyboys here in Isan are very low quality. They are just farmers and do not want to be in high society.

I feel fortunate to live in a country where ladyboys are accepted as they are in Thailand. I think a lot of this acceptance is because of Buddhist monks. There are many monks who are ladyboys or gay, and they are totally accepted by the other monks. Buddhist monks like ladyboys a lot.

[NOTE: Do NOT include this in published form. The ladyboy monks will have sex with men, but that is a deep secret and not to be put into any printed matter.]

Most people love ladyboys, because
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Some women do not like ladyboys, because ladyboys are so beautiful they are jealous.

Some men do not like ladyboys, because
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Some people say “You are a man, why do you want to be a lady?” I get angry and want to kick them, and I say “It is my personal choice. I want to beautiful.”

I accept myself and like myself the way I am. Sometimes, though, I become a little depressed and wonder why I am like this. But in all honesty I think my ladyboy nature comes from the spirits in the sky. I think angels and the Buddha decreed that I would be like this. I think my feminine nature is something inborn within me. It is not something that I could ever change. I know this for sure.

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What are the advantages to being _____?

What are the disadvantages to being _____?

If I had one wish it would be that my father could accept me and love me as I am. My mother learned to do that, and he could also do it if he would become more openminded and more open in his heart. I want everybody to accept ladyboys. I would like to see books published on ladyboys, television programs on ladyboys, and a ladyboy museum where people could come and see a gallery of our lives and things that would make them understand people like us. This is the way we are born to be in this lifetime, and everyone should accept that.