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"Life Is Already Hard Enough": Lesbian and Gay Adoptive Parents' Experiences and Concerns After the 2016 Presidential Election

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The 2016 U.S. presidential election was an especially difficult election for many Americans, particularly individuals with one or more marginalized identities. This qualitative study explores the experiences of sexual minority adoptive parents ($n = 50$), many of whom were members of multiracial families. Parents completed an online survey 2–3 weeks after the November 2016 presidential election, and 2.5 months later (1–2 weeks after the January 2017 inauguration). Through an integrated minority stress and intersectional theory lens, we examined participants' emotional responses to this stressful, ambiguous political event, their perceptions of how immediate and extended family relationships shifted during the election and its aftermath, and how they coped with stress, including relationship stress, exacerbated by the election and the political climate. Most participants reported experiencing negative emotions such as fear/anxiety, anger, and sadness upon learning the outcome of the election. Many participants reported that the election impacted family dynamics, including conflict with extended family, partners, or children. Adoptive sexual minority parents coped in a variety of ways, including by pursuing activism, connecting with others, and disengaging from thinking about the election. These findings have implications for how mental health care providers may support adoptive sexual minority parent families to cope with stressful political events.

Keywords: coping, election, emotions, sexual minority parent families

The 2016 U.S. presidential election cycle, starting with the nomination and selection of major party candidates and concluding on November 8th with the election of Donald Trump, was a particularly difficult one for many Americans given that the results were largely unexpected (Flegenheimer & Barbaro, 2016) and the majority of voters—particularly sexual minorities—had supported a different candidate (Kiley & Maniam, 2016). For those with minority statuses (e.g., sexual minorities, racial minorities, and adoptees), the election results

appeared to represent a legitimate threat to their well-being, safety, and status within the U.S. (Brenoff, 2016; Cahill & Makadon, 2017; Fuchsman, 2017; Kteily & Bruneau, 2017; Potok, 2017; Tan et al., 2017). Indeed, following the election, one national survey of over 2000 Americans found that acceptance of sexual minorities dropped dramatically, for the first time in the poll's history (The Harris Poll, 2018). The well-being of LGBTQ individuals also dipped after the election as fears about the future increased: A 2016 Gallup poll found that the percentage of LGBTQ adults who considered themselves to be "thriving" dropped significantly following the election (Gates, 2017).

The 2016 election itself marked the end of a contentious and highly charged political campaign season. Donald Trump campaigned on a platform that, according to many observers

(including conservatives; see Galen, 2016), communicated fear and distrust of minorities (including sexual and racial minorities). On several occasions, he called for violence against those who opposed him (see Tiefenthaler, 2016), inciting his followers to action: "So if you see someone getting ready to throw a tomato, knock the crap out of them, will you? I promise you, I will pay for the legal fees." In spite of the fact that his opponent, Hillary Rodham Clinton, won the popular vote, Trump took the Electoral College and was sworn into office on January 20th, 2017.

One group affected in myriad ways by the election outcome were adoptive families, a group that is often characterized by multiple dimensions of diversity. While adoptive parents in the U.S. are mostly White, about half of adoptions by White parents are of children of color, as of 2011 (Zill, 2017). Further, same-sex couples are significantly more likely to be parenting adopted children than heterosexual couples: About 21% of same-sex couples adopt their children, compared to 3% of different-sex couples (Goldberg & Conron, 2018). Same-sex couples are also significantly more likely to adopt a child of color, a child with a disability, and/or from the child welfare system (Gates, 2013; Gates et al., 2007). Adoptive families, then, and specifically same-sex parent multiracial families, represent a unique group with multifaceted, complex, and diverse identities—identities that could potentially make them targets of harassment and discrimination leading up to and following the 2016 election.

The current qualitative study draws from intersectional and minority stress frameworks to explore the effects of the political climate following the 2016 presidential election on families with one or more minority statuses (i.e., sexual minority parents, multiracial families, and adoptive families). Specifically, our sample consists of 50 sexual minority parents (20 men, 30 women), all of whom had adopted their children (via private domestic adoption, foster-to-adopt, and/or international adoption; mean age during election = 10.19 years), and most (n = 35; 70%) of whom had children of color. We examine parents' emotional responses to the 2016 presidential election, shifting family dynamics within and across family subsystems following the election, and the ways parents' social locations shaped how they coped with and overcame stigma related to their identities. We now provide an overview of our conceptual framework, followed by a review of relevant research.

Theoretical Framework and Overview

This study is informed by an integrative theoretical framework, incorporating intersectional (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Cole, 2009; McCall, 2005; Parent et al., 2013) and minority stress (Herek et al., 2009; Meyer, 2003) perspectives in order to better understand the role that discrimination and stigma can play in terms of multiple social categories of identity. Drawing from intersectionality theory, we consider how sexual minority adoptive parents, many of whom were part of multiracial families, navigate multiple and intersecting forms of oppression (e.g., homophobia, adoptism, and racism) leading up to and following the 2016 election. From an intersectionality perspective (Crenshaw, 1991; Weldon, 2008), parents' experiences of the 2016 election are inevitably different depending on their sexual orientation, multiracial family status, adoptive parent status, and other social locations. For instance, while some adoptive parents may have identities that protect them from certain forms of discrimination (e.g., because they are White, male, and/or have a stable income), they may be particularly vulnerable to stigma and harassment, given their particular identity constellation (e.g., part of a multiracial family, low socioeconomic status, preexisting health issues, and unsupportive family members). These interlocking privileges and oppressions may shape the experiences of sexual minority adoptive parents in fluid and dynamic ways (McCall, 2005; Parent et al., 2013; Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008; Weber, 1998).

