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“I Am Trying to Raise a Better Human”: Parenting Amid Uncertainty Among Queer Parents

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To examine how queer parents assigned female at birth (AFAB) navigate early parenting amid a sociopolitical climate characterized by uncertainty.

Background: Recent U.S. policy shifts affecting LGBTQ+ rights and reproductive autonomy have created heightened uncertainty for marginalized families.

Method: Using qualitative content analysis of survey responses from 97 U.S.-based parents, we explored (a) socio-politically focused concerns queer AFAB parents hold for their children and (b) how these events shape parenting practices (e.g., expressing values, preparing children for bias, and navigating identities).

Results: Parents described concerns connected to three themes: bias and infringement on rights (e.g., bodily autonomy, identity-based discrimination); uncertainty about the future (e.g., general, climate, and economic precarity); and safety and protection (e.g., physical safety). They responded with practices such as fostering acceptance and equality (e.g., exposure to diverse perspectives, teaching kindness, and cultivating emotional well-being) and prioritizing safety (e.g., shielding children, teaching safety, and vigilance in public spaces). Parenting involved anticipatory stress and heightened vigilance, particularly for parents raising girls or children who may identify as LGBTQ+. Variation by geography, social class, and gender identity highlighted how proximity to harm shaped protective and activist strategies.

Conclusion: For queer AFAB parents, parenting functioned as both response to and resistance against systemic threats.

Implications or Recommendations: Therapists and policymakers should recognize marginalized parents' emotional labor and address structural inequities shaping parenting.

1 | Introduction

Over the past several years, the U.S. has proposed and/or enacted a number of laws and policies that many view as discriminatory, sparking widespread social unrest, controversy, and fear (American Civil Liberties Union 2025). These laws and policies, which range from limitations on sex and gender diversity curricula to restrictions on gender-affirming healthcare, have ignited debates surrounding human rights and equality, contributing to an environment in which individuals with marginalized

sexual and gender identities report elevated discrimination, mental distress, and negative experiences in healthcare systems (KFF 2024). One example is Florida's Parental Rights in Education Act or “Don't Say Gay” bill, passed in March of 2022, which limits instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity in schools (MAP 2024). Similarly, 2024 saw 49 anti-LGBTQ+ bills passed into law nationwide, many of which target trans/nonbinary individuals by restricting access to gender-affirming healthcare, limiting local protections, and permitting discrimination in the name of religious freedom (ACLU 2025).

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Such laws and policies reflect a broader cultural backlash against values of inclusion and equity, signaling growing societal intolerance toward LGBTQ+ individuals, people of color, and other marginalized groups. This legislation fosters a sense of uncertainty that permeates daily life, influencing public discourse, interpersonal interactions, and the safety and well-being of diverse families (Gabriele-Black et al. 2021; Hatzenbuehler 2010). Major sociopolitical developments—including the U.S. Supreme Court's 2022 reversal of *Roe v. Wade*—have intensified this hostile environment. Beyond rolling back reproductive rights, these changes have raised alarm about the erosion of autonomy and legal protections central to LGBTQ+ people and other vulnerable communities (Gutmacher Institute 2024). For queer cisgender (cis) women and nonbinary individuals assigned female at birth (AFAB), particularly those parenting young children, these shifts contribute to heightened anxiety around access to contraception, abortion, and fertility care, as well as greater exposure to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (Powell 2022; Goldberg 2024). Recent political shifts (e.g., the 2024 election) expanding religious exemptions and limiting federal safeguards further exacerbate these challenges, creating acute conditions for parents whose bodies and identities are directly implicated in reproductive governance (ACLU 2025; Bernstein et al. 2024; Pew Research Center 2023).

1.1 | Parenting Strategies and Values in LGBTQ+ Families Facing Sociopolitical Stress

Emerging research has begun to examine how LGBTQ+ parents navigate parenting in increasingly uncertain times, particularly in the face of discriminatory legislation. For instance, Goldberg and Abreu (2023) found that LGBTQ parents in Florida employed a range of strategies to respond to the stress created by the Parental Rights in Education Act, including fostering activism and collective resistance, emphasizing family diversity and pride, and preparing their children to cope with stigma. This study also revealed that LGBTQ+ families with intersecting marginalized identities—such as families of color and lower-income families—are often especially harmed by such legislation. Such harms are compounded by geographic, economic, and structural barriers that restrict access to affirming care, legal rights, and community inclusion, isolating families (Goldberg and Abreu 2023; Radis and Nadan 2021).

At the same time, some families experience heightened scrutiny based not only on their identities, but on how visible those identities are perceived to be. While parents in same-gender relationships, for example, might encounter heightened visibility and thus greater discrimination, bisexual parents in different-gender relationships may contend with different stressors, including bisexual erasure and invisibility, which can complicate their efforts to access affirming resources or community (Flanders et al. 2018; Goldberg 2023). Their queer/bisexual identity may indeed be salient to them, shaping their parenting strategies and values (Flanders et al. 2018); but at the same time, they may lack access to LGBTQ+-affirming spaces, feel excluded from queer parenting communities, or struggle to be recognized as part of the broader LGBTQ+ community due to assumptions based on their partnership structure (Manley and Ross 2020).

The stress of navigating politically volatile environments can also take a toll on LGBTQ+ parents' mental health, often manifesting as anxiety about children's safety and future in a society that may not affirm their family structure. Based on their meta-analyses, Prendergast and MacPhee (2018) contend that minority stress, particularly when rooted in both enacted and anticipated stigma, significantly impacts LGBTQ+ parents' well-being and parenting behaviors. This stress can lead to hypervigilance and protective strategies—such as limiting children's exposure to potentially hostile environments or increasing parent engagement in advocacy efforts. The interplay between sociopolitical threat and parenting is further complicated by intersecting identities: as Radis and Nadan (2021) illustrate, African American lesbian mothers often navigate compounded forms of marginalization (e.g., anti-Black racism, homophobia, and gendered expectations of caregiving) that shape their constructions of risk and well-being. Rather than experiencing these stressors in isolation, LGBTQ+ parents, particularly those of color, must contend with overlapping structural forces that influence not only their psychological health, but the choices they make to protect their families (e.g., where to live, how to teach about safety, and how to cultivate affirming home environments) in an increasingly unpredictable climate.

1.2 | Family Socialization and Parenting Responses

In addition to protective strategies—including limiting their children's exposure to hostile sociopolitical environments (Radis and Nadan 2021)—LGBTQ+ parents often engage in intentional socialization practices aimed at helping their children navigate their unique family structure within a heteronormative and, at times, unsupportive, sociopolitical context (Averett 2016; Simon and Farr 2022). LGBTQ+ parents may feel that they are walking a fine line, balancing the perceived need to prepare their children for the reality of societal homophobia while also cultivating pride in their family identity (Breshears 2011; Goldberg and Smith 2024; Wyman Battalen et al. 2019). At the same time, some LGBTQ+ parents express caution around engaging in such preparatory messaging too soon or too often, and seek to avoid overemphasizing difference or burdening their children prematurely (Goldberg et al. 2016). Importantly, visibility also shapes these decisions, as parents in visibly queer relationships may face more overt judgment than those in different-gender partnerships, thereby necessitating additional vigilance and strategic socialization to protect their children from potential bias (Flanders et al. 2018). For queer AFAB parents in particular, these socialization decisions are also made alongside heightened concerns about bodily autonomy and healthcare access, both of which are directly to their AFAB status (Carpenter 2021).

