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Queer Mothering in *Myself Mona Ahmed*: A Matricentric Feminist Analysis

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ABSTRACT

In the field of parenting studies, the experiences of non-cis mothers have remained underrepresented and inadequately researched. This lack of documentation not only neglects the multifaceted roles of non-cis mothers but also contributes to the accumulation of disenfranchised grief within this community. To address this significant gap, this article employs a qualitative study using the theoretical framework of matricentric feminism to examine the queer mothering experiences of the trans-adoptive mother in *Myself, Mona Ahmed* (2001), a semi-autobiographical work by Mona Ahmed and Dayanita Singh. Through this, the study seeks to elucidate the pursuit of agency and the performative nature of motherhood. The patriarchal construction of motherhood disregards the inclusivity of queer people in parenting but, matricentric theorists assert that motherhood is performative, and they advocate for the concept of "mothering" as a transformative and active practice. Indeed, Queer mothering is an evolving field that asserts parenting as a performative entity. It acknowledges the legitimacy of maternal roles for adoptive parents, genderqueer persons, and anyone who cares for the "preservation, growth, and social acceptability" of the children[40]. This study's implications extend beyond academic discourse, shedding light on the unique joys and struggles of queer mothering. It encourages broader societal acceptance of diverse parenting narratives, underscoring the importance of recognizing and validating the experiences of non-cis mothers. This research fosters inclusivity in parenting studies and promotes social change in perceptions of motherhood. In this context*, Myself, Mona Ahmed* (2001) provides a scope for critical discussion on queer motherhood which is academically less researched and also explores the disenfranchised trauma experienced by trans women within the realm of mothering.

Keywords: Mothering, queer, disenfranchised grief, matricentric, patriarchal

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1. Introduction

Gender, sexuality, and parenthood have all undergone significant development in recent decades, leading to a more inclusive understanding of family structures and various parenting roles. Despite these advances, LGBT people continue to face particular obstacles and prejudices in their pursuit of mothering. This research article aims to shed light on the largely overlooked and underrepresented topic of queer mothering by examining the experiences of a trans woman in the semiautobiographical work *Myself Mona Ahmed*.

According to Adrienne Rich, motherhood is a "patriarchal institution"[38] where men wield authority and power over the entire process of birthing and motherhood, both legally and ideologically. On the other hand, mothering is a cultural practice and a social construct[16]. It pertains not only to biological mothers but also to all individuals who prioritize mother work in their lives. Mothering is inclusive of people of all genders and sexual orientations. Fiona Joy Green, in her chapter on feminist mothering, highlights how the institution of motherhood perpetuates oppression against mothers who identify as cisgender, transgender, agender, or differently[20]. The terms 'Motherhood' and 'Mothering' are often used interchangeably, but they have significant differences in their meanings.

The exclusive association of motherhood with women and the belief in their destiny to fulfill the role creates an oppressive system. The disregard for the emotions and desires of individuals of diverse genders and sexual orientations to parent often leads them to a sense of being excluded. Sara Ruddick and Andrea O'Reilly refer to "mothers," as individuals who engage in mother work or, a maternal practice. According to Sara Ruddick, three requirements characterize maternal practice 'preservative love, nurturance, and training'[40]. An individual who satisfies the demands mentioned above performs the role of a mother i.e.) mothering.

Over these years, research papers have discussed the discrimination against the transgender community, gender violence, demographics of the transgender population, identity and historical perspective of the transgender community, gender identity inclusion in workspace, etc. A limited amount of scholarly research on transgender individuals and their familial relationships indicates a relative lack of extensive academic study in this area[6]. Furthermore, the scholarly literature has given little attention to the queer mothering experience of adoptive parents, resulting in a comparatively less number of papers on the subject. As transgender acceptance and visibility increase, it is important to document the experiences of trans mothers and parents, as well as the challenges they face.

Myself Mona Ahmed published in 2001, is a photobook, email, and letter collection co-authored by Mona Ahmed and Dayanita Singh. It features real-life incidents in the life of Mona Ahmed, a trans woman. The plot revolves around Mona, who left her family at the age of 17 due to her gender identity. She later parted ways with her eunuch family at the age of 60 due to constant quarrels and hegemonic practices within the community. Mona adopts and parents a female baby named Ayesha, but the baby is taken away from her because her guru Chamman believes she cannot take good care of the child. The narrative from *Myself Mona Ahmed* offers substantial material for in-depth academic exploration and critical discourse on the under-researched topic of queer motherhood. The study aims to provide a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of queer motherhood, with a particular focus on non-cis mothers, by highlighting Mona Ahmed's experiences as an adoptive trans woman. This study examines the transformative and empowering experience of queer motherhood through a matricentric feminist lens. By exploring the nuances of this complex experience, a deeper understanding of how queer mothers can challenge and resist societal norms and expectations can be gained. This perspective also highlights the need to celebrate and acknowledge gender-inclusive motherhood and demand greater visibility for all mothers. This study tries

to provide insight into the complexities and resilience demonstrated by a trans-adoptive mother in her quest for parenthood by exploring her narrative *Myself Mona Ahmed.* The study challenges mainstream heteronormative narratives and advocates for more inclusive family policies and social support systems. This research contributes to a better understanding of varied mothering experiences and holds the potential to impact social change toward greater acceptance and support for LGBTQ+ families.