The minority stress model proposes that sexual minorities face increased stigma because of "the negative regard, inferior status, and relative powerlessness that society collectively accords anyone associated with non-heterosexual behaviors, identity, relationships, or communities" (Herek et al., 2009, p. 33). Sexual minorities may face stressors in the form of microaggressions (Balsam et al., 2011), overt discrimination (Nadal et al., 2011), and violence (Lea et al., 2014; Testa et al., 2015). They may also experience internal stressors, such as fear of discrimination and distrust of others (Testa et al., 2015), which can shape behaviors. Minority stress is unique in that is layered on top of the normal life stressors (e.g., job and

family) that most people experience, resulting in greater overall stress (Eliason & Fogel, 2015; Goldberg & Smith, 2011). Both the intensity and chronicity of stress can limit individuals' efforts to cope with and manage their stigmatized status, and life overall (Lea et al., 2014; Rostosky et al., 2010).

Over time, minority stress can contribute to a range of negative mental health issues, including anxiety and depression (Goldberg & Smith, 2011; Hatzenbuehler, 2010), particularly for those with multiple and intersecting minority statuses (e.g., sexual/gender minorities, racial/ethnic minorities; see Balsam et al., 2011; Hatzenbuehler, 2009; Meyer et al., 2008). Balsam et al. (2011), for example, found that individuals who identified as both LGBTQ and as a person of color experienced complex stressors such as racism in the LGBTQ community and heterosexism in communities of color, which in turn had a negative impact on mental health. Meyer et al. (2008) found that disadvantaged social statuses were associated with greater exposure to acute stressors (e.g., denial of services because of race or sexual orientation) and fewer coping resources (e.g., personal resources and social support) to buffer stress. Hatzenbuehler (2009) has suggested that those with multiple minority statuses may have their coping resources overwhelmed by the combination of general and minority stressors. In the wake of the 2016 election (an acute stressor; see Brown & Keller, 2018), same-sex parents with adopted children—especially those who are of color—may experience elevated anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed in an increasingly hostile (i.e., racist and homophobic) national environment, and may be overwhelmed by the combination of general and minority stressors. Yet at the same time, the privileges that some adoptive sexual minority parents may hold as a function of their gender, race, and/or social class may buffer them from concern about stigma, discrimination, and harassment.

The Experience of the 2016 Presidential Election by Minorities

Racial Minority Experiences of the Election

The 2016 presidential election was experienced as largely negative by minorities (e.g., Flitter & Kahn, 2016; Phoenix & Arora, 2018). For racial and ethnic minorities, the election

brought to the surface preexisting hostile attitudes toward racial and ethnic groups, including immigrants (e.g., Flitter & Kahn, 2016). Schools reported greater incidences of hate speech by students who felt emboldened to say bigoted things to their classmates (Knisely, 2019; Nethers, 2019), primarily aimed at children who were Hispanic, Black, or Muslim (Natanson et al., 2020). Multiracial families (including adoptive families with children of color), experienced interfamilial tension and distress when extended family members supported Trump, leading to deteriorating relationships and distrust (Bense, 2018).

LGBTQ Experiences of the Election

Some work has focused specifically on sexual minorities' experiences of the 2016 presidential election outcome (e.g., Brown & Keller, 2018; Drabble et al., 2019; Garrison et al., 2018; Gonzalez et al., 2018a; Lannutti, 2018; Riggle et al., 2018; Veldhuis et al., 2018). For instance, Riggle et al. (2018) found that sexual minority women and gender-diverse individuals felt hopeless about the future (i.e., feelings associated with minority stress), while others described feelings of hope and empowerment. The authors suggested that these positive feelings came from increased political engagement (e.g., joining with others to resist oppression), and a sense of personal agency (i.e., the ability to create change). Similarly, Brown and Keller (2018) found that LGBTQ individuals experienced a range of negative emotions (e.g., sadness, hopelessness, anger, and hurt) about the election outcome. Participants coped by immersing themselves in social activism and finding support through like-minded others. In a longitudinal study of the well-being of sexual and gender minorities before and after the 2016 election, Gonzalez et al. (2018a) found that LGBTQ individuals experienced significant declines in well-being and increases in minority stress experiences. Collectively, these studies and others suggest that many sexual minorities experienced the election as a negative event, spurring them toward action to cope with uncertainty.

Adoptive Family Experiences of the Election

Adoptive families represent a group of minority individuals who were targeted implicitly or

explicitly by President Trump's "America First" rhetoric (Potok, 2017). For parents who adopted a child internationally, and/or adopted a child of color, the election of Trump created fear around the safety of their children and families: Indeed, there are accounts of adoptive parents asserting that their children were afraid of being sent back to their countries of origin after hearing Trump's antiimmigrant rhetoric (see Brenoff, 2016). Sexual minority parents who adopted their children experienced an additional layer of anxiety and uncertainty as a result of the election outcome: They grappled with the possibility that their families would be targeted by bigots (Southern Poverty Law Center [SPLC], 2016), or that their relationships with children or partners may not be legally recognized (Liegel, 2018).

