



# Kathoey mothers: Experiences of transgender women becoming a mother under the capitalist patriarchy in Thai society

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## Abstract

This study aims to explore the experiences of transgender mothers as they navigate the complexities of embracing motherhood within a capitalist patriarchy in Thai society. The study focuses on Bowling and Richy, two middle-class transgender women commonly identified as kathoey, who are currently in their working years. Employing feminist narrative research techniques, including in-depth online interviews, this study uncovers the challenges that kathoey mothers face in defining their maternal identities amidst societal pressures, feelings of alienation, and uncertainties. They embrace a form of patriarchal mothering to grapple with patriarchal expectations, as a means to negotiate societal norms and achieve authentic motherhood. Concurrently, they strive to be empowered mothering while also aspiring to fully cater to their children's needs based on their social and economic status. These case studies highlight that authentic maternal instincts can exist within the male bodies of transgender women. Furthermore, this journey underscores the importance of fulfilling their maternal roles and paves the way for new paradigms of motherhood in the future. These experiences are profoundly influenced by the complex social, economic, and class dynamics of capitalist patriarchy.

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## Introduction

Traditional norms in Thai society have long dictated that motherhood be closely linked to biological roles, with mothers expected to conform to idealized notions of diligence and obedience. These societal expectations permeate various institutions, such as family, extended family, religion, schools, and communities, often subjecting women to conflicting demands. However, contemporary

motherhood roles have diversified, particularly for transgender women, known as 'kathoey mothers,' who are gaining recognition and sparking open dialogues.

Presently, transgender women in Thailand continue to endure discrimination and exclusion, adversely affecting their access to employment, government services, education, and housing (Potiwan, 2011; Tinnam et al., 2021). These challenges result in negative emotional consequences, including depression, anxiety,

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and emotional distress. They also face exclusion from various family-related rights, including assisted reproductive technologies, surrogacy, and adoption rights. These exclusions exist both *de jure* and *de facto* (Preechasinlapakun, 2013). Furthermore, Thai adoption laws come with limitations, such as adoptive parents not being allowed to inherit from their adopted child (Pushita & Kakhai, 2020). Heteronormativity and patriarchy have established a hierarchy of social acceptance, impacting for parenting and adoption by same-sex couples (Jakping, 2012). Transgender women in Thailand strive to establish a family identity that transcends biological sex despite these limitations and the use of medical technology for reproduction. Moreover, Thai society incompletely accepts the moral aspect of motherhood and embracing the role of a mother for transgender women. However, they explore various avenues to form families, such as surrogacy, transgender pregnancies, and adoption, despite legal restrictions and unfavorable social and economic circumstances (Chokcharatkul, 2020; Thicha, 2018).

In capitalist patriarchy, motherhood introduces complexity into the decision-making process for contemplating parenthood, encompassing considerations related to financial costs, employment, and life balance. Thus, becoming a mother in Thai society is demanding and challenging due to legal and social constraints. Transgender women adapt to fulfill their motherhood responsibilities even under limited circumstances. Moreover, socioeconomic changes significantly influence their decision-making regarding motherhood and achieving balance in their lives and families, including embracing and respecting diverse models of motherhood. In this study, the author uses the term *kathoey* as a specific reference to middle-class transgender women of working age in Thai society. This study aims to illuminate the experiences of *kathoey* mothers who navigate the complexities of embracing motherhood while grappling with societal pressures shaped by capitalist patriarchy.

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## Literature Review

### *Motherhood and Transgender Women*

The early 2000s marked a gradual shift as lesbian women increasingly utilized assisted donor insemination, and gay men engaged in commercial surrogacy arrangements. This transition transformed the narrative to a newfound procreative consciousness, allowing LGBTQ+ to view parenthood as a life choice.

Meanwhile, transgender parents face disproportionately high rates of violence and discrimination, which can significantly prevent their ability to establish and sustain families. Critical scholars have raised questions about the desirability of normalizing queer families, advocating instead for the celebration of diverse family models beyond the traditional heteronormative family structure. Queering motherhood challenges conventional notions by dismantling the idea of a natural path to reproduction, motherhood, and the expectation of a mother's natural body, thus challenging the prevailing notion that mothering is exclusively women's domain (Park, 2013). The lens of adoption reveals how societal influences impact maternal bodies and challenges established norms, such as heteronormativity (Park, 2006).