Indeed, socialization efforts related to preparing children for potential bias may vary based on a number of factors—such as children's developmental stage, with parents of older children more likely to engage in explicit discussions around societal stigma and legal discrimination, suggesting that perceptions of children's emotional and cognitive readiness shape these conversations (Goldberg and Smith 2016). Longitudinal work supports this possibility, showing that children begin to recognize stigma related to their parents' LGBTQ+ identity as early as age

five, with awareness rising significantly into adolescence (Bos et al. 2023). These findings underscore how growing cognitive capacity influences not only what children can understand, but also how and when parents choose to engage in conversations about identity and stigma. At the same time, emerging work suggests that these dynamics are not shaped by age alone; rather, parent and child characteristics (e.g., parent gender identity; child developmental stage) intersect to influence how stigma is anticipated and addressed (Goldberg and Smith 2024).

Gender and sexual identity, alongside social class, shape how parents approach socialization, often in ways that are further nuanced in the case of LGBTQ+ parenthood. For instance, while LGBTQ+ parents inherently resist heteronormativity through their family structure, they may nonetheless conform to dominant gender norms in parenting, particularly under public scrutiny or in the face of institutionalized hostility (Berkowitz and Ryan 2011; Goldberg 2009). Adding additional complexity, parenting practices are also shaped by social class. Differences in education and income give rise to distinct approaches, with middle-class parents more likely to cultivate their children's interests and institutional engagement, while working-class parents often emphasize unstructured growth and resilience (Lareau 2011). Drawing on qualitative interviews, E. W. Kane (2012) highlights how economic security can open space for greater acceptance of diverse expressions of gender and identity, whereas financial constraints may push parents toward reinforcing conventional norms as a protective strategy.

Importantly, most of the research on the classed nature of parenting practices assumes heterosexual parenthood, overlooking how LGBTQ+ parents' own marginalized identities may interact with class position to reshape these dynamics (E. W. Kane 2012). Though not explicitly addressing social class, Logan et al. (2025) found that LGBTQ+ parents often engage in a nuanced negotiation between safeguarding their children from societal pressures and encouraging authentic gender expression, which can lead to parenting strategies that prioritize child autonomy. As such, this work illustrates how parenting strategies informed by sexuality and gender can potentially complicate classed approaches to parenting. Taken together, these findings suggest that parenting practices are not shaped by gender, sexuality, and social class in isolation, but are impacted by their intersections, which uniquely position LGBTQ+ parents to both challenge and reproduce dominant norms depending on their social context.

1.3 | The Emotional Landscape of LGBTQ+ Parenting

Emerging research increasingly highlights how sociopolitical stressors shape the broader psychological and relational contexts in which LGBTQ+ parents raise their children. These stressors often manifest not only as direct minority stress—chronic stress arising from societal stigma and discrimination—but as vicarious or secondary stress, where parents experience distress as a result of children's marginalized identities or encounters with prejudice (Mackenzie 2021). For example, sexual minority parents may experience heightened emotional labor as they advocate for trans, nonbinary, or gender-expansive children, confronting hostility while also managing their own marginalized

identities (Averett 2016; Logan et al. 2025). Among queer AFAB parents, this emotional labor unfolds within a context where minority stress tied to sexuality and gender converges with healthcare discrimination and the gendered political regulation of reproductive bodies, further intensifying caregiving demands (Carpenter 2021).

Across contexts, these compounded stressors are consistently associated with increased emotional burden, relational strain, and feelings of vulnerability among sexual minority parents, particularly when legal recognition or institutional support is lacking (Bower-Brown and Zadeh 2020). At the same time, findings underscore the protective role of community-based coping strategies and relational resilience, suggesting that shared support networks and affirming environments can buffer the psychological toll of such stress and help sustain healthy parent-child dynamics under duress (Mackenzie 2021; Bower-Brown and Zadeh 2020). These insights point to the need for structural and cultural shifts that foster more affirming parenting ecosystems for LGBTQ+ families navigating intersecting axes of class, race, and parental invisibility.

1.4 | The Impact of Sociopolitical Unrest on Children in LGBTQ+ Families

Just as LGBTQ+ parents face distinct stressors in the current climate, their children are also impacted. Children raised by LGBTQ+ parents may encounter stigma, peer discrimination, and institutional bias in public settings, such as schools and their communities, which can contribute to elevated stress, anxiety, and challenges around identity development (Goldberg and Smith 2024; van Gelderen et al. 2013). These impacts may be intensified in regions where anti-LGBTQ+ legislation or rhetoric is prevalent, leading children to internalize fears about their families' safety or legitimacy (Goldberg and Garcia 2020).

Importantly, the presence of stressors does not guarantee negative outcomes. Protective factors—including affirming parental communication, exposure to inclusive peer environments, and engagement in family-based advocacy—have been shown to buffer against these negative outcomes (Bos and Van Balen 2008; Goldberg and Allen 2013). For instance, studies suggest that children of LGBTQ+ parents often develop strong capacities for empathy, resilience, and social awareness when raised in households that prioritize open communication and pride in family identity (van Gelderen et al. 2013). In turn, these qualities may serve to reduce the likelihood of negative psychological outcomes (e.g., anxiety, low self-esteem), as well as improve children's capacity to navigate prejudice or exclusion. Inclusive schools and community spaces that validate diverse family structures can also promote children's well-being, even amid wider sociopolitical hostility or peer-based stigma (Vyncke et al. 2014).

1.5 | A Focus on Queer AFAB Parents

While the existing literature and policy discussions often refer broadly to "LGBTQ+" parents, this study narrows its focus to queer cis women and AFAB nonbinary parents in order to

examine how sociopolitical threats to both sexual/gender identity and reproductive autonomy converge in the lives of those whose bodies are directly implicated in current legal and political debates. These individuals face layered challenges as they navigate early parenting while contending with threats to bodily autonomy, legal recognition, and identity visibility. In addition, while some research has established that LGBTQ+ parents adopt strategies to foster resistance to stigma, less is known about how queer AFAB parents enact these strategies through the ways they express values, prepare children for bias, and navigate their identities, especially during their children's early years, when parents are actively forming caregiving practices, identity narratives, and protective approaches in real time (Goldberg 2023). Studying this early period allows us to capture how queer AFAB parents respond to the current sociopolitical climate at the moment these strategies are first taking shape, rather than after they have stabilized over time.

A further limitation of research on LGBTQ+ parents is its disproportionate focus on same-gender couples, overlooking non-monosexual parents (e.g., bisexual, pansexual, and queer), particularly those in different-gender relationships, who often experience invisibility and erasure (Ross et al. 2012; Flanders et al. 2016). These parents may avoid some overt homophobia but still face stigma tied to assumptions of heterosexuality and pressure to conform to normative parenting roles (Brekhus 1996; Yoshino 2000). At the same time, their perceived invisibility may afford greater flexibility in supporting gender-expansive expression in children without the added scrutiny faced by more visibly queer families (Averett 2016; E. Kane 2006).