Political Events and Family Relationships

Some work has specifically examined changes in family dynamics for sexual minorities following the 2016 presidential election (e.g., Brown & Keller, 2018; Gonzalez et al., 2018b; Veldhuis et al., 2018). Gonzalez et al. (2018b) found that many LGBTQ participants reported experiencing fractured relationships with family (e.g., parents and siblings) after the election because of the realization that they did not share the same values, which prompted feelings of betrayal and anger, a finding also documented by Brown and Keller (2018) and Veldhuis et al. (2018). In contrast, participants who reported that their family was supportive of LGBTQ-affirmative policies were especially likely to experience a sense of solidarity and support (Gonzalez et al., 2018b). The current study extends these findings, exploring how family relationships of sexual minority adoptive parents (who were members of multiracial families), were shaped by parents' emotional responses to the election.

Minority Stress and Coping

People vary considerably in how they cope with stress, with some individuals drawing on avoidant or unhealthy coping mechanisms (Toomey et al., 2018). For example, during stressful periods and times of increased discrimination, individuals may increase their use of substances, such as alcohol and drugs, in an effort to alleviate anxiety or distress (Hudson et al., 2016; Livingston et al., 2017; Parent et al.,

2019)—but which, over time, may have negative consequences to physical and mental health, parenting, and employment stability (Compton et al., 2014; Lander et al., 2013). Others cope with their emotions in healthier ways, such as through exercise, which can increase stress tolerance (Bland et al., 2014). Many turn to social supports, such as religious communities (Bland et al., 2014; Dunn & Szymanski, 2018; Hudson et al., 2016), or are drawn to community engagement, such as volunteer work (Cohen & Numa, 2011; Mojza & Sonnentag, 2010). Such reliance on support communities tend to be associated with better mental health (Ballard et al., 2019). The current study explores these and other positive outcomes in the face of adversity related to the election.

Significantly, social activism represents one form of external coping that may be particularly important in managing individual and relational stress during challenging political circumstances. Some work has explored how engagement in activism can be beneficial for sexual minorities (e.g., Broad et al., 2008; Brown & Keller, 2018; Jones & Voss, 2006; Levitt et al., 2009; Taylor et al., 2009). For instance, in the wake of the 2016 election, Brown and Keller (2018) found that some participants deliberately engaged in activism (e.g., marches and political discussions) to create social change and develop a stronger sense of community. Activism can be a source of resilience and community transformation for sexual minorities (Jones & Voss, 2006), although little work has explored activism specifically among sexual minority parent families (see Broad et al., 2008), particularly in the context of a politically charged and meaningful event like the 2016 election.

The Current Study

The current study aims to address how the 2016 election, a challenging political event, shaped the emotional experiences and relationship dynamics of sexual minority adoptive parents, many of whom were situated in multiracial families. This study offers a unique glimpse into how sexual minority adoptive parents cope with new realities amidst what may be experienced as an uncertain and scary political climate. Our research questions were as follows:

1. How did sexual minority adoptive parents respond emotionally to the 2016 election,

a politically charged and potentially stressful event? How did these responses and fears reflect parents' and children's social locations (e.g., parent race and gender; child race)?

2. How were sexual minority adoptive parents' relationships with immediate and extended family members shaped by their emotional responses to the election?

3. How did sexual minority parents, situated within diverse families (e.g., adoptive and multiracial), cope with, and seek to overcome stigmas that were exacerbated by the presidential election?

Method

Recruitment

Participants in this sample were drawn from a larger group of adoptive parents who were originally recruited between 2005 and 2009 to participate in a study on the transition to adoptive parenthood. To be included in the original sample, parents in different-sex and same-sex couples were required to be adopting their first child, and both parents needed to be becoming parents for the first time. Participants were recruited through over 30 adoption agencies in the U.S. and via national LGBTQ organizations, such as the Human Rights Campaign (HRC). Participants from the original study were invited by email to participate in the current study about the election. This study involved two waves of data collection: The first occurred 2–3 weeks after the 2016 November election, and the second occurred 1–2 weeks after the inauguration of President Donald J. Trump, in late January. Thus, the two time points were separated by about 2.5 months.

The current sample consists of 50 adoptive parents (30 women, 20 men), or 13% of participants from the original transition to parenthood study. The second author, who is the principal investigator (PI) of the original study, encouraged one parent per couple to participate. A total of 108 families (41 different-sex parent families, 38 same-sex female parent families, and 29 same-sex male parent families) participated at T1, and 110 families (41 different-sex parent families, 36 same-sex female parent families, and 33 same-sex male parent families) participated at T2.

Ninety-one families participated at *both* T1 and T2 (i.e., we had data on these families at both time points). We chose not to include the different-sex parent families in this article, which focuses on multiple minority statuses (e.g., same-sex adoptive parent families). In turn, the 50 same-sex parent families who participated at T1 and T2 constitute the current sample.