The emergence of non-traditional family structures signifies a deliberate political effort aimed at cultivating societal acceptance of gender diversity (Weeks et al., 2001). In a similar vein, Lewin (1993) contends that these non-traditional families do not supplant or diminish biological kinship. Queer motherhood assumes an essential role in empowering parenthood, guided by the rejection of discriminatory categorizations of motherhood as either good or bad, the aspiration to transcend the dichotomy of biological and social motherhood, and a steadfast refusal to confine women within traditional maternal roles (Gibson, 2014). Queer motherhood boldly challenges the norms of heterosexuality, effectively dismantling the oppressive constructs of motherhood relating to biological standards and contributes to the emergence of a society grounded in self-determination (Wald, 1997). Transgender individuals, when their gender identities and parental roles diverge from societal expectations, confront intricate challenges, and adjustments. This transition to parenthood, particularly when one partner shoulders the sole caregiving duties, often engenders distinct perceptions, expectations (Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2007).

### *Motherhood on Capitalist Patriarchy*

Feminist scholars contend that motherhood, both biological and social, constitutes a distinct mode of production that perpetuates capitalism, patriarchy, and hierarchical power structures (Neyer & Bernardi, 2011). Capitalist patriarchy is a mutually reinforcing system where capitalism and patriarchal ideology intersect, significantly influencing motherhood and maternal roles (Hartmann, 1976). From this perspective, gender and class relations are central to feminist analyses, as emphasized by Taylor et al. (2004), who argue that patriarchal and

capitalist ideologies shape childbirth experiences based on cultural and social class distinctions. The gender-based division of labor enforces traditional gender roles, compelling women to assume domestic responsibilities, leading to the emergence of working mothers (Eisenstein, 1979). Mothers who lack legal entitlements and access to biological reproduction experience stress within the gender-ideological framework of patriarchal society (Wald, 1997). Patriarchal norms heavily influence how society views motherhood, portraying it as sacrificial mothering (O'Reilly, 2004a) and perfect mothering (Heffernan & Wilgus, 2018). This has implications for self-control, a shift in one's roles, and concerns in adapting to motherhood (Miller, 2005). These expectations linked to good motherhood under patriarchal influences, are: (1) primary caregivers; (2) maintaining 24/7; (3) prioritizing a child's needs over one's own; (4) fulfilling all of a child's needs; (5) making personal sacrifices of time; (6) bearing full responsibility for motherhood; and (7) regarding motherhood as a personal duty (O'Reilly, 2004b), which can lead to questioning of maternal integrity (Fields, 2001). Furthermore, in patriarchal societies, women's roles are typically confined to being housewives, consumers, and emotional support providers (Rich, 1986). These ideals are often depicted as belonging to white, middle-class, heterosexual, married individuals (Goodwin & Huppertz, 2010).

In the era of neoliberalism, this phenomenon is intertwined with the deep-seated patriarchal logic that supports capitalist pursuits, as it assumes responsibility for childcare within a largely inconspicuous realm (Hart, 2005). The concept of an ideal mother has largely been shaped by middle-class Western norms, leading to the marginalization (Koniak-Griffin et al., 2006). In the context of post-modernity, it becomes challenging to depict the traditional gendered division of labor as negotiable, particularly concerning child-rearing responsibilities (Duncan, 2005). However, motherhood can also be a source of empowerment through new forms of socialization and interactions through children. Empowered mothers are better equipped to care for and protect their children by limited resources and financial dependence. Despite these pressures, mothers employ multifaceted strategies related to labor, domestic responsibilities, and financial matters (O'Reilly et al., 2005). Empowered motherhood grants mothers' rights and freedoms to influence society positively, enhancing their ability to care for and protect their children (O'Reilly, 2004b). Green's research (2005) also highlights that such empowerment allows mothers to define their roles independently, exercise autonomy in child-rearing,

and fosters independence and thoughtful parenting. Moreover, it enables them to resist racialized efforts aimed at harming them and supports their growth into fully mature adults (Collins, 2000).