Importantly, these parenting experiences unfold in a broader contemporary landscape of shrinking reproductive freedom, where access to abortion, contraception, and fertility care is increasingly restricted (Guttmacher Institute 2024; Powell 2022). For cis women and AFAB nonbinary parents, especially those with marginalized sexual identities (e.g., queer parents), these constraints amplify stress during the early parenting period and complicate long-term planning, health access, and autonomy (Powell 2022). Despite these intersecting pressures, the parenting practices of queer AFAB parents—how they express values, prepare children for bias, and navigate their identities—remain underexplored. The current study addresses this gap by examining how queer AFAB parents of young children respond to the present U.S. sociopolitical climate. Specifically, we explore the fears and concerns they hold for their families and how recent sociopolitical events shape their parenting practices.

1.6 | Theoretical Perspective

This study is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological framework, minority stress theory (Meyer 1995), and the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991). The ecological model emphasizes the multilayered contexts that shape human development, from macro-level forces such as national politics to more proximal settings like family and school. This framework enables an understanding of how intersecting systems influence the parenting experiences of people with marginalized identities, such as queer AFAB people. By situating caregivers within their broader ecological systems, this model offers

a nuanced analysis of how sociopolitical forces interact with parenting practices during a time of heightened social unrest and inequity.

This study also draws on minority stress theory, originally articulated by Brooks (1981) and later expanded by Meyer (1995) to explore the chronic stress experienced by individuals with marginalized identities in a U.S. sociopolitical context shaped by racism, homophobia, and transphobia. Minority stress theory posits that stigma-related stressors (including discrimination, anticipated rejection, and internalized stigma) operate above and beyond general life stressors to negatively affect health and well-being, particularly among sexual minority women (Brooks 1981; Rich et al. 2020). Through this lens, the experiences of queer AFAB parents are understood as being deeply shaped by structural and cultural forces that devalue their identities.

Finally, our study is informed by an intersectional framework (Crenshaw 1991), which reveals how overlapping systems of oppression and privilege (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, and class) shape lived experience. We examine how parents with multiply marginalized identities navigate parenting in a sociopolitical climate marked by threats to bodily autonomy, delegitimization of their identities, and limited access to resources like healthcare and education. An intersectional feminist lens (Crenshaw 1991) further underscores how AFAB parents are parenting in a sociopolitical context where reproductive autonomy is increasingly constrained, calling attention to the gendered power structures that shape who is granted legitimacy and control over their bodies, families, and parenting decisions (Goldberg et al. 2008). This lens allows for a more justice-oriented understanding of the layered challenges these families face, and the strategies they use to foster resilience, advocacy, and care within their communities.

1.7 | The Current Study

1.7.1 | Purpose and Research Questions

This study draws from a larger survey-based project conducted in the spring of 2023, which explored how the current U.S. sociopolitical climate influences LGBTQ+ parents' experiences, help-seeking behaviors, and early parenting practices. The broader sample ($N=123$) included individuals who had become parents to at least one child within the past 4 years. Using qualitative content analysis applied to open-ended survey items, this paper focuses on a subset of queer AFAB participants ($N=97$) (82% cis, 18% nonbinary). This study addresses two research questions: (1) What socio-politically-focused fears and concerns do contemporary queer AFAB parents hold for their children and families? (2) How do recent sociopolitical events (e.g., the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, gun violence, etc.) shape their parenting practices (e.g., the ways they express values, prepare for bias, and navigate identities) with young children? By examining these questions, this study aims to illuminate how queer AFAB parents navigate the dual challenges of early parenthood, and a socio-political climate marked by heightened uncertainty.

TABLE 1 | Demographic characteristics of participants ($N=97$).

Demographic characteristic	<i>n</i> (%)
Gender	
Cisgender woman	80 (82.4%)
Nonbinary/Genderqueer	17 (17.5%)
Age	
19–24	19 (19.5%)
25–30	39 (40.2%)
31–36	28 (28.9%)
37–42	10 (10.3%)
Sexual orientation	
Bisexual	62 (63.9%)
Pansexual	17 (17.5%)
Lesbian	5 (5.2%)
Queer	2 (2.1%)
Something else (e.g., asexual & lesbian)	11 (11.3%)
Race	
White	76 (78.4%)
Person of color	21 (21.6%)
Relationship status	
Not partnered or married	18 (18.6%)
Partnered or married	79 (81.4%)
Family income	
Less than \$25,000	26 (26.8%)
\$25,001–\$50,000	26 (26.8%)
\$50,001–\$75,000	21 (21.6%)
\$75,001–\$100,000	12 (12.4%)
More than \$100,001	12 (12.4%)
Education	
Less than high school	2 (2.1%)
High school/GED	20 (20.6%)
Some college/associate's degree	45 (46.4%)
College degree	19 (19.6%)
Master's degree	10 (10.3%)
PhD/MD/JD	1 (1.0%)
Geographic region	
Northeast	17 (17.5%)
Midwest	26 (26.8%)
South	42 (43.2%)
West	12 (12.4%)

(Continues)

TABLE 1 | (Continued)

Demographic characteristic	<i>n</i> (%)
Number of children	
One	65 (67.0%)
Two	23 (23.7%)
Three or four	9 (9.3%)
Pathways to parenthood (at least one child via each pathway)	
Donor Insemination (DI), gestational parent	5 (5.2%)
DI, non-gestational parent	2 (2.1%)
Intercourse with partner	87 (89.7%)
Intercourse with someone other than partner	4 (4.1%)
Other (e.g., adoption, assault)	6 (6.2%)

2 | Method

Our sample ($N=97$) consisted of 80 cis women (82.4%) and 17 nonbinary AFAB people (17.5%), all of whom identified within the queer (or LBQ+) umbrella. Most identified as bisexual ($n=62$; 64%) or pansexual ($n=17$; 18%), while others identified as lesbian ($n=5$; 5%), queer ($n=2$; 2%), or something else ($n=11$; 11%; e.g., asexual and lesbian, questioning, demisexual). Among cis parents, 59 (74%) were bisexual, queer, or pansexual (BQ+) women with cis men partners, 10 (13%) were unpartnered BQ+ women, 5 (6%) were LBQ+ women partnered with cis women, 4 (5%) were LBQ+ women with nonbinary partners, and 2 (3%) were LBQ+ women partnered with trans women. Among non-binary parents, 10 (59%) were LBQ+ individuals with cis men partners, 3 (18%) were LBQ+ people with nonbinary partners, 3 (18%) were LBQ+ people with trans women partners, and 1 (6%) was lesbian and unpartnered.

Most participants (78%) identified as White; 22% identified as people of color. In terms of subjective social status (SSS), 60% identified as lower class or working class, 21% identified as lower middle class, and 19% as middle or upper middle class. Participants were geographically diverse, with 18% residing in the Northeast, 27% in the Midwest, 43% in the South, and 12% in the West (see full demographics in Table 1).