Chi-square analyses were conducted to determine if there were significant differences in basic demographics between the larger group of adoptive parents in the original sample, and the subsample in the current study. Specifically, we examined the type of adoption pursued (i.e., private, public, or international), the gender of the first adopted child, the race of the first adopted child, and parent education levels. These analyses revealed no statistically significant differences between the original sample of parents and the subsample in any of these demographic variables.

Participants

On average, participants were 47.86 years old ($SD = 6.10$). Forty-five participants (90%) identified their race as White, and 5 (10%) as other identities, including Latinx, African American, Filipino American, and Puerto Rican. The sample was well-educated: 11 had a PhD, JD, or MD, 19 a master's degree, 16 a bachelor's degree, and 4 some college or high school. The average family income was $154,250.00 ($SD = \$90,738.82$, $Mdn = \$130,000.00$). When asked to report their gender identity, of the 25 women and 16 men who responded, all reported their identity as cisgender, and no participants were known to the research team to identify as trans or nonbinary at the time of the election. When choosing from a list of sexual orientation options, 17 of the men chose "exclusively gay" and three "mostly gay," while 17 of the women chose "exclusively lesbian," 7 "mostly lesbian," 4 "bisexual," 1 "queer," and 1 did not respond. All but one participant (30 women, 19 men) voted for Hillary Clinton in the election; of these, 46 stated their choice matched their typical party affiliation or voting pattern. Two Clinton voters (both women) and the one Trump voter (one man) indicated that they do not have a party affiliation or a typical voting pattern, and one Clinton voter (a woman) indicated she voted in contrast to her party affiliation.

Fourteen participants (28%) had adopted their first child through foster care, 27 (54%) through

private domestic adoption, and 8 (16%) internationally; 1 child was born via surrogacy and adopted by the nongenetic partner. The age of the first child at the time of adoption ranged from newborn to 15 years old ($M = 17.86$ months, $SD = 39.63$ months, $Mdn = .88$ months); the age of the first adopted child at the time of the present survey ranged from 4.57 to 24.29 years old ($M = 10.19$ years, $SD = 3.41$ years, $Mdn. = 9.80$ years). Ethnic/racial identities of the first adopted child included White ($n = 15$, 30.0%), Latinx ($n = 14$, 28.0%), biracial/multiracial ($n = 13$, 26.0%), Black/African American ($n = 6$, 12.0%), and Vietnamese American ($n = 2$, 4.0%). Twenty-nine (58.0%) of the first children were boys and 21 (42.0%) were girls (see Table 1, for full breakdown). Chi-square analyses were conducted to determine if there were significant differences in basic demographics as a function of family type (i.e., two mothers, two fathers), for adoption type, child race, child gender, and parent education. There were no statistically significant differences as a function of family type across these characteristics.

Procedure

Ten days after the election, participants in the original study were contacted and asked to complete an online "postelection survey," which was approved by the institutional review board at Clark University. The second author (the study PI), who maintains contact with participants via newsletters and other updates, sent an email to all participants that acknowledged that "Regardless of how you feel about the outcome of the election,

Table 1
Participant Demographics by Family Type

Parent Variables	Two-mother families (*SD*, % of *n* = 30)	Two-father families (*SD*, % of *n* = 20)	Total (*SD*, % of *n* = 50)
Parent age	47.94 (*SD* = 6.93)	47.74 (*SD* = 4.75)	47.86 (*SD* = 6.10)
Parent race = White	29 (96.7%)	13 (65%)	42 (84%)
Parent education			
PhD/JD/MD	6 (20%)	5 (25%)	11 (22%)
Master's	12 (40%)	7 (35%)	19 (38%)
Bachelor's	12 (40%)	4 (20%)	16 (32%)
Associate's	0 (0%)	2 (10%)	2 (4%)
High school diploma/some college	0 (0%)	2 (10%)	2 (4%)
Family income	$116,950[a]	$210,200[a]	$154,250
	(*SD* = $56,383.29)	(*SD* = $104,353.45)	(*SD* = $90,738.82)
Political affiliation			
Democrat	28 (93%)	18 (90%)	46 (92%)
Republican	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Unaffiliated	2 (7%)	2 (10%)	4 (8%)
1st type of adoption			
Foster-to-adopt	9 (30%)	5 (25%)	14 (28%)
Private domestic	14 (46.67%)	13 (65%)	27 (54%)
International	7 (23.3%)	1 (5%)	8 (16%)
Surrogacy	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	1 (2%)
1st child age at adoption	15.96 months	20.71 months	17.68 months
	(*SD* = 37.07)	(*SD* = 44.03)	(*SD* = 39.63)
1st child age at survey	10.17 years	10.02 years	10.19 years
	(*SD* = 3.21)	(*SD* = 3.74)	(*SD* = 3.41)
1st child race			
White	6 (20%)	9 (45%)	15 (30%)
Latinx	10 (33%)	4 (20%)	14 (28%)
Biracial/Multiracial	8 (27%)	5 (25%)	13 (26%)
Black/African American	4 (13%)	2 (10%)	6 (12%)
Vietnamese American	2 (7%)	0 (0%)	2 (4%)
1st child gender			
Male	14 (46.7%)	15 (75%)	29 (58%)
Female	16 (53.3%)	5 (25%)	21 (42%)

[a] An independent samples *t*-test indicated that family income was statistically significantly different as a function of family type (i.e., two mothers and two fathers), $t(18.95) = -3.66$, $p = .002$.

it has likely brought up complicated conversations and feelings in relation to family members, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and even strangers. Likewise, the media coverage of the election has been quite charged." In turn, the PI invited participants to consider completing a 15–20 min survey that addressed their feelings postelection, how they were talking to their children, and their concerns and hopes for the future. They were asked to complete the survey within 2–3 weeks after the election and told that they would be entered in a drawing for $100. They were directed to an online *Qualtrics* survey and asked to enter their individual parent ID# before proceeding.