1.1. Originality of the Study:

Previous studies focusing on queer parents have largely been survey-based and quantitative in nature. These studies are predominantly from fields such as medicine, social science, psychology, sociology, and social work. This study offers a unique perspective by using a qualitative method, specifically textual analysis, to shed light on the previously unexplored aspect of mothering by transwomen in the field of English literature. The paper probes into the disenfranchised grief experienced by the protagonist, who has been rejected by her family and community and separated from her adopted child. The study also examines how mothering empowered the protagonist, giving her resilience and agency. The paper applies a theoretical framework of matricentric feminism, which views mothering as a performative practice rather than an innate identity. This feminist lens emphasizes inclusivity and is often undervalued in studying transgender motherhood narratives. The paper's unique contribution lies in its intersectional exploration of adoptive queer motherhood and disenfranchised grief, providing a new perspective on queer parenting experiences.

2. Literature Review
2.1. Queer Parenting

Considerable research studies are on queer parenting in the fields of sociology, psychology, and health science. Goldberg and Frost's "Lesbian and Gay Parenting"(2016) focuses on the difficulties that lesbian, gay, bisexual parents and their children have to deal with. Several other aspects of research areas include queer family formation, disclosure, and societal support. The chapter also looks at societal discourses and discussions around homosexual parenting, including issues with heteronormativity, prejudice, and legal frameworks. It highlights the diversity among lesbian and gay parents, considering factors like class, colour, and ethnicity. It contributes to the qualitative study of lesbian and gay parenting and offers insights into the larger area of qualitative psychology research[18] Goldberg's (2010) work scrutinizes the commonly held assumptions about heterosexuality and emphasizes the resilience and strengths of LGBTQ+ parents[19]. Shelly M Park (2006) challenges the traditional views of motherhood by exploring how adoptive maternal bodies offer a good vantage point from which to evaluate prevailing views of mothering[34]. Paige et al (2016), in their systematic review of lesbian and gay parenting, conclude that a necessity for further research on Gay and Lesbian headed families including quantitative, qualitative, and action research is perceptible[4]. Rosenblum (2012) proposes to unsex parenting, or removing the biological sex link from "mothering" and "fathering," to build a more fluid and equitable family structure[39]. E. Perrin et al. (2019) argues that despite the heightened acceptance of parenting by same-gender adults, difficulties and stigma exist[36]. Kate Henley Averett (2021) argues that research on LGBTQ-parent families may be especially helpful in de-coupling mothering behavior from female-gendered bodies[5]. Farr's (2020) research highlights adoptive parents of non-traditional families face stigma. LG adoptive parents face additional stigmatization, affecting mental health[13]. Naples in the article titled Queer Parenting in the New Millenium concludes that Queer parenting or family formation requires debilitating the hegemonic

heteronormative practices in "daily negotiations, strategic choices, and a commitment to challenge heterosexual privilege in everyday life"[31].

2.2. Transgender Parenting and Adoption

According to Fausto-Sterling (1993), the medical community, legal system, and state machinery all contribute to maintaining the two-sex binary[14]. Letchfield et al. conducted a systematic review of transgender parenting research to better understand how trans people re-established their relationships with children after the transition. They also considered the implications for professional practice with trans people in terms of how to best support them in their family caring roles[21]. According to Timothy J. Biblarz and Evren Savci (2010), study on transgender people is almost unavailable in the context of more traditional areas of family studies research, such as their dating behaviour and formation of intimate relationships in adulthood, issues surrounding their having children, parenting behaviours, and children's experiences with transgender parents, family/work relationships, and so on[7]. This is due to the fact that only a small quantity of current literature has addressed a number of challenges faced by trans people. The paper "Making trans parents visible: Intersectionality of trans and parenting identities" (2014) by Haines et al focuses on the problems trans parents face in managing parenthood and their gender identities. A few challenges of transgender parents which researchers identified through empirical studies are related to the impact of their trans identity on their children's well-being, conflicts with co-parents or partners, and the delicate balance of transitioning while fulfilling their parenting responsibilities amidst changes in family structure.　The paper emphasises the critical role of therapists and educators in recognising and resolving the unique challenges of trans parents, as well as takes into account transgender individuals' intersecting identities[22]. Arslan's (2018) study examines Istanbul drag queens, emphasising "drag motherhood" in queer kinship. It examines house formation, highlighting drag moms' roles in providing support[3].　Pyne's research reveals the persistent existence of transphobia and other societal pressures that negatively impact the mental health of trans parents as they navigate parenting their children. The paper emphasises the critical necessity for psychosocial support to help trans parents overcome these obstacles[37]. Kuri (2022) explores the challenges faced by marginalized mothers and the impact of neoliberalism on social work practice. The article also highlights the role of women and mothers in advocating for social justice and fighting against various forms of oppression. It emphasizes the need for diverse and inclusive narratives in understanding motherhood and social work[27]. Fiona Joy Green in feminist mothering (2020) discusses the broadening scope of feminist mothering. She notes that it now encompasses not only the experiences of women but also the involvement of transgender individuals and cisgender men in practicing feminist mothering [14]. This observation underscores the dynamic evolution of feminist mothering within contemporary society, where a diverse range of individuals actively engages in parenting roles from a feminist perspective. In a 2018 news article in Hindustan Times, Gauri Sawant, a prominent transgender activist, expressed the view that motherhood transcends gender. She claims that motherhood can extend beyond traditional gender roles and is better understood as a set of actions and behaviours, irrespective of the gender identity of the individual involved[6]. This idea of motherhood given by Gauri differs from the patriarchal definition of mothers and motherhood. It is more inclusive and aligns with the concept of mothering. In the context of transgender communities, there is a lack of clarity around adoption procedures among hijras[19], which highlights the need for further research and legal clarification to understand adoption practices within the community.