2.1 | Procedure

Participants for this study were recruited through Prolific and compensated for their participation. Eligibility criteria required participants to identify as LGBTQ+ and to have become a parent to at least one child within the previous 4 years. By using broad inclusion criteria across sexual and gender identities and recent parenting status, the sampling approach allowed for the inclusion of a range of parenting experiences within the LGBTQ+ community. The larger survey included both closed-ended demographic items and several open-ended questions about participants' family building, pregnancy, birth, and early

parenting stages, in the current U.S. sociopolitical climate. The present analysis draws primarily from these open-ended responses while also using demographic items to contextualize intersectional features of the sample. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from Clark University's Institutional Review Board, and all participants provided informed consent prior to participation.

2.1.1 | Sample Selection

This study employed purposive sampling to select a subsample of participants from the larger LGBTQ+ parenting survey. Such purposive sampling is commonly employed in qualitative studies to ensure depth and relevance of insight within specific subpopulations (Patton 2015). Specifically, we focused on cis women and AFAB nonbinary individuals who identified as sexual minorities and had welcomed a child in the past 4 years. This sampling strategy was guided by the study's aim to highlight the unique parenting experiences of those navigating intersecting marginalized identities within a hostile sociopolitical context. In line with best practices in qualitative family research, we prioritized clarity and transparency in the sample description, ensuring that key participant characteristics were documented and relevant to the research questions (Roy et al. 2015). Selected participants offered a rich dataset for exploring how early parenting intersects with sociopolitical instability, especially within sexual minority communities that are often underrepresented in family research (Goldberg et al. 2014).

2.2 | Data Analysis

We employed qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff 2004) to analyze parents' open-ended responses in the survey. Content analysis is a widely used method for interpreting textual data, enabling the identification of themes and patterns through a structured process of coding and categorization. This technique allows for a deeper understanding of the explicit and implicit meanings embedded in participants' responses (Bogdan and Biklen 2007). In the current study, coding focused on uncovering both the surface-level content and underlying sentiments, particularly regarding how parents navigate childrearing and address concerns within a sociopolitical climate marked by unrest. Although our analytic approach was qualitative, we report descriptive percentages to indicate the prevalence of themes across participants, consistent with qualitative content analysis approaches that allow for limited quantification of coded categories (Krippendorff 2004).

The primary aim of our analysis was to examine the range of concerns shaping early parenting experiences amid widespread sociopolitical instability, as well as the practices (e.g., efforts to express values, prepare children for bias, and navigate their identities) that parents employed in response to those concerns. Although the survey did not include a direct prompt asking parents to list their sociopolitical fears or concerns, prior literature on minority stress, family socialization, and LGBTQ+ parenting informed our expectation that such concerns would be embedded within parents' descriptions of how sociopolitical events shaped their parenting. As such, we treated these concerns as

an analytic focus from the outset. Additionally, specific attention was given to parents' reflections on how political and social changes over the past 3–6 years, such as the passing of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and the limiting of reproductive rights (e.g., the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*), have influenced their parenting practices. The survey questions that guided this focus were: (1) How has the social and political unrest and upheaval of the past 3–6 years impacted whether, when, and how you wanted to become a parent? (2) How did it affect your ideas about and outlook on parenthood? (3) How has the social and political unrest of the past 3–6 years affected how you parent your children? (e.g., the lessons you try to instill; concerns and actions related to safety). Notably, the examples provided were intended to clarify the scope of parenting practices rather than to constrain the types of responses participants could provide.

The first step in the analysis involved reading through all the open-ended responses to become familiar with the data and identify overarching themes. Each response was then carefully annotated, using line-by-line coding to capture phrases and ideas relevant to key themes such as safety concerns, social justice, and values or morals. These codes were categorized under broader thematic clusters, with each code representing different facets of parents' responses (e.g., concerns, strategies). This process was guided by our initial research questions and sensitizing concepts drawn from prior literature (Goldberg and Allen 2015), particularly work suggesting that LGBTQ+ parents engage in protective and values-based socialization in response to anticipated stigma, safety threats, and structural inequities. These concepts sensitized us to attend not only to parenting strategies, but to the underlying fears and concerns embedded within queer AFAB parents' experiences. As a research team with divergent identities in several key realms (parenthood status, generational status, and nationality), we also remained reflexive about our own positionalities and how our assumptions may have shaped interpretation, consistent with best practices for enhancing analytic rigor (Morrow 2005).

Consistent with our sensitizing framework, we anticipated that parents' descriptions of their parenting practices would be intertwined with expressions of underlying sociopolitical fears and concerns. As the analysis progressed, themes were organized in an effort to identify connections and intersections. For example, among the overarching set of parental "concerns" were "safety" and "bodily autonomy," which often overlapped, with parents balancing efforts to personally protect their children from harm (e.g., gun violence, harassment) while preparing them to advocate for themselves. More broadly, we identified several types of sociopolitical concerns which we organized in terms of their relationship to parenting strategies (e.g., identity-based discrimination, and a focus on nurturing acceptance and equality; threats to reproductive rights, and a focus on safety and security). After developing an initial coding scheme, we engaged in an iterative process of recoding the data with the goal of reaching a deeper, detailed understanding of analytic patterns. This process revealed how certain themes varied based on factors such as location, race, parent and child gender identities, and child age. Throughout, we engaged in ongoing dialogue to resolve interpretive discrepancies and ensure that themes remained grounded in participants' words and experiences, enhancing the trustworthiness and transparency of our analysis (Goldberg and Allen 2015; Guba and Lincoln 2005).

3 | Results

3.1 | Parenting Amid Crisis: Sociopolitical Concerns and the Weight of the Future

Queer AFAB parents in the U.S. identified a range of pressing sociopolitical issues that shaped their parenting experiences. While the survey prompted responses about specific contemporary threats, such as restrictions on reproductive rights and anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, many parents expanded upon these to share broader, intersecting fears. Their reflections paint a portrait of contemporary parenting marked by vigilance, advocacy, and anticipatory stress. Most parents—who were, in many cases, multiply marginalized, on the basis of their gender identity, sexual orientation, race, socioeconomic status, and/or location—were navigating multiple domains of concern, emphasizing the volatile U.S. climate in which they were raising children.

These concerns clustered around three central themes: Bias and Infringement on Rights, Uncertainty About the Future, and Safety and Protection. First, we explore each concern-related theme, with attention to how parents make meaning of sociopolitical events and how those meanings might inform their parenting practices. Then, we highlight the parenting practices that parents described using in response to these concerns (e.g., including how they sought to express values, prepare children for bias, and navigate identities).

3.2 | Bias and Infringement on Rights

Parents' most frequently cited concerns focused on *threats to bodily autonomy* and *experiences of systemic discrimination*. Reproductive rights and bodily autonomy—highlighted by 40 parents (41%)—were especially prominent among parents of girls ($n=26$ of 40; 65%). These concerns were not abstract or ideological; they were deeply embodied, often rooted in lived experience and trauma. Morgan, a White bisexual cis mother in Connecticut who identified her subjective social status as lower class, herself a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, shared, “Having a daughter after *Roe v. Wade* has been terrifying... I fear for my daughter's right [to] make choices and protection for her body autonomy.”