A week after the inauguration of President Trump, the PI reached out again to participants in the original study and requested their participation in a survey, also approved by the Clark University institutional review board. Individuals who had not completed the original postelection survey were not discouraged from completing it; rather, anyone who wanted to participate could do so. The PI stated, "It is now a week into the new presidency. Regardless of how you feel about the election of President Trump, it has likely continued to be a topic of conversation and potentially the subject of much emotion. A week after the election, I asked you to complete a brief survey about how you were doing. Now, a week after the inauguration of President Trump, I would like to invite you to complete an even shorter survey on this topic." Again, they were directed to a survey link, reminded to complete the survey within 2 weeks, and told they would be entered into three drawings, each for $50.

Participants were asked to respond to a series of open-ended and closed-ended questions at both T1 and T2. The current study primarily focuses on participants' responses to open-ended questions. The open-ended questions in the survey at T1 that were included in our analysis were: (a) What were your emotions, postelection? (b) What did you tell your child? (c) What was that conversation like? (d) What has been the most stressful part of the election/postelection? Elaborate. (e) How have you been managing your feelings in the wake of the election? The open-ended questions in the survey at T2 that were included in our analysis were: (a) What types of conversations have you been having with your children about the President? (b) What questions does your child have, and how do you answer or address them? (c) What were your goals in activism? Have you

involved children in activism? (d) What has been the most stressful part of the election/post-election? We collapsed responses across the two time points to generate a richer portrait of how participants were feeling in the wake of the election, given that participants generally expressed similar feelings at both time points. On average, participant responses to each open-ended question were 3–5 sentences long but ranged in length from one sentence to several paragraphs. Fourteen parents (28%) completed at least 80% of the open-ended questions, 13 (26%) completed 70%–79% of the open-ended questions, 8 (16%) completed 60%–69%, 5 (10%) completed 50%–59%, and 10 (20%) completed less than 50% of the open-ended questions.

Data Analysis

We used content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004) to examine responses from the open-ended portions of the surveys. Content analysis is a standard method for examining open-ended responses to survey questions, generating new insights through a process of identifying, coding, and categorizing primary patterns or themes in the data (Patton, 2002). Through this process of exploring and classifying qualitative data with the help of NVivo (a qualitative software program), we condensed words to text into a smaller number of content categories (Krippendorff, 2004) to develop a coding system to organize the data (Bogdan & Bicklen, 2007).

Our analysis focused on parents' descriptions of their experiences leading up to and following the 2016 presidential election, informed by intersectional and minority stress frameworks. The process of identifying and applying our thematic framework necessarily required judgment on our part about meaning, the relevance of particular issues, and the connections between ideas (Ritchie & Spencer, 2011). Our process of identifying and applying these frameworks was as follows: The second author engaged in line-by-line coding of all participant transcripts to develop a preliminary coding scheme with codes close to the text, such as "concerns about future" and subcodes such as "healthcare" and "rollback of civil rights." As a group, we discussed these preliminary codes, noting recurrent themes and identifying key issues and concepts to examine in more depth. After reading through a subset of participant responses, making slight modifications

to the initial scheme, the first and third authors applied the coding scheme to a subset of participants *(n = 18; 46%)*. We then established our thematic framework, informed by our research questions and the patterns of experiences we noted in preliminary coding (e.g., fears, emotional well-being, shifting family dynamics, particular social locations). We made further modifications to the scheme, reapplying it to all participants. This process ensured that multiple interpretations were considered, strengthening the credibility of the analysis (Patton, 2002; Ritchie & Spencer, 2011). The first author then reviewed all survey data again and revised the coding scheme a final time, in collaboration with the second author. We examined the data with close attention to the social locations of family members (e.g., their sexual minority status, racial minority status, geographic location, education, and income) and how these intersected with the patterns that emerged. We also attended to whether and how participants' responses shifted in meaningful ways across the two time points. Ultimately, we determined that participants expressed similar sentiments at both time points, and, thus, we collapsed our analysis across the two time points.

Our perspective and expectations of this study are shaped by our own professional and personal identities and experiences (Sim et al., 2012). The authors are all cisgender women, white or white-adjacent, who hold a variety of sexual identities including queer, bisexual, and heterosexual. All authors have experience studying and interviewing LGBTQ and adoptive families, as well as personal experiences with diverse families (e.g., foster care and queer parenting). Throughout the research process, we were sensitive to our individual identities and discussed how they may influence our perspective on and interpretations of the data, in order to uncover and acknowledge the influences that shaped our work (Lazard & McAvoy, 2020).