### *Transgender Women Mothers on Motherhood in Thailand*

In contemporary Thailand, patriarchy persists amidst societal changes. At the same time, these shifts have empowered mothers, reshaped gender roles, and embraced diverse facets of motherhood, encompassing both traditional and modern paradigms. Traditional motherhood upholds values such as diligence and self-sacrifice, perpetuated through societal institutions, including the significant influence of religion (Pothipiratana, 2004), moreover, within the private sphere, which represents a home environment laden with gendered power relations (Songsida & Padthaisong, 2015). Conversely, modern motherhood adapts to various societal contexts. Economic and social contexts, revealing gender wage disparities, the influence of parenthood on career decisions, and balancing motherhood and careers, often lead to pressure and stress (Tamdee, 2016). Furthermore, there are disabled mothers (Boonpiam, 2006) and teenage mothers (Yakasem & Chaisang, 2014). These mothers are still assessed differently from the ideal mother, and they endeavor to negotiate ideal motherhood based on self-determination.

The term "kathoey" is historically used to denote transgender females in Thailand. It primarily reflects their social identity rather than their biological dimension (Romjumpa, 2002). Kathoey individuals have long occupied a distinct cultural role. However, achieving motherhood as a transgender woman in Thailand remains a difficult journey due to societal norms and legal restrictions. They have experienced discrimination and economic exclusion due to capitalist patriarchy, with only middle-class individuals having access to gender-affirming procedures, influencing their identities as women and mothers (Tharawan, 2019). Currently, Thai laws lack a clear framework for transgender women to legally become mothers, resulting in legal hurdles related to custody disputes. Deep stereotypes and societal expectations about parenthood further complicate the assertion of transgender women's rights as mothers. Those desiring biological children encounter fertility-related challenges. Research on transgender parents, particularly transgender women as mothers, is notably scarce in Thai society. Existing studies predominantly explore the experiences and perceptions of transgender women, revealing concerns related to parenthood, especially

the anxieties associated with having children. Meksuk and Siriwong (2018) highlighted the challenges faced by transgender women in a predominantly heterosexual society, showcasing their limited legal rights and adoption processes. Furthermore, Mattawanon et al. (2021) emphasized the preference of most transgender women in Thailand for children genetically or biologically related to them. The journey of transgender women in pursuit of motherhood in Thailand is a complex and multifaceted one, marked by societal obstacles, legal challenges, and evolving perspectives.

## Methodology

The author employs a feminist narrative research approach to gain a deep understanding of the personal experiences of kathoey mothers. Feminist narrative research is particularly effective in uncovering an individual's subjectivity and decision-making processes, especially in an experience-centered context (Andrews et al., 2013). This approach is well-suited to reveal experiences within the cultural context and the challenges these individuals face (Costa & Matzner, 2007). It captures life experiences, promoting self-awareness and empowerment while shedding light on identity, culture, and societal dynamics (Robinson, 2000). This approach uncovers voices, exposes norms and inequalities, and explores interpersonal interactions (Costa & Matzner, 2007; Woodiwiss, 2017).

Primary data for this study were collected through online in-depth interviews with two transgender women, Bowling (pseudonym) and Richy (pseudonym), both residing in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region, as indicated in [Table 1](#). These individuals have adopted children and identify as middle-class transgender women. Data collection comprised three one-hour interviews conducted between January and February 2022, following an adaptable interview guide addressing topics related to motherhood preparation, adoption, early motherhood, and current experiences. The author ensured privacy and ethics compliance, with approval from Thammasat University Ethics Committee (Social Sciences) (Ref. no: 125/2021). The author employed a descriptive narrative analysis,

adhering to a balanced feminist narrative approach, prioritizing participants' experiences and opinions (Messias & DeJoseph, 2004). The results are presented in two case studies through descriptive analysis.