2.3. Transgender Experience

In the literature on transgender experiences, several significant publications provide valuable insights into the prevalent issues faced by the community. Bradford etal 's (2013) research illustrates the healthcare prejudice suffered by transgender adults in Virginia,USA due to their gender identity[10]. Furthermore the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey[25] by James et al. reveals substantial disparities and elevated rates of abuse, discrimination, harassment, and violence against transgender people within the United States. The findings highlight the urgent need for focused interventions that address the systemic issues faced by the transgender community. Dilini Abeyratne et al.'s (2022) study in Sri Lanka exposes high levels of discrimination against transgender individuals, including 78% harassment, 35% physical assault, and 12% sexual violence in schools. Notably, 15% experienced severe harassment, leading to school departure, while 19% faced direct housing discrimination[1].

The findings highlight the urgent need for focused interventions that address the systemic issues faced by the transgender community. Shifting the focus to India where transgender people face various forms of oppression, Gayathri et al.'s 2022 study on transgender experiences in Chennai indicates widespread prejudice in education, work, healthcare, and public areas. The study reveals difficulties in acquiring official IDs, updating documentation post-transition, obtaining bank loans, experiencing homelessness, and receiving travel denials[26]. Tanupriya and Dhishna Pannikot's 2022 exploration further delves into how transphobic violence is embedded in cultural and systematic oppression in India[42]. Tanupriya's 2016 article emphasizes the role of literature in advocating for transgender rights, using A. Revathi's narrative to highlight violence against the hijra community, and similarly Pratishi Hazarika's 2020 paper explores how systems of gender and sexuality domination lead to the subordination of the hijra community in India. The study systematically examines the disempowerment and exclusion of hijras from national narratives, drawing insights from autobiographies like "I Am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey" (2007) by Living Smile Vidya and "The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story" (2010) by A. Revathi[23]. Priyakumaran & Meenakshi (2020) research paper focuses on the life experiences of the third gender in the second phase of Bombay. The study centers on the novel "Narcopolis" (2012) and sheds light on the challenges and achievements of transgender individuals, providing insights into LGBT issues. In summary, surveys addressing the experiences encountered by transgender individuals, both within and beyond the confines of India, exhibit a consistent discriminatory nature. Furthermore, the existing literature underscores that while the transgender experience and discrimination are studied widely, the consequent disenfranchised grief or the pain that arises due to the lack of acknowledgment of their loss/grief is understudied. Therefore, there arises the necessity for a more empathetic and nuanced approach in scholarly research related to transgender experiences.

3. Research Problem

The primary gap identified in the existing literature concerns the insufficient scholarly attention dedicated to the experiences of adoptive queer mothers. While research on queer parenting has extensively covered psycho-social aspects within homosexual couples and medical dimensions such as assisted reproductive technologies (ART) and surrogacy, a noticeable research gap exists regarding adoptive queer parents and their mothering experiences. The specific experiences of adoptive queer mothers, as represented and interpreted in literary works, have been mostly unnoticed. Addressing these gaps is vital for gaining a better understanding of the various narratives around queer parenting, contributing to a more inclusive academic discourse on LGBTQIA experiences, and improving the representation of adoptive queer mothers in

scholarly research. Furthermore, it underscores that transgender experience and discrimination are studied widely; however, the disenfranchised grief experienced by transgender individuals due to neglect of their enormous grief is understudied, emphasizing the necessity for a more empathetic approach in scholarly research.

4. Research Objectives

The discourse surrounding the area of parenting is predominantly based on traditional heteronormative framework. The inability to identify the different experiences of queer people in the realm of parenting promotes stereotypes and limits understanding of family structures, particularly for heterosexuals. This lack of recognition can make it challenging for those within the queer community who aspire to become mothers, contributing to a broader societal misunderstanding of diverse family dynamics. Hence, it is essential to thoroughly study the multiple facets of queer mothering and acknowledge their experiences to create more inclusive and informed understanding of the topic. This study aims

    i)   To analyze the queer mothering experience of Mona Ahmed, an adoptive queer mother, as portrayed in *Myself Mona Ahmed* through the lens of matricentric feminism

    ii)   To promote a better understanding of the unique joys, struggles, and dynamics of queer mothering, specifically in the context of adoption through close reading and analysis of the text

5. Methodological Framework

The research explores the mothering experience of a trans-adoptive mother in the literary work *Myself Mona Ahmed* through textual analysis. The method of textual analysis is well-suited for this qualitative study as it can reveal the underlying themes and layers of the narrative. Textual analysis enables the extraction of meaning from the narrative, facilitating an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of a trans-adoptive mother. By employing textual analysis, the study aims to bridge the gap in the representation of non-cis mothers in academic discourse and contribute to a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of queer motherhood. It prioritizes and amplifies diverse perspectives to allow the narrative to unfold naturally. The textual analysis in this research employs a close reading approach, in which specific passages from *Myself Mona Ahmed* is extensively analyzed to identify themes related to queer mothering, agency, and disenfranchised grief that pertain to the experiences of the trans-adoptive mother.