Results

We first address sexual minority adoptive parents' emotional or affective responses postelection, and how these responses varied according to key social locations (e.g., gender and race) of family members. We then discuss how parents' emotional responses to the election shaped immediate and extended family relationships. Finally,

we examine how parents coped with stressors and family relationship challenges in facing an uncertain future. We use participants' choice of racial identities for their children when describing family demographics.

Parents' Emotional Responses

For most parents in this study, the 2016 presidential election was a challenging political event, marked by uncertainty, which was reflected in parents' feelings about it. Parents described a variety of emotions leading up to and following the election. These emotions were mostly negative in valence and reflected the multiple ways in which participants experienced marginalization because of their identities. Yet, cautious optimism or positive responses were also present in some parents, underscoring the potential for multiple and conflicting experiences of privilege and oppression as a function of social position (McCall, 2005).

The majority *(n = 36, 72.0%)* of participants reported experiencing negative emotions (e.g., sadness, shock, helplessness, disappointment, and anger) as they learned of the election outcome, suggesting that despite differences in social locations (e.g., parent race, SES, multiracial family status), parents shared important similarities in their experience of oppression (Cole & Sabik, 2009). The dominant emotional response that parents reported was fear/anxiety *(n = 23, 46.0%)*, followed by anger (e.g., characterized by words and phrases such as "rage"; *n = 12, 24.0%*), sadness (e.g., "crushed"; *n = 9, 18.0%*), shock (e.g., "disbelief"; *n = 8, 16.0%*), disappointment (e.g., "devastated"; *n = 7, 14.0%*), and helplessness (e.g., "feeling of uncertainty"; *n = 4, 8.0%*). Chi-square analyses indicated that there were no significant differences in emotion categories across participants according to key demographics, namely parent gender or race, or the gender or race of the target child.

Notably, most participants reported experiencing multiple emotions, reflecting how individuals may experience "different forms of domination and privilege from multiple systems of oppression" (Windsong, 2018, p. 136). For example, Kimberly, a White lesbian mother of a 9-year-old White daughter and a 6-year old African American boy, expressed feeling "shock, rage, fear, disbelief, [and] sadness," after hearing about the results of the election, trying to reassure her

children that "everything would be okay." Other parents talked about their feelings in light of what could change for their children specifically. Ryan, a White gay father with a 6-year-old biracial son and a 4-year-old White son, reported feeling "disappointment, concern, [and] anxiety for my children's future." While both Kimberly and Ryan carried social power as White parents, they recognized how the election outcome could lead to the victimization of their children because of their children's identities (e.g., race, having sexual minority parents), a reflection of their privilege and oppression (Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008).

Parents' often strong and powerful emotional reactions to the election results seemed to reflect that for most, the outcome was a surprise. Indeed, the unexpected nature of the election results intensified the "sucker punch" of the news, thus magnifying their reactions. Nicole, a bisexual mother to three children of different races who had voted for Clinton, felt deep sadness over the outcome of the event. "I feel almost a sense of grief, as if someone close to me died," she explained. Her statement illustrates the intensity of emotion that parents felt in the wake of the unexpected election outcome. Similarly, Mark, a White gay father who had also voted for Clinton, said that he felt "devastated, kick-in-the-gut, loss for America," amidst his concern that his 11-year-old White son would "suffer harassment and/or discrimination" for having two fathers. For Mark, the election loss was both personally felt ("kick-in-the-gut") and more broadly felt ("loss for America"), underscoring the multifaceted impact of the event on parents' well-being amid uncertain times.

Several parents ($n = 23$, 46.0%) expressed concerns over safety because of their same-sex parent and multiracial family status, particularly in light of how the president-elect had normalized harassment against minority groups. They often shared plans for preventing stigma and discrimination—and, in turn, minimizing minority stress through increased vigilance (Gonzalez et al., 2018a; Meyer, 2003). For instance, Adam, a biracial gay father to three children of different races, expressed concerns about traveling out-of-state, worried that his family would be the victims of violence because of their gay-parent family status: "I don't even want to travel out of the relative safety I enjoy in California and have elected not to take our children to visit my family

in the red states of Mississippi and Texas where they live for fear that we might be the victim of violence." Adam was afraid that, as a married gay man with a multiracial family, his family would be increasingly visible to "violent racists who have been empowered to have their worldviews legitimized by Donald Trump." In addition to identifying fears associated with his family structure, this father also outlined how he planned to prevent stigma—namely, avoid certain regions of the country—which can be regarded as an unfortunate but adaptive response to potential stress (Meyer, 2003). Similarly, Sean, a White gay father to 7-year-old and 4-year-old White sons, was concerned about the possibility of violence because of his gay-parent family status, sharing that he felt "foolish that I thought prior progress would keep my family safe." He too planned to take steps to prevent stigma as much as he could: "I am thinking of being less public about the family."

