

Title of submission: ASPECTS OF GENDER: BETWIXT ND BETWEEN

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ABSTRACT ALSO ATTACHED

“Aspects of gender: Betwixt and Between”
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ABSTRACT

The project involves exploring anthropological examples of transgender, and focuses on male-to-female transsexuals in UK, comparing these with *kathoey* ('Ladyboys') in Thailand. Taking an ethnographic approach, qualitative interviews are being conducted with male-to-female transsexual people in UK and *kathoey* in Thailand and professionals in UK and in Thailand (that is, psychiatrists, gender identity counsellors and surgeons involved in the transsexual phenomenon).

In Britain a 'gatekeeper' system exists. Before the medical authorities will allow sex reassignment surgery, the transsexual person is required to undergo lengthy psychiatric and psychotherapeutic treatment, and to live full-time (in the case of the male-to-female) in the female role for a number of years, a procedure known as the 'real-life test' or 'real life experience'.

In Thailand, transgendered males are known as 'Ladyboys' or '*kathoey*'. Prostitution in Thailand provides a resource, which contributes to the national economy through sex tourism. Ladyboys are heavily represented in the sex industry. Sex reassignment surgery is easily accessible in Thailand, where no gatekeeper system exists, and where surgeons are highly experienced due to the large numbers of *kathoey* upon whom they perform surgery. Some British transsexuals bypass the gatekeeper system in UK and travel to Thailand for their surgery.

The paper contrasts the two systems and suggests that whereas in Britain a 'gatekeeper' system prevails, in Thailand transgendered individuals are given jurisdiction over their own bodies.

Topic area: Sociology/anthropology

Keywords: Kathoey, Thailand, transgender, UK, Sex Reassignment Surgery in Thailand