Related concerns, emphasized by 33% of parents ($n=32$), focused on identity-based discrimination, including racism, heterosexism, and transphobia. These concerns were often anticipatory, rooted in fears about how children would be perceived, treated, or harmed (e.g., based on their gender identity, sexual orientation, or family structure) in an increasingly hostile environment. Dakota, a White bisexual cis mother in Missouri (lower class) expressed concern about the intersection of multiple marginalized identities, saying, “There has been so much fear... Fear that [my daughter] may be gay/bi/les/trans/etc. when she's already a minority in race... people are cruel and the more different you are, the more society wants to hurt you.” These fears were not only about children's potential identities but also about how they would be received and responded to by the world. As such, this theme also reflects a form of anticipatory harm, in which parents prepare for discrimination their children might 1 day face, even before it occurs.

3.3 | Uncertainty About the Future

A second major category encompassed broader *anxieties about the future of society* in general and the U.S. specifically, often centered on the unknowns that lie ahead for the next generation, including their children. Such anxieties were varied, with some being fairly generalized, others centering on climate, and others involving economic instability. A total of 23 parents (24%) voiced a generalized sense of unrest and unease, which was often accompanied by guilt and helplessness. Marley, a White pansexual cis mother in Pennsylvania (working class) said, “I'm still quite nervous about the world and society in general, and I have many feelings of guilt that my child has to grow up trying to face all of the atrocities that my generation wasn't able to sort.” Such statements reflect a shift from individual concern to collective responsibility, where parents view themselves as stewards of future generations amid instability.

Other participants raised urgent, often unprompted, concerns about climate change and environmental degradation. Twelve parents (12%), including Frances, a White bisexual cis mother in Iowa (working class), highlighted the climate crisis as a core parenting worry: “The world has always been a scary place with climate change and war, but it's gotten even worse in the past few years. Terrifying place to raise a child.” For these parents, environmental degradation wasn't just about distant future risks; it was part of the everyday ethical and emotional terrain of caregiving.

Finally, economic precarity ($n=6$) was described as a concern, typically alongside critical reflections on its underlying societal forces. Alex, a White bisexual cis mother in Ohio (lower class) viewed society as “extremely unhealthy with a major lack of community support, most people having to live in survival mode.” In sum, these parents' concerns highlight more than household-level instability; they reflect a broader sense that community-based support networks and traditional pathways to security may no longer be viable for the next generation.

3.4 | Safety and Protection

A third cluster of concerns centered on *physical safety*, especially in relation to gun violence, school environments, and the need for increased supervision. Fifteen parents (15%) shared fears about their ability to protect their children in an environment they perceived as unsafe. Avery, a White bisexual cis mother in Georgia (lower class) shared, “One of the main reasons currently that I've considered not having any more children, and also being scared for my current child's well-being, is gun control. I hear about another public shooting what seems like every day almost... Not being able to protect my child terrifies me.”

Safety related concerns often had direct implications for decisions about family size, educational settings, and community engagement. Parents described fear of bringing children into an unsafe or unstable world, as well as detailing their own ongoing active recalibration of how, where, and with whom their children spend time. Many were rethinking what kind of environments felt survivable or acceptable for their children. Their narratives reveal how the burden of navigating systemic violence

disproportionately falls on caregivers—especially those who are already marginalized and left to mitigate risks that society has failed to address.

3.5 | Limited Concerns

While most participants clearly described navigating one or more sociopolitical concerns related to parenting, a minority ($n=9$; 9%) indicated that none of the sociopolitical issues that were inquired about had much influence on their parenting experiences or emotional lives. Remy, a bisexual cis mother of color in Nevada (working class) stated, “When it comes to my decision to be a parent, social and political unrest and upheaval have no effect.” Such responses were rare, but they illustrate the variability in how parents perceive risk, proximity to harm, and personal relevance. Notably, nearly all were cis (8 of 9), and most (7) identified as bisexual women partnered with cis men—a relational context that may offer relative insulation from certain forms of scrutiny. Whether shaped by privilege, worldview, or context, these narratives indicate that not all sexual minority parents see sociopolitical change as an immediate concern.

3.6 | Parenting Approaches: Responding to Sociopolitical Concerns

3.6.1 | Nurturing Acceptance and Equality ($n=48$)

Across varying concerns, about half of the parents in our sample ($n=48$; 49%) expressed that emphasizing acceptance and equality for all was a core parenting goal. This goal was highlighted, in particular, by parents who cited concerns related to bias and infringement on rights (e.g., identity-based discrimination, threats to reproductive rights). Further, this goal was particularly prevalent among nonbinary/genderqueer parents (11 of 17; 65%), and parents who were living states with abortion bans (16 of 24; 67%). Thus, these parents were often characterized by marginalized gender identities or living in socio-politically hostile states.

Among this group, a common strategy to subvert discriminatory rhetoric was exposure to diverse perspectives and social activism, with many parents specifically asserting that they were actively working to promote inclusivity of all marginalized identities, challenge traditional societal norms, and center social justice in their parenting ($n=27$). Middle-class queer AFAB parents were disproportionately represented in this group ($n=10$ of 27; 37%), suggesting that socioeconomic resources may influence parents’ ability to engage in these intentional strategies. Some of them described their efforts to create a home environment free from restrictive gender expectations. Riley, a White cis bisexual mother in Wisconsin (working class) shared, “I try to ensure I am not giving in to gender stereotypes when purchasing toys for my son, [such as] buying him a kitchen set instead of just tools.” Others described broader approaches involving intentional steps to expose children to diverse outlooks. Finley, a White cis lesbian in Minnesota (middle class), wanted to “give him opportunities so that he can see other people with different backgrounds, so we go out a lot to places like the library or shopping mall so that he can interact with other kids who may look

different or have families that look very different from ours,” reflecting an ongoing commitment to raising an open-minded child who is respectful of diversity.

Relatedly, many of these parents saw it as their duty to instill a sense of social activism and responsibility in their children, linking this directly or indirectly to the contemporary sociopolitical landscape. Jordan, a cis pansexual mother of color in North Carolina (lower class) explained, “We talk a lot about... making sure you treat everyone equally. I am also teaching my child to stand up for what you believe in. I have taken him to a couple of protests with me.” This reflection highlights some parents’ efforts to help their children recognize discrimination through everyday conversations and shared experiences. Others framed activities with their children as aimed to convey broader lessons about human rights, with Quinn, a cis bisexual mother of color in Florida (middle class) stating:

I try to be realistic with my children and prepare them for the world they live in. I’ve taken them to political and civil rights rallies, marches, and meetings since they were infants... My kids know racism and sexism exists. And I try to make sure they are in diverse/majority minority schools that reflect our community and family. That includes LGBTQ, Black, Latine, Asian, Native, Jewish, Muslim, agnostic, etc.

Quinn’s quote reflects a deliberate, values-driven approach to parenting—one that views social activism and exposure to diversity as foundational to raising socially conscious children.

For another group of parents ($n=16$; 16%), explicitly teaching kindness and compassion served as necessary pathway to nurturing acceptance and equality. These parents saw kindness as an essential counterbalance to the hostility they perceived in the world. Taylor, a White cis bisexual mother in Texas (working class), reflected, “I try to always teach them to be kind, gentle, and compassionate towards others... there is so much hate in this dark world and I want my kids to be a light to others,” emphasizing the importance of raising a child who brings positivity to their environment. Similarly, these parents highlighted the power of fostering kindness and compassion as proactive values, particularly in discussions about bullying. Casey, a White cis bisexual mother in Pennsylvania (working class), explained, “I teach her to be kind to everyone... we discuss bullying and how it’s not nice.” This sentiment reflects parents’ focus on helping children respond to unkind behavior with empathy, particularly in an environment in which cruelty has become increasingly visible in everyday life.