A few parents (two mothers, one father; 6.0%) reported cautious optimism about the election results, describing feelings of fear and frustration, but also, unlike other parents, articulated hope for and faith in broader systems of justice. Their negative emotions were tempered by their confidence in, and respect for, governmental systems, a likely function of their own privilege as White and relatively affluent parents (see Weber, 1998). Jeremy, a White mostly gay father to a 10-year-old African American son, described feeling "fear, anger, and motivation" after seeing the election results, demonstrating that while he was upset, he was also focused on what could be done to change the situation. While concerned, Jeremy felt reassurance that the checks and balances of government would keep the President-elect from making "many of the really frightening things" come to pass, and told his son that he would "continue to fight and organize to keep him, and all of us, safe." Angela, a White lesbian mother of an 8-year-old White daughter, said "I've talked about our need to be respectful of the office of the president. I've also shared that I am not as worried about President Trump's actions as her teachers or other mom are. That some good may come of this." Angela prioritized a respect for the highest position in the country, and even though she had some concerns, she held onto hope for the possibility of a positive outcome. Cautiously optimistic parents, then, were concerned about the election outcome, but

demonstrated more hope in the future than parents with a solidly negative outlook, simultaneously protected by their own racial and economic privilege (McCall, 2005).

A single male participant, an unaffiliated voter who voted for Trump from a rural area on the East Coast, reported feeling positively about the outcome of the election. Kevin, a White gay father of four sons (two White, two Latino, ages 15–23), reported feeling "pleased" and "excited to see what happens." He and his husband had voted for Trump because of the candidate's position on "taxes, and defense of the country and how we think it takes a business man to get our country back on track." In contrast to the rest of the parents in the sample, this father was not concerned about threats to safety on account of his two-father, multiracial family status. His position as a working-class father in a rural area aligned him with many other White working-class parents facing potential economic uncertainty who seek to maintain positions of power and control (Morgan & Lee, 2018; Weber, 1998), which may have to lead him to vote for the Republican candidate who promised to "make America wealthy again" and to bring back jobs to struggling states (Trump, 2016, para. 2). Notably, two of their teenage adoptive sons did not share their political beliefs, a point of conflict that is discussed in the next section.

In summary, most parents highlighted many ways that the results of the election triggered worries for them around their and their family's minority statuses. Parents worried about and prepared for stigma, discrimination from others, and possible violence, particularly for their children, whose identity constellations could uniquely expose them to harassment from dominant social groups (Crenshaw, 1991). Except for one family, all were concerned about what the future might hold.

Family Relationships

Regardless of parents' reactions, emotions, and fears following the election, their responses impacted family relationships in a number of ways. We turn now to those responses, examining these experiences in light of key social locations of both the parents and their children (e.g., sexual orientation, adoption status, and race). These effects were located both within the immediate family (i.e., between partners; between parent

and child), and across the family system (i.e., conflict with extended family).

Immediate Family

While no parents had partners who voted for different candidates, some participants ($n = 8$, 16.0%; 4 women, 4 men) described how their partners' emotional reactions to the election were different than their own, which created distance, and rarely, tension. Keith, a White gay father of a 12-year-old Latino son, found himself wanting to engage in activist work, seeing it as vital to his mental health in light of his concerns about the possibility of "efforts to repeal marriage equality, and that discrimination will be legal . . . I also feel that I must take one action per day for my own sanity and sense of agency." He described his partner, Michael, as taking a more restrained approach: "Michael has a tendency to shut down more when I want to take action," adding that he personally "could not deal with or speak to anyone who supported Trump." Keith acknowledged the degree of "mental fatigue" he and his spouse were experiencing in their joint concerns, while noting that he felt that he could not fully engage in discussions that might create conflict with his spouse. Ryan, a White gay father who had engaged in conversations with his 8-year-old biracial (including Native American) son about how "Trump doesn't like families like ours," found himself to be more open about his feelings than his partner Eric: "I am just more vocal about expression things. Eric will keep things himself to a point." Ryan's fears of having his marriage voided, or about the "ease of discrimination that others will be 'allowed' to have toward me and with no recourse," while shared by his partner, were not expressed in similar ways. Their differing approaches to managing emotions vis-à-vis the election meant that they were not always on the same page, a negative effect of minority stress on relationship closeness (Frost, 2014).

A few participants ($n = 3$, 6.0%, 2 mothers, 1 father) expressed that their relationships with their partners (and in one instance, between their partner and children) were strained as a result of different ways of managing their emotions in the wake of the election. For instance, Angela, a lesbian mother of a White 8-year-old daughter, who wondered about "how far the polarization of our country will go," shared that even though she and her wife had voted for the same candidate,

their relationship had since deteriorated, in part because of their different responses to the election. While Angela preferred to "share/forward Facebook messages that I thought carried a positive message—like to be kind, respectful, and value diversity, nothing overtly political … ," her wife's reaction to the election was much more pronounced: "My wife is so angry that I don't dare express much real thoughts about what is happening to deflect her comments and keep the kids away from her. It's been very tense … [we] can barely talk about [the election] at all." Angela, notably, acknowledged that she felt protected from any future discriminatory laws because she lived in a Democratic-leaning state. Danielle, a mostly lesbian mother of an 11-year-old Latino son, whose partner had a preexisting health condition and whose child had mental health issues, was afraid of how proposed policies by the Trump administration would affect her family and others, including "nontraditional families, people of color, and vulnerable communities." Danielle shared that her emotions about the election had boiled over onto her wife: "I am so irritable that I have been very angry at times, even at home. That includes yelling at my spouse … this is not because we differ in our politics, I am just so damn irritable!" In contrast, Travis, a White gay father of a 15-year-old multiracial son who worried about the "well-being of the country and economy," felt constrained by his partner: "I think about buying a gun all the time, but my husband won't let me."