## Results

### *Bowling (Pseudonym): Having a Child and Being a Mother are More than a Success in Life*

Bowling, who is 32 years old, identifies as a "kathoey mother," which refers to a transgender woman who is not transsexual. Bowling enjoys a high socioeconomic status. In the past, she faced challenges from her conservative family and society, which did not embrace diversity. Bowling initially shared her early life story, which was marked by financial struggles within her impoverished family. She was determined to improve her social status through personal opportunities and her own abilities. She recounted the hardships she endured during her youth, path, and identity as a transgender woman were far from smooth. However, Bowling has achieved what she considers a "perfect family." According to her perspective, a perfect family is one that aligns with traditional biological or idealistic family norms. Bowling decided to adopt two children without any formal legal agreements. She adopted the first child (referred to as A, pseudonym) through a relative who willingly conceived and offered the child to her. The second child was offered to Bowling by a person who lacked the ability and desire to raise a child. Bowling and her partner agreed to accept the child, and the child's biological mother, who happened to be Bowling's partner's sister, entrusted them with her baby. Bowling explained, "*The parents of the child were glad to see that we have a prospect of raising a child well*" (Bowling, Personal communication, February 12, 2022). During the childbearing process, Bowling was deeply involved in every aspect of care. The biological mother nursed the newborn for the first two months, after which Bowling took over and assumed the role of the mother. Bowling recounted, "*We took care and assisted with feeding and healthcare. We were there during the birth, watching the mother nurse the baby, and*

**Table 1** Sample description

Participant	Age (Year)	Relationship status	Occupation	Monthly income (Baht)	Number of adopted children
Bowling	32	Having a partner and a committed ceremony	Self-employed	Unspecified	2, A (pseudonym) and B (pseudonym), both are 6 years old
Richy	23	Having a partner	Self-employed	Unspecified	1, Arie (pseudonym), 10 months old

*we learned how to feed, how the baby sleeps, what to do, and how to do them*" (Bowling, Personal communication, February 12, 2022). After a brief period of caring for the first newborn, Bowling expressed her desire to adopt another child. Child B was adopted from a single mother who was unprepared for parenthood. The adoption and child-rearing arrangements for both children were based on trust, which Bowling referred to as, "*San-Ya Jai*"<sup>1</sup> (Bowling, Personal communication, February 12, 2022). However, these arrangements caused Bowling some uncertainty because she did not have legal authority as a mother.

Bowling believes that transgender women's motherhood is highly unstable in Thai society, posing risks such as unsuccessful motherhood, relationship breakups, and the possibility of losing custody of a child. She acknowledged these challenges and stated, "*We have to be prepared because we don't know what the future holds, there's a lot of uncertainty. We've mentally prepared ourselves about 50 percent*" (Bowling, Personal communication, February 12, 2022). Bowling also used the term "*Miang Khao Rao Aom Yue*"<sup>2</sup> (Bowling, Personal communication, February 12, 2022) to describe this frustrating situation, where the law does not recognize adoption by mothers unable to give birth biologically.

*Despite the challenges and stress associated with motherhood, Bowling deeply appreciates the duties it entails. She referred to these duties as a "prestigious duty"* (Bowling, Personal communication, February 5, 2022). She vividly remembers a moment that left a lasting impression on her. Being an inexperienced mother, Bowling acknowledged the need to learn and prepare thoroughly for raising children. She sought guidance from those who had successfully raised children and emphasized the importance of studying child development, as both of her adopted children were adopted at different ages. The first child was adopted as a newborn, while the second child was adopted at the age of two. Currently, both children are six years old. Bowling argued that transgender women are naturally attentive and caring, just like any other mothers. She shared, "*I had to control myself more. I was less myself, especially in my demeanor. Motherhood had changed me. On the other hand, it also taught me to be calmer and more mature. As a transgender mother, I had to be very attentive*" (Bowling, Personal communication, February 12, 2022).

Bowling also acknowledged that having children is a significant responsibility, as it requires a considerable amount of time and resources. She recognized that if she hadn't been as successful or lacked sufficient financial means and support, she might not have considered having children. She reflected, "*I spent lots of money on a child. Looking back, I can't imagine how much money my mother had spent until I finally grew up*" (Bowling, Personal communication, February 16, 2022). Bowling was determined to be transparent with her children about her transgender identity and hoped that the strong bond between them would affirm her as their real mother. Additionally, she made financial preparations for her children's future by depositing funds into their accounts and ensuring their basic needs were met. She expressed her patience and willingness to support her children's choices, emphasizing her commitment as a mother: "*I am very patient. I accept whatever happens. I prepare for everything that could happen to my children. I am willing to support whatever my children choose. Do my best as a mother*" (Bowling, Personal communication, February 16, 2022).