A few parents ($n=5$) noted the importance of cultivating emotional well-being for their children through “gentle parenting,” whereby they strove to create validating environments that facilitated their children’s self-worth, against the backdrop of living in a harsh world. Rowan, a White cis lesbian mother in New York (middle class), who described worries about identity-based discrimination and bigotry, explained, “It has made me try to be kinder to him. The world will be unkind enough, so home needs to be as safe and supportive as possible.” Similarly, Blair, a White cis bisexual mother in North Carolina (upper middle

class), described a shift toward “gentle parenting rather than authoritative” approaches, noting a commitment to “child-led learning and understanding emotions.” Such reflections show how some parents are responding to external threats by turning inward, prioritizing emotional attunement and intentional practices.

3.6.2 | Focusing on Safety and Security ($n = 37$)

Over one-third of parents ($n = 37$; 38%) highlighted their focus on safety and protecting their children in the current U.S. American sociopolitical climate. In particular, these were primarily parents of at least one girl (27 of 37; 73%) whose parenting decisions were often made in response to concerns raised about bias and infringement on rights (particularly reproductive rights and bodily autonomy), and safety and protection (particularly gun violence and school safety). Notably, they primarily lived in the South or Midwest (26 of 37; 70%). Thus, for many of these parents—particularly those living in more politically conservative or socially traditional regions—concerns about safety are deeply shaped by the broader sociopolitical climate.

Reflecting a broader safety-focused orientation, a substantial group of parents ($n = 13$; 13%) described personally protecting or shielding their children amidst fears about their children's susceptibility to harm in a hostile climate. For these participants, parenting in a climate of sociopolitical volatility meant taking proactive steps to safeguard children from perceived threats—via increased supervision, cautious regulation of relationships (particularly with adult men), and reconsideration of traditional educational settings. This vigilant approach was often marked by heightened attentiveness to children's whereabouts, as parents sought to exert more control over their environments than they had experienced as children. Drew, a White asexual nonbinary parent in North Carolina (working class), said, “It has made me more worried about my children's safety. They are a lot more supervised than I was at their age.” For some, these concerns led to shifts in schooling decisions, including the choice to homeschool. Wynn, a White bisexual cis mother in North Carolina (lower middle class) stated, “It's definitely made me plan on homeschooling so I can keep them safe.” Dakota, a cis bisexual mother in Missouri, said, “She's still young and absolutely not being public schooled (due to concerns about bullying, underfunded schools with low quality education, and the bodies piling up from school shootings) but there's going to be so many discussions...as she gets older.” This comment encapsulates a confluence of fears (about gun violence, systemic failure, and peer cultures) alongside awareness that efforts to shelter children from danger did not eliminate the need for ongoing dialogue.

In addition to their own protective instincts, parents also described teaching safe practices and bodily autonomy ($n = 17$; 17%) in an effort to prepare their children to navigate safety concerns independently, recognizing the need to not only protect their children but facilitate their ability to handle danger themselves. In many cases, they seemed to recognize their daughters' greater vulnerability to threats from outsiders, which parents implicitly or explicitly identified as largely men. As Kelly, a cis bisexual mother of color in Kansas (working class) stated, “I teach her how to look out for ‘suspicious’ persons when out and about, to

be aware of her surroundings, to have situational awareness.” Robin, a White bisexual cis mother in Michigan (lower middle class) echoed this emphasis on preparation and self-protection: “I teach my daughter all about the dos and don'ts of this world. How to be safe. What to do in certain situations. I try to instill as much knowledge... to keep her safe and making good decisions.”

As mentioned, many of these parents prioritized informing their children about consent and bodily autonomy, as a means of ensuring they would be able to recognize and protect themselves against potential harm. This emphasis on consent may reflect both a personal history of gendered vulnerability and a feminist commitment to disrupting cycles of harm. For some of these parents who were also raising boys, a consent focus seemed rooted in a sense of accountability—an intentional effort to raise sons who respect boundaries and challenge patriarchal norms around power. As Peyton, a White bisexual cis mother in Ohio (lower class), explained that in the current climate, “I have tried harder to teach my child about consent.”

Lastly, some of these parents ($n = 5$) expressed a heightened vigilance around their children's physical safety in public spaces, particularly in relation to gun violence, harassment, and interactions with strangers. A recurring theme was the sense that public spaces in the U.S. were no longer as safe as they once were, and that this shift required new forms of parental protection. For some, these fears stemmed from anxiety about how to instill caution without compromising their child's sense of trust and joy. “He's just so damn trusting of everyone,” Cameron, a cis bisexual mother of color in Michigan (lower class) explained, “and it makes me really scared we won't be able to instill stranger danger.” Others highlighted concerns around increased gender-based harassment, with Sasha, a cis pansexual parent of color in Oklahoma (working class) describing their child's fear of using public restrooms alone: “We have had to talk about going to the bathroom by ourselves... she is afraid to use public restrooms because of the behavior of those around us.” Parents also acknowledged the emotional toll of parenting through persistent uncertainty (“the safety she needs to learn about guns and men is something I'm not ready for... and I don't want to ruin this innocence”). Across narratives, public safety concerns were not only practical but existential, pointing to parents' struggle to balance protection with the desire to preserve their children's openness, curiosity, and sense of freedom.

3.6.3 | Limited Changes in Response to Sociopolitical Concerns ($n = 12$)

Not all participants felt that recent sociopolitical changes necessitated a shift in their parenting strategies or beliefs ($n = 12$; 12%), and thus described limited changes. However, while many of them did not articulate clearly defined concerns about specific sociopolitical issue/s, some broadly acknowledged the reality of a climate marked by general sociopolitical unrest and economic instability. Notably, nearly all of these participants were White parents (11 of 12; 92%), and almost all were living in abortion-friendly states (10 of 12; 83%).

Some parents emphasized continuity in their values, explaining that they had long prioritized principles like kindness and

standing up for others, regardless of the political climate. As Mika, a White cis lesbian mother in Florida (working class) put it, “I plan to raise my children the same way as before.”

For others, particularly parents of very young children ($n=6$), the impact of sociopolitical issues felt less immediate. They often described focusing on foundational values and routines, while anticipating that more complex conversations would emerge over time. Dani, a cis bisexual mother of color in California (working class) reflected, “As of right now I’m just teaching her basic stuff since she’s only two. Nothing drastic or anything,” while Sky, a White cis bisexual mother in Michigan (lower class) noted, “She is only 3 so lessons are not being taught yet, but I am aware that as she grows older... we will need to have many conversations.”