This study adopted a textual analysis method comprising the following steps:

5.1. Close Reading

The process of textual analysis involved a close and thorough reading of *Myself Mona Ahmed* multiple times to gain a deep understanding of the content and context. The text was carefully examined to identify the main themes, underlying meanings, and conclusions.

5.2. Identification of Significant Passages

After reading the text repeatedly, the paragraphs with important themes, motifs, and assumptions were identified and highlighted.

5.3. Manual Grouping and Sorting

The text is manually classified based on common characteristics, such as emotions, ideologies and thought patterns, and then grouped.

5.4. Theme Mapping

By actively engaging with the text, different perspectives and primary themes were revealed. To effectively identify thematic groupings in the text, a detailed outline was created through manual sorting of major and sub-themes. After carefully analyzing the content, comprehensive understanding of the underlying themes was achieved. The resulting outline provided a clear and structured overview of the key ideas presented in the text.

5.5. Analysis and Interpretation

The selected text most relevant to the objective and the context of the overall theory is closely analyzed and interpreted. Through a close reading of the key passages in the text, patterns, and deeper meanings are found. The analysis identified significant themes that were used to categorize Mona's journey. Finally, the principles of matricentric feminism were applied as an interpretive lens to the detected themes contributing to an enhanced understanding of queer mothering.

The study's methodology involves a systematic process that includes reading the text thoroughly, manually categorizing its content, identifying themes, and analyzing it in a layered manner without using formal coding procedures. This method helps to extract original concepts and ideas from the text through repetition, reflection, and interpretation.

The selection of Matricentric Feminism as the theoretical framework for this study was a carefully considered choice intended to provide an inclusive perspective on non-cis motherhood. The term matricentric feminism was coined by Andrea O'Reilly and it refers to a mother-centred mode of feminism. Matricentric feminism theory is an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from multiple academic domains such as history, anthropology, literary studies, sociology, philosophy, psychology, sexuality studies, and women's studies. It also incorporates principles from various established schools of academic feminism including African-American feminism, liberal feminism, queer-lesbian feminism, cultural difference feminism, socialist feminism, and third-wave feminism[33]. Matricentric feminism understands motherhood to be "socially and historically constructed, and positions mothering more as a practice than an identity"[32]. It also distinguishes and understands mothering and motherhood to be "culturally determined and variable, and is committed to exploring the diversity of maternal experience across race, class, culture, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, age, and geographical location"[32]. This theory advocates for the reconceptualization of motherhood, emphasizing its performative nature and dismantling essentialist categorizations that tend to exclude non-cis individuals from the discourseMatricentric feminism positions the needs and concerns of 'mothers' as the starting point for a theory and politics for women's empowerment. This theoretical choice is intended to amplify the voices of queer mothers and contribute to a broader understanding of maternal identities. The study also seeks to challenge societal norms surrounding parenting. Matricentric Feminism's emphasis on the transformative nature of motherhood resonates with the study's exploration of Mona Ahmed's journey, portraying queer mothering as a dynamic and evolving practice. By utilizing Matricentric Feminism, the study aims to deconstruct normative assumptions about gender roles within parenting, shedding light on the diverse and performative aspects of queer motherhood. Throughout the process, the researcher maintains reflexivity, recognizing potential biases and guaranteeing a balanced interpretation.

6. Gender Identity and Conceptualizations

People in society use gender identity and sexual orientation which are two completely different terminologies interchangeably in meaning. Gender identity refers to how people perceive themselves as male, female, or somewhere in between. It includes their inner sense of self as well as how they display their gender through their thoughts and actions. Gender identity is an intensely private and personal experience[30]. It refers to a "person's self-concept of their gender independent of their biological sex[28]. The latter notion is closely related to the concept of gender roles. Gender roles are the exterior expressions of one's personality that reflect their gender identity They include how individuals express their gender identification in society and conform to the societal standards and expectations connected with being either male or female[20]. Gender norms that pre-exist in society deny this basic right to a family and to raise children by imposing gender roles and assigning motherhood to only cis females. Sexual orientation refers to an individual's attraction, both sexually and romantically, to people of a particular gender[1]. Regardless of the constructed ideologies outlined above, identities are always fluid and, to some extent, provisional. As Vignoles in "Identity:Personal and Social" rightly states,"identities can be experienced as real, unitary and stable, even when they are actually constructed, multiple and fluid"[43]. Situated co-construction of identity narratives can change the prerogative. These constructed ideologies not only have an impact on the binary masses but also have an unavoidable impact on trans individuals. Merely dividing the concepts of sex and gender would be insufficient in accurately capturing these experiences, as the binary understanding of each construct would still require critical examination.