#### *Ricky (Pseudonym): An Inexperienced Mother and Pressure from Thai Society*

Ricky is a self-employed middle-class transgender woman, 24 years old, who enjoys financial stability. She identifies as a woman, although she has not had gender reassignment surgery. She is considered a successful figure within the transgender community. Furthermore, Ricky has taken on the role of head of her family after deciding to adopt a child from one of her fans who was not fully prepared to raise a child. Reflecting on this decision, Ricky mentioned, "*Then I met this biological mother who wanted to offer me her baby. I didn't prepare much; I only had the courage*" (Ricky, Personal communication, January 22, 2022). Ricky places great importance on love, which she refers to as "*Rak Aoey*," as the foundation of a secure life. She emphasizes that she wouldn't consider having a child without an understanding and loving partner. For Ricky, having a complete and fulfilling family is a dream shared by many transgender women. Having a child, regardless of the method, becomes a goal after finding a suitable partner. It is a carefully planned mutual objective for Ricky and her partner. She noted, "*If I didn't have a partner, I wouldn't even think about adopting a child at all*" (Ricky, Personal communication, January 22, 2022).

<sup>1</sup> A term similar to "promise" that means "to tell someone that you will certainly do something"

<sup>2</sup> A term of Thai proverbs is similar to "*ເຈົ້າຈຸກເຂົາມາເລື່ອງເຂົາມໍ່ຍິ່ງເຂົາມາຄົມ* [Ao luk Khao Ma Liang Ao Mimg Khao Ma Aom]" [in Thai]. This term means adoption is a responsibility without expecting anything in return.

The preparation for adopting a child began when Richy met the biological mother when she was four months pregnant. Richy mentioned that her primary concern was not financial planning for raising the adopted child but rather preparing for the mental aspects of parenting. She took on the responsibility of covering medical bills and basic living expenses for the expectant mother. Initially, Richy believed that being a mother would be straightforward, but she soon realized that being a first-time mother was exceptionally challenging. She described it as feeling like "*the 100th-level difficulty*" (Richy, Personal communication, January 27, 2022) because taking care of a newborn or toddler demands exceptional skills and patience. Nevertheless, she believed in her maternal instincts, much like Bowling. Richy acknowledged that motherhood meant selflessness to her, so she was committed to being patient and continually learning. In addition to the inherent challenges of motherhood, Richy's status as a public figure in the modern world adds further demands to her situation. As a transgender woman, she feels the need to meet the expectations of the transgender community. She candidly shared her stress and anxiety with stating, "*It's not just the feeling that I'm not good enough, but being a transgender woman and a public figure also made me a target of verbal abuse, which led to my depression...*" (Richy, Personal communication, February 4, 2022).

Managing time is crucial for Richy, who must balance her responsibilities at her day job with housework and caring for a newborn child. To address this, she relies on babysitters when she needs extra time for work or child care. However, the multiple responsibilities eventually take a toll, leaving her feeling exhausted and in need of a daily break. Richy's revelations highlight that the stress and pressure experienced by kathoey mothers are closely tied to societal expectations. She is aware that kathoey mothers face social marginalization and are forced to fight for survival. Richy, particularly faces immense pressure when she has to act as a mother, saying, "*In Thailand, social media world, they bash each other without trying to understand the truth or distinguish anything. Some words or things are just too harsh...*" (Richy, Personal communication, February 4, 2022).

Richy must work hard to achieve a better quality of life, something that Thai society does not readily offer them. As Richy stated, "*We haven't achieved anything yet. And, being a mother, what's left? If we don't have the money to create a good environment, it's over because no one else can help us except ourselves.*" (Richy, Personal communication, January 22, 2022). Despite having cared for the child for less than a year, she has already devised

a plan to ensure that the child grows up in a supportive and understanding community, saying, "I don't want them to face the same problems I did" (Richy, Personal Interview, February 4, 2022).