4 | Discussion

This study explored how queer AFAB individuals in the U.S., most of whom were mothers, navigate the complex terrain of early parenting amid an unpredictable sociopolitical climate. Guided by two central research questions, we examined (a) the socio-politically focused fears and concerns that these parents hold for their children and families, and (b) how recent sociopolitical events shape the practices they employ in parenting (e.g., how they convey values, prepare children for bias, and navigate identities). While many themes emerged across all types of participants, our analysis revealed some meaningful variations in how parenting concerns and practices were expressed, such that they were shaped by intersecting factors like geography, social class, race, gender identity, family structure, and policy environment. Such variations were visible in the Results, where, for example, nonbinary parents more frequently emphasized inclusivity (65%), parents in abortion-ban states emphasized equality and autonomy (67%), and parents in the South and Midwest disproportionately described safety-focused strategies (70%). Indeed, a key contribution of this study was our analysis of such intersectional variations, revealing that queer AFAB parenting is highly contextual.

Findings revealed how contemporary parenting is shaped by deeply felt concerns related to bodily autonomy, identity-based discrimination, environmental and economic precarity, and safety. In response to such concerns, parents in our sample described varying approaches, including efforts to nurture acceptance and equality (through exposure to diverse perspectives, teaching kindness, cultivating emotional well-being), and prioritize safety and security (e.g., through shielding children, teaching safe practices, and vigilance in public spaces). Together, these findings illustrate how multiply marginalized parents are parenting not only through crisis, but against it—infusing daily acts of caregiving with advocacy, protection, and social responsibility. For instance, some parents described bringing children to political rallies (e.g., Quinn), while others emphasized subtler choices such as teaching kindness and discussing bullying (e.g., Casey), illustrating how both activism and daily interactions served as sites of response. Importantly, participants’ responses (e.g., bringing children to protests, emphasizing consent education, or restructuring schooling decisions) were not idealistic orientations but were built into parenting

practices shaped by lived experience. These findings align with Oswald et al.’s (2005) concept of “doing family,” in which queer parents actively construct family life in response to social norms and structural constraints, highlighting how parenting then becomes both protective and identity-affirming.

As noted, parents’ narratives revealed meaningful variation based on geography, social class, gender identity, and their intersections. Parents in the South and Midwest, particularly those raising girls, frequently emphasized safety-oriented decision-making, including increased supervision, homeschooling, and caution around public environments, reflecting the impact of regionality on perceived vulnerability. For example, this included decisions such as planning to homeschool to “keep them safe” (Wynn) or avoiding public schooling due to fears of shootings and bullying (Dakota). Similarly, participants residing in abortion-ban states were especially likely to center values of acceptance, bodily autonomy, and social justice, suggesting that parenting in particularly hostile policy environments can provoke both protective and activist responses, echoing Goldberg and Abreu’s (2023) finding that LGBTQ+ parents in Florida responded to the Parental Rights in Education Act by promoting values of equity and acceptance while also seeking to safeguard their children.

Socioeconomic status appeared to influence the form and scope of values-focused parenting, with middle-class parents more able to create intentional, structured experiences around social justice, while parents with fewer resources often embedded lessons of empathy and kindness into daily interactions. For example, middle-class parents often described structured efforts such as facilitating exposure to diverse environments (e.g., Finley’s outings), whereas other parents emphasized embedding values like kindness and compassion into everyday interactions (e.g., Casey, Taylor)—thereby reflecting the ways social class constrains or facilitates activist-oriented parenting. Gender identity also shaped parenting goals and practices, with nonbinary parents being especially likely to describe efforts to foster inclusivity and challenge normative expectations, often reflected in attempts to avoid gender stereotypes (e.g., Riley). These patterns underscore how proximity to perceived harm, as shaped by regional, class-related, gendered, and relational factors, can influence how sociopolitical stress is translated into early parenting practices. Our findings, then, illustrate how macro-level political forces (Bronfenbrenner 1992; Crenshaw 1991) are filtered through queer AFAB parents’ geographic location, class position, gender identity, and family structure to shape parenting practices.

Additionally, our findings underscore the ways in which parents are not only absorbing the weight of the present through everyday actions, but anticipating and responding to potential future harm. In doing so, they are engaging in forms of anticipatory stress—a psychological burden stemming from imagined or uncertain future events, which may never come to pass or may not unfold as feared (Bosley-Smith 2023; Farina et al. 2023). Namely parents often expressed fear about what *might* happen to their children (e.g., Dakota’s concern about potential future identities or Morgan’s fear for her daughter’s autonomy), rather than only current conditions. Such forms of stress reflect both the emotional labor of parenting and broader patterns around

the gendered responsibility for nurturing, safeguarding, and socializing. This ongoing attunement to potential threats often shaped how parents made daily decisions, such as monitoring social interactions, choosing homeschooling or selective schooling to avoid hostile peer cultures, teaching about consent at an early age, and engaging in conversations about social justice. A key feature of parents' anticipatory stress was a state of heightened vigilance: an ongoing emotional and cognitive alertness directed toward potential threats to their children's safety, identity, or well-being. From a minority stress perspective, such vigilance can be understood as an adaptive response to structural stigma rather than individual pathology (Brooks 1981; Frost and Meyer 2023). Ecological systems theory further contextualizes this vigilance as emerging from the interaction between broader policy climates and intimate family processes (Bronfenbrenner 1992).

4.1 | Anticipatory Vigilance

In this study, heightened vigilance emerged as a central expression of anticipatory stress among parents, characterized by a forward-looking concern for how their children will be treated, what rights they will have, and what kind of world they will inherit. This vigilance was reflected in practices such as increased supervision (e.g., Drew), teaching situational awareness (e.g., Kelly), and closely regulating children's environments and interactions. Variation emerged here as well, with queer AFAB parents of girls and children whom they believed might someday identify as LGBTQ+ describing particularly acute vigilance, and some parents in more politically permissive states expressing lower levels of concern. Consistent with prior research, this kind of vigilance constitutes both a protective response and a chronic stressor, shaped by systemic oppression and historical trauma (Briggs-Gowan et al. 2010). Riggle et al. (2023) describe hypervigilance among LGBTQ+ individuals as involving constant scanning for threats, often accompanied by withdrawal, identity concealment, and psychological distress. In our study, these patterns extended beyond self-protection to concerns for children's bodily autonomy, safety, and social acceptance—revealing how queer AFAB parents internalize the weight of potential future harm. For example, many parents described teaching their daughters specific safety strategies, including recognizing “suspicious” individuals (Kelly) and learning “dos and don'ts” for navigating risk (Robin). This increased concern, which was heightened among parents of girl children, is consistent with prior work underscoring how societal gender norms shape family relationships and parenting expectations thereby contributing to heightened vigilance, especially regarding daughters' safety (Montgomery et al. 2017).