According to Borenstein (1994, p. 52), the concept of gender fluidity acknowledges the absence of boundaries or constraints in relation to gender[9]. As the researcher has discussed, gender itself is a spectrum and scientifically delineating sex is also a spectrum. The construction of predominantly binary rigid identities is a collective attempt of society to make everyone fit into these constructed norms. Trying to make people fit in predetermined boxes will always leave some individuals out of it. Not fitting into these predetermined boxes leads to community ex-communication from society as a whole, which has happened to the LGBTQIA+ community.

Upon reviewing the supplementary resources, the denial of the practice of 'motherhood' to the people belonging to the transgender community becomes evident. If having a family and wanting a family was a basic human demand and a matter of humanity, it is unjust to deny it to people based on their gender identity and or sexual orientation. Several parts of society, mostly guided by patriarchal systems that deter and discourage gender identities other than the normative cis male and cis female, remain oblivious to these issues of wanting, needing, and attempting to have a family. Only by analysing the narratives of the trans community's biographical literature, can these issues reach out to a forum of discussion and hence receive attention.   This paper attempts to harness these issues from the depths of oblivion to deconstruct patriarchal norms on the concepts of motherhood can be deconstructed. Only through the analysis and discussion of queer autobiographical literary pieces can there be a progressive change in favour of inclusivity.

6.1. Gender, Sex, and Performativity

Judith Butler argues vehemently against the social construction of gender and sex. In her exploration of gender and sex in the book 'Gender Trouble' she suggests that when gender becomes the cultural interpretation of the body, it challenges the notion that gender directly stems from biological sex. This perspective emphasizes a significant divergence between sexed bodies and the socially constructed nature of gender[11]. This asserts that gender is not a fixed entity but a constant performance.

6.1.1. Defining the term 'Transgender.'

The American Psychological Association defines 'transgender' as an umbrella term to address someone whose "gender identity, expression, or behaviour" diverges from the societal norms traditionally associated with the assigned sex at birth[2F]. Shelly.M.Park in the chapter queering and querying motherhood defines the following,

Trans mother typically refers to a person with children who identifies as female but was assigned a masculine gender at birth; trans father typically refers to someone with children who identifies as male but was assigned a feminine gender at birth. Some trans parents may resist the gender binaries encoded in "father" and "mother" and create other names for themselves as genderqueer parents[36].

7. Results

The following results are drawn from the textual analysis of *Myself Mona Ahmed*. Figure 1 depicts the multiple layers of grief experienced by Mona Ahmed.

1. Mona faces discrimination from society and her transgender community.
2. Mona's adoption of a child challenges traditional gender roles regarding motherhood
3. Despite hardships, raising Ayesha empowers Mona's womanhood.
4. Losing her daughter Ayesha aggravates Mona's disenfranchised grief.
5. When separated from her daughter, Mona resiliently desires to care for more children.
6. Mona finds purpose and agency in queer motherhood while channelling her grief into compassion for children in need despite facing oppression as a trans mother.
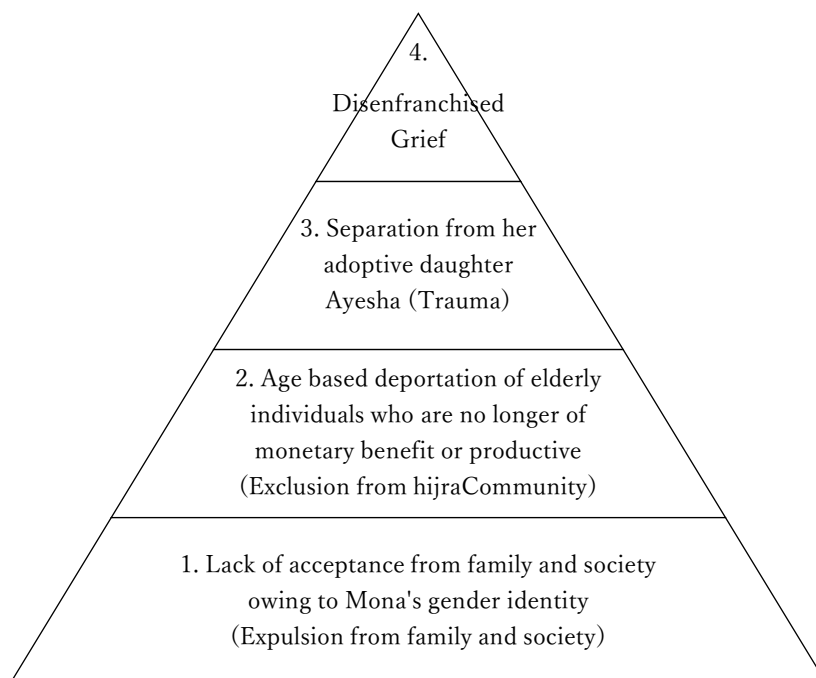

Figure 1. Layers of grief experienced by Mona Ahmed

Despite experiencing disenfranchised grief due to her separation from Ayesha, Mona demonstrates a great sense of agency, as illustrated in Table 1: Mona's Agency Through Mothering. Her autonomy is evident in her conscious decision to adopt a newborn girl, which brings her tremendous joy and fulfillment in her role as a mother. Despite facing adversity, Mona displays resilience that not only fosters acceptance but also inspires her ambition to transform her home into an orphanage, demonstrating her strong desire to make a positive social impact. Furthermore, Mona's embracing personality and compassion extend beyond human connections to include animals highlighting her dedication to community building and emphasizing how she tackles challenges with purpose.