## Discussion

### *Beginning of Motherhood: Desire, Expectation, and Value of Motherhood*

Bowling and Richy faced significant challenges during their childhood, particularly related to financial difficulties and their quality of life. However, with determination and perseverance, they have been able to improve their social standing. They have also assumed the role of family leaders. Clearly, identity transformation in same-sex couples as they transition to parenthood is influenced by various social factors. This transition is indicative of the cultural conflicts between dominant heterosexual societal norms and the subcultural expectations within the LGBT+ community (Cao et al., 2016). Motherhood, considered one of the most feminine qualities within the transgender women community, has become a societal expectation. Bowling and Richy, like many others, recognize the importance of financial support in contemporary parenting and acknowledge the influence of capitalism in this context (Kanchanachitra et al., 2019). Consequently, Kathoey mothers, including Bowling and Richy, often work tirelessly to secure the financial resources needed for child-rearing and family formation. Despite their relative financial stability, they continue to put in substantial effort to cover the expenses associated with motherhood. Their journey into motherhood represents an aspiration to create what they consider a perfect, biologically conventional family—a common goal among transgender women who seek both companionship and children.

The desire to have children and fulfill the role of motherhood holds significant value for Bowling and Richy, as it aligns with their perception of their greatest feminine qualities. This emphasizes the importance placed on feminine and maternal attributes within the transgender women community, motivating them to embrace motherhood. As Averett (2021) notes, maternal behaviors serve as a connecting and value-imbuing activity for women. These strategies empower Kathoey mothers to overcome societal barriers, embrace their parental roles, and challenge conventional norms. Moreover, redefining motherly love empowers both these mothers and children, fostering innovative caregiving dynamics

and liberating partly motherhood from patriarchal constraints (Takševa, 2018). The decision to have children hinges on their ability to fulfill conventional family ideals. They often define 'family' in mainstream terms, consisting of a father, mother, and children. Additionally, a soulmate plays a pivotal role in their decision-making process, closely tied to their personal dreams and aspirations (Meksuk & Siriwig, 2018). For instance, Bowling sees her potential social marriage with her partner as a significant milestone in line with her vision of a perfect family. Bowling and Richy's experiences illustrate the intricate interplay between social identity, economic stability, and motherhood aspirations within the transgender women community. Their stories underscore the significance of embracing traditionally feminine qualities and navigating societal expectations as they embark on their unique journeys toward motherhood.

#### *Motherhood and Adoption Process: Transgender Women Need High Economic Status to Become Mothers in Thai Society*

Kathoey mothers still endeavor to be real mothers and perform maternal roles under social and economic conditions. However, mothering ability alone is not enough to obtain a child. Transgender women need a high social class, financial well-being, and economic status to become mothers in Thai society. From this study, the biological mother's decision to offer their child to a Kathoey mother originates from the inability to raise children, differences in economic and social status, and the desire to improve the child's social status. This decision significantly reflects the attitudes of the general urban middle-class and leads to an adoption process relying upon a heart-to-heart contract. Kathoey motherhood and the adoption decision between them and biological mothers indicate that motherhood might be perceived as an occupation and a child as a product of a biological mother, as mothers' work and bodies are resources for reproduction (Stanworth, 1987). Even though there is no financial exchange between Kathoey mothers and biological mothers, there is an exchange of life investment for children to raise their social status and quality of life. This situation reflects capitalism and inequality in society and the economy, which can determine or create parental power and investment under parental financial regulations (Stanworth, 1987). In addition, it indicates that economic and social-class powers encourage Kathoey mothers' power and the development of relationships of motherhood through a social process (Devasahayam & Yeoh, 2007).

From these cases, in the process of adoption, which is considered essential in enabling transgender women in Thai society to become mothers, represents three alienations and uncertainties: (1) The alienation between Kathoey mothers and the children they nurture, wherein biological mothers cannot claim legal ownership rights over their offspring or assert legal parental rights through customary agreements with birth mothers. This is evident in Bowling's statement: "They are our children, but not our genetic inheritance." Ultimately, this societal challenge involves being legally recognized as a mother or biological birth mother rather than another mother; (2) The alienation between Kathoey mothers and biological birth mothers, reflected through Bowling's anxiety concerning her uncertain future and the legal rights of birth mothers who maintain legal relationships with their offspring; and (3) The alienation of Kathoey mothers in themselves in the status of extramarital and non-legal mothers, along with their inability to access the biological motherhood role in Thai society. Nevertheless, their role as social mothers is regarded as crucial, with diverse norms, living standards, childcare practices, and childbirth standards (Chodorow, 1987). Likewise, Fontenot (2007) indicates that adoptive parents experience a wide range of emotions, including uncertainty, rejection, competition, isolation, judgment, apprehension, helplessness, risk-taking, and fear. Nevertheless, they also find moments of fulfillment, hope, joy, and love.