4.2 | The Gendered Nature of Responsibility and Concern

Our sample was comprised of cis mothers and/or AFAB non-binary parents, whose experiences reflect an internalized sense of responsibility for their children's safety, values, and emotional development. Many described recalibrating parenting practices around protection, particularly in response to

threats such as gender-based violence, gun violence, and the rollback of reproductive rights. This aligns with existing work that shows how women, particularly mothers, often assume a heightened emotional and cognitive load related to mitigating harm (Reich-Stiebert et al. 2023). Indeed, parents frequently described their efforts in emotionally intense terms—such as feeling “terrified,” “scared,” or “not ready”—highlighting the ongoing emotional burden of this responsibility. As feminist scholars have emphasized, the work of teaching values, cultivating empathy, and preparing children to face injustice is often framed as women's work (Douglas and Michaels 2004). Our findings suggest this remains true for queer AFAB parents, in a variety of relational contexts, who are shouldering the responsibility of equipping their children to navigate an unstable world. This trend also echoes prior scholarship documenting the intensified emotional labor experienced by queer/LGBTQ+ parents as they anticipate and prepare for bias affecting their families (Averett 2016; Simon and Farr 2022), underscoring how parenting responsibilities are shaped by gendered expectations and minority stress processes. Notably, most parents (69 of 97; 71%) were partnered with cis men, and in these partnerships, the relative invisibility of their sexual orientation likely shaped how they distributed labor, determined the urgency of protective strategies, and guided children's moral and social development. As such, these patterns underscore the need to consider intersecting factors (e.g., partnership dynamics, regional context, and access to resources) when examining parenting practices, as such factors shape the form and intensity of values-driven and protective caregiving.

4.3 | Climate Anxiety and Existential Concern

Concerns about the environment and climate change emerged as an important, if less frequent, theme. These reflections were often existential in tone, with parents describing guilt, grief, and fear about raising children in a world marked by ecological degradation. While fewer participants discussed the environment as compared to issues such as bodily autonomy or discrimination, their responses were especially powerful and timely. Consistent with broader themes in this study, participants framed environmental degradation as a collective and moral issue. For example, Frances described the world as a “terrifying place to raise a child,” underscoring how climate concerns were experienced as immediate and emotionally salient. Such reflections reinforce how early parenting was understood as entangled with larger political and ethical responsibilities for queer AFAB individuals. This is consistent with emerging research suggesting that climate anxiety is becoming a significant psychological concern among parents and people deciding whether or not to become parents (e.g., Clayton 2020; Kamenetz 2022; Sasser 2024). In fact, a recent national survey found that 74% of U.S. Americans feel a moral obligation to address climate change not only for their children, but for all future generations, highlighting how climate-related concerns are closely tied to care (Kamenetz 2022). These reflections suggest that environmental concern is not a future-oriented worry, but a persistent emotional weight that influences how parents navigate early caregiving—and one that may continue to operate front-and-center for parents in the future.

4.4 | Continuity and Variation in Parenting Approaches

While the vast majority of participants described adapting or intensifying their parenting in response to the U.S. American sociopolitical climate, a small subset reported minimal or no changes. These parents tended to be White, partnered with cis men, and living in states with greater abortion protections. As reflected in the Results, many of these participants explicitly stated that sociopolitical issues had “no effect” on their parenting, suggesting a perceived distance from the threats described by others. These findings underscore the importance of an intersectional approach (Crenshaw 1991) and highlight how privilege can buffer individuals from systemic threats, or from perceiving those threats as pressing. At the same time, some of these parents described a process of delaying engagement, noting that their children were too young to understand complex sociopolitical topics. This was evident in responses from parents of very young children (e.g., Dani, Sky), who emphasized focusing on “basic stuff” while anticipating future conversations. Such approaches align with research showing that parents often modulate the timing and depth of socialization based on children’s developmental readiness (Goldberg and Smith 2016), with early exposure to inclusive language and diverse perspectives laying the groundwork for more direct conversations later in development. These patterns raise important questions about when and how different parents feel a sense of urgency around values transmission, and how that timing might vary across sociocultural contexts.

4.5 | Limitations

While this study offers meaningful insights into the early parenting experiences of queer AFAB parents in the U.S., it is not without limitations. First, the sample is not representative of all LGBTQ+ parents, nor of all mothers. The predominance of White participants and the self-selection inherent in the study design may have shaped the salience of certain sociopolitical concerns, especially those resonating with participants’ own lived experiences. Although many participants were cis women, bisexual, and partnered with cis men, such that some findings may simultaneously reflect broader responses to sociopolitical uncertainty, this also highlights how geography and social class often shaped parenting more strongly than sexuality or gender identity alone, underscoring the importance of an intersectional context. As such, future research should explore how other subgroups (e.g., transmasculine parents, fathers, and parents in same-gender partnerships) experience similar or different dynamics in the current climate. Moreover, while qualitative content analysis allowed for the identification of broad themes, it cannot capture the full nuance or longitudinal trajectory of these experiences. Given that the analysis was based on survey responses, we were also unable to ask follow-up questions or probe for deeper meaning. Future in-depth qualitative interviews can gain more insight into parents’ experiences. Finally, the data were collected during a particularly volatile political period in the U.S. (e.g., in the aftermath of the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, amid a wave of state-level anti-LGBTQ+ policy changes), and perceptions may shift over time as policies evolve.

4.6 | Implications and Future Directions

These findings have important implications for mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers situated in a U.S. American context. First, the pervasiveness of anticipatory stress among parents—particularly around diminishing reproductive rights, identity-based harm, and an increasingly uncertain future—highlights the need for support systems that address these fears. Support strategies should be tailored to reflect the diverse experiences of parents across different regions, class positions, and family structures. As such, practitioners working with queer AFAB parents should be aware of the ways in which sociopolitical events (at the community and national level) shape their specific parenting decisions. This includes recognizing that decisions such as increased supervision, homeschooling, and early conversations about bodily autonomy are not signs of overprotectiveness or paranoia, but responses to real and perceived threats grounded in lived experience. Drawing on minority stress theory, which conceptualizes vigilance among sexual and gender minorities as a response to chronic stigma rather than individual psychopathology, and research documenting discriminatory treatment experienced by LGBTQ+ people in healthcare settings, practitioners should be cautious not to interpret parents’ vigilance as rooted in pathology (Casanova-Perez et al. 2022; Frost and Meyer 2023). Therapists (e.g., individual, family) should offer space for parents to explore these fears without pathologizing their vigilance and help them develop coping strategies that affirm their current realities.

Additionally, the emphasis on social activism and exposure to diversity as a parenting strategy suggests a need to support parents’ efforts to raise socially conscious children, including through school curricula, community programming, and policy advocacy. Educators can play a crucial role by incorporating age-appropriate, identity-affirming content into classrooms and partnering with parents on efforts to foster inclusion, empathy, and critical thinking. Community organizations can support this work by offering accessible, affirming programming for families and opportunities for civic engagement that include children.

Finally, this study contributes to growing evidence that parenting in the U.S. is not merely a private endeavor but a sociopolitical act, particularly for those navigating intersecting marginalization. Future research should continue to highlight diversity, exploring how parenting strategies differ across subgroups of LGBTQ+ families, and how these differences inform resilience, child outcomes, and intergenerational transmission of values. Policymakers should consider how laws and public discourse directly impact parental mental health, decision-making, and children’s safety—especially for LGBTQ+ families and those living in conservative or under-resourced regions. Investments in mental health care, reproductive justice, and affirming education are not just policy concerns; they are supports for the everyday lives of caregivers. As such, future research should continue to center the voices of multiply marginalized parents and explore how parenting functions as both a response to, and a means of resisting, systemic harm. Further inquiry might also examine the long-term emotional and developmental impact of anticipatory stress on both parents and children and

explore interventions that address intergenerational transmission of fear and resilience.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The participants of this study did not give written consent for their data to be shared publicly, and because of the sensitive nature of the research supporting data are not available. Questions about the data can be directed to the corresponding author.

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