Table 1. Mona's Agency Through Mothering

Aspect of Agency	Description
Autonomy of choice	• Mona decides to adopt a baby girl and finds happiness and fulfillment in her role as a mother
Resilience	• Separation from Ayesha causes devastation, but it also fosters resilience and acceptance.
	• Vision for transforming her home into an orphanage for an even greater social impact.
Community Building	• Mona's compassionate nature extends beyond humans to animals.
	• Showcases Mona's compassion and inclusive nature.

8. Discussion

8.1. Mona's Lived Experience of Mothering

The term 'matricentric feminism' refers to a kind of feminism that is mother-centered[32]. Matricentric theorists consider the idea of motherhood as "socially" and "historically" constructed[15]. People consider mothering a practice than an identity[32]. In this context, queer motherhood is an inclusive model that aims to destabilize the patriarchal institution of motherhood by entailing rethinking, reshaping, and re-establishing concepts and practices of normative motherhood[32].

Mona Ahmed, the protagonist of the select work is a trans woman from Delhi, who desires to be a mother or a father. "If I had a family, if I had children, then they would care for me."[41]. At the tender age of four days, she embraces the adoption of Ayesha, embarking on her journey of queer motherhood. Queer mothering challenges traditional assumptions about gender. It helps document the unique experiences of queer mothers, who often face discrimination and prejudice especially due to the intersection of various social categories like gender identity, sexual orientation, caste, class, race, etc. Mona faces various challenges along her journey, including expulsion from the community by members of her own trans community. Mothering Ayesha makes Mona feel complete "I felt, all that I had missed in life was more than made up for. Ayesha was like my own heart- beat. I truly felt that she came from within me, a part of my body."[41]. Matricentric feminism theory asserts mothering as a performance, Mona in the same context performs the act of feeding the baby: "I regret that I did not have breasts to feed her my own milk, so I used to feed her with the bottle by placing it on my chest. Then I could pretend I was feeding her myself"[41].

The ostracisation of Mona from the community is because Mona's actions or choices deviate from the traditional established norms and expectations of society and the community she belongs to.[29] This rejection could be a result of her queering for motherhood, challenging traditional notions and practices that the community adhered to. " Why do we not recognize mothers' specific perspectives as we do for other women, whether they are queer, working class, racialized, and

so forth? Why do mothers and mothering not count or matter?"[32]. The act of having her daughter taken away by her guru, Chaman, indicates the hierarchies and prejudices at play in Mona's situation. Chaman's assumption that Mona couldn't adequately care for the baby, asserts her perception of what constitutes a "good" or "bad" mother "Chaman guru does not return Ayesha to me, because she feels Ayesha will not have a good future with me. I have to obey Chaman because he is my guru, but the bad thing is that he does not let me meet Ayesha"[41].

Matricentric feminism offers a scholarly critique of the materialist viewpoint, which positions motherhood as the basis for shaping female identity. Simultaneously, it questions the assumption that maternity is an innate characteristic of women. This perspective presupposes that all women naturally know how to mother a child. and it asserts that mothering is primarily 'instinctual' rather than a product of intelligence, and it is developed through practice[32]. Matricentric feminism theory is against the essentialist categorization of good and bad mothers. The notion of 'good mother' [12] is a patriarchal ideology that dictates only biological mothers are capable of taking proper care of children, that mothers must provide care 24/7, that mothers should always prioritize their children's needs over their own, that mothers should find complete satisfaction, fulfillment, and personal fulfillment in motherhood, and that mothers should devote excessive amounts of time, energy, and financial resources to raising their children. Mothers bear complete responsibility for their children yet lack the authority to make decisions and properly parent. The patriarchal institutions constrain and frequently gender mothers' expectations, confining them to good and bad mothers, emphasising the importance of confronting and rethinking these standards in order to establish a more inclusive and equitable image of motherhood[32].

8.2. Disenfranchised Grief of Separation

Mona experiences various layers of disenfranchised grief throughout her life. Disenfranchised grief, as defined by Kenneth J. Doka , refers to a loss that is 'not openly acknowledged, socially mourned, or publicly supported [12]. Mona's experiences reflect the various stages of disenfranchised grief that she goes through, resulting in a great sense of agony and suffering. Mona in her early stage of life faced rejection from her own family due to her gender identity. This rejection signifies a loss of acceptance and support from those who are supposed to provide love and understanding. The lack of acknowledgment and mourning for this loss from her family intensifies her grief, as her authentic self is not recognized or valued within her closest relations. Furthermore, Mona encounters rejection from the trans community as she grows older and can no longer contribute financially. This rejection based on age demonstrates how societal expectations and norms can exclude individuals who are no longer deemed valuable or productive. Mona's inability to continue contributing financially and being barred from performing blessings has led to a loss of community support and connection which intensifies her grief. This grief is further aggravated by the lack of acknowledgment or support for her loss, both from her community and from her loved ones.

The most devastating loss for Mona is when her guru Chamman has taken away Ayesha from her and feels that Mona couldn't take good care of the baby. This separation from her child represents a profound disruption of the mother-child bond, and it subsequently leads to an irreparable loss that is not acknowledged or socially mourned, leaving her to navigate the grief of losing her daughter in isolation. "First that man master betrayed me, then they took Ayesha away from me, and Chaman guru swallowed me up like a big fish swallows a small fish"[41].