#### *Becoming a Kathoey Mother is not Easy: A Role as a Mother*

Patriarchy and capitalism, influenced by the Western world in Thai society, result in the idea of gender roles in families called the 'ideology of intensive mothering,' which includes being a good and sacrificial mother (Hay, 1996). From the concept of patriarchal mothering, society pressures Bowling and Richy to follow the concept. Bowling and Richy's maternal practices resemble the stereotype of middle-class parenting. At first, they had difficulty parenting and adjusting to the mother's role, as Bowling remarked, "*I must be patient,*" while Richy commented, 'the 100th-level difficulties' and 'Being a mother for the first time is difficult. You will not know what to do if you have never done it.' Bowling and Richy are particularly aware of the importance of choosing a good environment and acquiring objects that will satisfy children's needs. In addition to being mothers, they must work to provide for their family. An intriguing aspect of Kathoey mothers is the combination of being working mothers and homemakers. Even though they are prosperous, they must still work hard. As a result,

Kathoey mothers must endure more. They accept the uncertainty of their family life or an illegitimate marriage. It demonstrates that capitalism and patriarchy control decisions regarding sexual intercourse and pregnancy (Averett, 2021), and transgender women who want to have children must be financially prepared for a good quality of life. However, Kathoey mothers are examples of striving to be the best mothers despite challenging conditions. It becomes an interesting case study, prompting discussions about their survival strategies and suggestions for other families dealing with housekeeping, caregiving, and financing with limited resources and dependent financing (O'Reilly et al., 2005). On the other hand, Bowling and Richy embrace empowered mothering through an attempt to redefine the terms 'mother and family' such that they are not dependent on an individual's sex and express their opposition to the concept of gender roles in families and the society that exclusively recognizes heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is an expansive and deeply entrenched system of privilege, comprising three interrelated binary constructs: gender ideology, sexual ideology, and family ideology (Allen & Mendez, 2018). Bowling and Richy are aware that they must raise the children as well as or better than the biological mothers. Besides, Stotzer et al. (2014) found that transgender parents positively influence their children's attitudes about diversity. In addition, Kathoey mothers display higher sensitivity to gender and empathy. As Bowling stated, "*The more you're a transgender mother, the more detail-oriented you become. It's like it's already in us, this level of detail. Transgender mothers have to be meticulous. Women do five level of actions; transgender mothers do ten level of actions.*" (Bowling, Personal communication, February 16, 2022). Kathoey mothers in middle-class working-age groups in capitalist patriarchy in Thai society face significant financial challenges and societal pressure (Faccio et al., 2013). For both Bowling and Richie, the pressure of being a legal mother involves striving to provide the best care for their children to benefit their own offspring while reducing societal stigmatization and criticism (Imrie et al., 2021). Motherhood in Thailand is intertwined with economic and social factors, making it complex. Contemporary caregiving requires resources and planning. Kathoey mothers in Thai society play roles in parenthood, caregiving, and consumerism.

## Conclusion

The experiences of middle-aged transgender women as mothers are profoundly influenced by the complexities

of capitalist patriarchy. Kathoey mothers face the challenge of defining their motherhood identities within a societal framework that may not fully acknowledge or accept their roles. Nevertheless, their maternal practices empower them to assert maternal authority and provide full care for their children. This journey underscores the importance of self-reliance and confidence in nurturing their children, which is vital for maintaining their maternal roles. Yet, they must navigate societal pressures, alienation, and uncertainties surrounding maternal roles, romantic relationships, and future mother-child dynamics. These case studies challenge the notion that maternal identity is exclusively tied to female biology, affirming that authentic maternal instincts can exist within transgender women's male bodies. They must conform to patriarchal mothering to construct the image of perfect or good motherhood while simultaneously conforming to empowered mothering in order to strive to be real mothers and fully satisfy all their children's needs. This study underscores and advocates for government action to validate transgender women's legitimacy as mothers and raise awareness of their parenting. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of empowering transgender women to achieve motherhood and open new avenues for parenthood in the future.

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## Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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