Mona's experiences encompass multiple layers of disenfranchised grief, as she faces rejection, loss, and separation in various aspects of her life. The lack of societal acknowledgment, mourning, and support for her losses exacerbates her

suffering, reinforcing the concept of disenfranchised grief. Mona's journey highlights the importance of recognizing and validating the grief of individuals from other gender whose losses fall outside of socially accepted norms and expectations. Furthermore, society is obsessed with the physical aspects of transgender experiences, particularly castration while failing to know the importance of understanding and empathizing with the emotional and psychological aspects of transgender individuals' lives. "All the world wants to know is about our castration, but not how we feel our emotions"[41]. This quote emphasises the immediate need to adopt a holistic and empathetic approach when addressing transgender issues. It highlights the necessity to move beyond the sensationalization of physical transformations and delve into a more profound exploration of the emotional and psychological dimensions that define the experiences of transgender individuals.

8.3. Agency Through Mothering

Mona faced various problems as a trans adoptive mother while raising Ayesha. She had already faced rejection from her family and society for her gender identity (trans woman). Mona could feel a sense of contentment and joy in her role as a mother after adopting Ayesha.

I always had a deep desire to be a mother or father, to have someone of my own. When I took Ayesha in my arms, I felt complete. My first reaction was tremendous fear, and I could not sleep all night, thinking, "How will I bring up this child alone?" But when she was in my arms, I felt a happiness of a very different kind. I felt she was already part of me, that I was now responsible for her. I felt a human being's emotion. I distributed sweets in the whole neighborhood and recited the azaan (Muslim prayer) in her ears and had her head shaved, as is the custom here. At night, we had a music party. I danced with joy, knowing that I was now a complete woman.[41]

Despite the difficulties and obstacles that Mona encounters, from society and from her own transgender community 'mothering' gives her a tremendous sense of fulfillment and delight. Mona believed that motherhood was one of the only ways to feel "complete" womanhood[41]. "Ayesha fulfilled my dream of becoming a mother"[41]. She was able to build a caring and nurturing home for Ayesha through the adoption process, providing her with all the attention and support she needs.

I brought her up with all the love that is humanly possible. I never even scolded her. I wanted to give her all the world's happiness. In Ayesha, I felt, all that I had missed in life was more than made up for. Ayesha was like my own heart- beat. I truly felt that she came from within me, a part of my body[41].

Owing to jealousy of seeing Ayesha and Mona close, guru Chamman decides to separate them and takes Ayesha away from her, alleging that Mona is incapable of taking good care of Ayesha. Mona becomes devastated when she realises that she can no longer be close to her child. Mona feels loss and abandonment after her daughter's separation, but she eventually recognizes that she will convert the building she created for Ayesha into an orphanage and be a mother to hundreds of children not just one. Mona demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of adversity following her separation from her daughter Ayesha. She responded to this difficult situation with a mindset of acceptance and a focus on broader societal issues. Specifically, she had the idea of improving educational and housing facilities for underprivileged children. Mona's compassionate nature extended not only to her fellow human beings but also to animals, whom she welcomed into her residence. In addition, she exhibited kindness towards strangers in accommodation

Through Ayesha, through all the animals, through the crazy ladies in the graveyard, Mona has repeatedly tried to recreate a family for herself. Once again, she has an army of animals, and all the little children living around the graveyard are gathered around her TV set. Yet her inner loneliness is eating her up, the feeling that she belongs nowhere, an outcast among the outcasts. When I tell her that she is such a unique person, that she would be a misfit in any society because of her very unique point of view, she is not convinced"[41].

Mona defies social standards and expectations by embracing parenthood in her own unique way. She finds happiness in questioning conventional notions of family and motherhood, proving that love and maternal attachments may extend beyond biological ties. By embracing motherhood in her own unique way, Mona is able to challenge societal norms and expectations. She finds happiness in defying conventional notions of family and motherhood, demonstrating that love and parental bonds can extend beyond biological ties. Mona's experience exemplifies the transformative ability of parenthood and the substantial impact it can have on an individual's life, even in the face of adversity. It aligns with Dana E Rudoph's (2008) idea of queer motherhood which empowers mothers. It showcases the resilience and agency of queer individuals who navigate societal prejudice and find fulfillment in their chosen path of motherhood.

9. Limitation of the Study

This study has focused on the queer mothering experience from the perspective of adoptive trans women as portrayed in *Myself Mona Ahmed*. It is essential to acknowledge that queer mothering experiences include a wide spectrum of non-cis individuals, including gays, lesbians, bisexuals, asexual people, trans men, transsexuals and intersex each with their distinct challenges and narratives. This research, therefore, may not fully capture the entirety of these diverse experiences. This study has limited its focus on trans women within the context of adoption and offers a specific vantage point. The realm of queer motherhood extends far beyond this narrow scope, encompassing a rich tapestry of identities, including but not limited to cisgender women, genderqueer individuals, non-binary parents, and others within the LGBTQ+ spectrum. Future research should explore and celebrate diverse sexualities and their parenting experiences as they contribute unique insights and challenges to the discourse. Adoption practices among the Indian hijra community are an interesting area of further study, particularly the perspectives of trans people as adoptive parents. Further research can shed light on alternative family formation, structures, cultural differences, and the interplay of gender and adoption in this society. By broadening the scope of research in this field, we can attain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of queer mothering experiences, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and equitable representation of all non-cis mothers.

10. Conclusion

This paper attempts to challenge the conventional understanding of parenting by elucidating the concept of mothering by analysing the select work *Myself Mona Ahmed* . By exploring the unique experiences of Mona Ahmed in her story, the study argues that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender mothers experience specific challenges but they are also resilient. The paper argues that the experiences of queer mothers can assist in questioning conventional gender and sexual identity stereotypes, especially in the institution of motherhood. It also highlights the resistance and pushback that individuals may face when they deviate from societal norms and seek to redefine motherhood in unconventional ways.

Through examining Mona's journey, it becomes evident that she initially gains agency and joy in life through mothering

Ayesha. However, Mona experiences profound loss and disenfranchised grief when she loses her daughter. Nevertheless, with the support of her friend Dayanita Singh and her own endurance, she eventually finds resilience and decides to transform the place that she was building for Ayesha into an orphanage where she can be a 'mother' to a hundred children. Exploring the transformative experience of a transgender woman engaging in mothering becomes crucial in providing inspiration and representation for other community members. Thus, while exposing systemic inequities, the text also reveals possibilities for inclusive change through the lens of matricentric theory. It showcases how re-envisioning mothering as a nurturing practice rooted in social justice rather than biological essentialism can itself be an act of agency and resistance.

Furthermore, this paper highlights the significance of queer motherhood, challenges societal norms, and emphasizes the transformative power of embracing diverse experiences of mothering. By shedding light on the resilience and struggles of individuals like Mona Ahmed, it contributes to a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of motherhood, fostering support and acceptance for queer parents and diverse family structures. Resisting heteronormative standards of "good" mothering, queer mothering becomes a form of empowerment. It acknowledges that when individuals are deprived of the opportunity to exercise their agency in mothering, it can lead to grief and disenfranchised trauma. The narrative also embraces the notions of queer motherhood, challenging the idea that all mothers must be women and disrupting the belief that there is a single prescribed method for creating a family. Furthermore, this perspective suggests that the desire and ability to engage in motherhood are not only attributed to a specific gender, implying that the ability to mother is not fundamentally linked to one sex more than the other. In addition, it questions the idea that familial relationships and kinship are only determined by biological ties or blood links. This challenges the idealization of essentialization, normalization, naturalization, and biologicalization within the context of motherhood.

The paper encourages further research and discussion on the experiences of queer mothers, promoting inclusivity and recognition of diverse family structures. Researchers can undertake a comprehensive study of the parenting experiences of trans men and people of different sexual orientations. They could include additional viewpoints in future studies, such as intersectionality, queer theory, and trauma theory. This would broaden the reach of the study and allow researchers to gain insights into the parenting experiences of trans men and people of various sexualities, such as gay, lesbian, and bisexual people. This would result in a broader understanding of the diverse realities of queer parenting

"Queering motherhood means that not all mothers are women or that there is one right or correct way to create a family. It means as well that the desire and ability to mother is not innate to one sex over the other and that kinship is not defined only by blood. Queering motherhood, thus, makes possible the very identities and practices needed for empowered modes of mothering that were discussed earlier: a multitude of maternal identities, diverse family formations, and a variety of motherhood practices"[3].

In terms of social service and awareness, the research advocates for increased inclusivity and recognition of diverse family structures led by queer parents. This call for awareness encourages further research on the parenting experiences of trans women and individuals with various sexual orientations, fostering support and acceptance. This paper underscores the disenfranchised grief experienced by those who are denied the opportunity to express their freedom in mothering. Finally, it suggests advocating for the inclusion of diverse mothering experiences in educational curriculums and organizing community celebrations to acknowledge the resilient attempts of the trans community to create families despite societal challenges. As Kuri observes "Mothering experiences are often silenced in course curriculums, practice settings, and

research agendas"[16].Kuri's highlighting of the current absence of such content in curricula underscores the presence of gaps in our education system. The present study, in compliance with E.R. Boskey's idea, promotes the integration of gender identity understanding into new sexuality education curricula, with a specific emphasis on transgender and other gender-nonconforming identities[8].

In conclusion 'Queer Motherhood' and 'Mothering' are a few similar ideas that demand attention for discussion as they advocate non-patriarchal systems of familial affiliations. The concept of motherhood through trans subjectivities reinforces the idea of motherhood and opens new avenues of understanding[17]. This can challenge the traditional patriarchal conception of a family and the general social systems which are too quick to be judgemental, dismissive, and hostile to the people attempting to break these gender roles in the familial structure[24]. The Transgender community's attempts to create a family despite social adversity represent a resistance against the deeply ingrained gender stereotypes and patriarchal structures, which must be acknowledged and celebrated as an essential step towards promoting inclusivity and overcoming systemic discrimination.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest with this research article.

Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to ethical guidelines to ensure respectful interpretation and analysis of text. Ethical considerations primarily revolve around maintaining confidentiality and narrative integrity since there are no human participants.

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