One two-father transracial adoptive family (i.e., both men were White; two sons were Latino and two were White) described election-related tension between the parents and their teenage children of color, who were old enough to work but not to vote. Kevin, the White gay father who voted for Trump, explained that "two of our kids agreed with our thoughts and candidate, two did not." Kevin and his husband worked to try to reach an agreement with their sons, keeping the lines of communication open: "We talked to them throughout the campaign, we talked about taxes, which they didn't understand until they started to work recently as well." Kevin discussed "how the media is one sided," and how to decide what was truth and what was not. The election, then, from the campaign through the inauguration, had the potential to introduce conflict between parents and older children, who could consume their own media and thus form differing political opinions

from their parents, and whose privileges and oppressions based on their social locations (e.g., race) may be different from those of their parents (e.g., McCall, 2005).

Extended Family

Some participants ($n = 17$, 34.0%, 12 mothers, 5 fathers) shared how their emotions surrounding the election outcomes had changed their relationships with extended family members, particularly those who had voted differently. Nine participants (18.0%, 8 mothers, 1 father), limited their level of communication and time spent with extended family. For instance, Kimberly, a White lesbian mother to a 9-year-old White daughter and a 6-year-old African American son, shared that her anger over the election outcomes caused her to limit time with her side of the family: "I haven't been in communication as much as usual with my parents and brother because I am angry they voted for Trump. They live in [different state], so it's not like we saw them a lot anyway, but we emailed, called, and texted often, and now I've pulled back because I'm angry. I know they know why and it hurts them, but I can't help it." Her anger, stemming from her feeling "like some of the people closest to me did not have my family's best interests in mind," directly impacted the depth of relationship she was willing to have with her parents and sibling, in order to protect herself and her family.

Similar to Kimberly, Jill, lesbian mother to a 9-year-old African American/Caucasian son, shared that she was "still unable to face family who we thought supported our family and have since found out while they say they are supportive, they voted against who would protect us." Jill saw her family members' decisions to vote for a different candidate as a deep betrayal of trust, a refusal to "see the broader picture of protecting their grandkids." Her feelings of anger and betrayal caused her to reduce contact with extended family to protect herself, her spouse, and her children. In one instance, Tanya, a mostly lesbian mother, was considering cutting ties altogether with her partner's parents "after years of dealing with [partner's] parents' racism," expressing that they felt "we are finally just about done." Tanya, whose adopted children were not yet U.S. citizens, felt particularly sensitive about her partner's family's racial hostility in the wake of the

election. She was no longer willing to tolerate their intolerance for the sake of her vulnerable children, not wanting to expose them to racism—a strategy found in other similar samples within the LGBTQ community (see Gonzalez et al., 2018a).

Coping Responses: Managing Reactions and Emotions to the Election

Most participants found the election to be a time of increased stress, as they prepared for or navigated discrimination (e.g., fear of legal changes, managing microaggressions) while also managing daily life stressors (e.g., family disagreements, parenting demands; see Herek et al., 2009; Meyer, 2003). It is therefore important to understand how parents managed their emotions in the wake of the election. We turn next to our third research question about how parents coped with election-related stressors.

Parents described using a variety of coping mechanisms to help manage the stress they were experiencing as a result of the election, in line with past work on minority stress and coping (e.g., Toomey et al., 2018). Some reported using healthy coping mechanisms—namely, activities such as exercise, volunteering, and connecting with others. One of the most prominent ($n = 11$, 22.0%, 8 mothers, 3 fathers) forms of healthy coping that participants described was seeking out connection with like-minded others, both online and in-person. As Jeremy noted, he was "taking to social media and reaching out to community" to help him deal with his emotions around the election, deliberately seeking comradery online through "supporting others who are dealing with the trauma." Three (6.0%; 2 mothers, 1 father) parents said that they used exercise to vent feelings around the election and to remind themselves that they had agency in a time of hopelessness. Specifically, when asked how she handled election-related stress, Lysa, a bisexual mother of a 9-year-old Filipino/Mexican-American daughter, who worried about "significant changes or even decimation of the ACA [Affordable Care Act]" in light of preexisting conditions in her family, shared that she kept "trying to keep moving my body . . . Focusing on what I CAN control." Others ($n = 2$, 4.0%; 2 fathers) mentioned that they turned to the outdoors, thus connecting with the larger world in a meaningful way. Keith, father to his 12-year-old

Latino son, for instance, was "spending lots of time in nature," while Ben, father to a 10-year-old White daughter, reported that "a lot of gardening is what relaxes me." These coping mechanisms, particularly that of community-seeking, can be effective strategies for LGBTQ people in lessening the impact of negative feelings related to uncertain and challenging political climates (Gonzalez et al., 2018b; Russell & Richards, 2003), giving them a sense of agency at a critical time of powerlessness.

When asked if and how they engaged in activist work, many parents ($n = 18$, 36.0%, 10 mothers, 8 fathers) said that they chose to alleviate election-related stress through getting involved in causes outside of them in order to create change, which is an adaptive response to minority stress (e.g., Hope et al., 2018). For instance, parents described going to marches, sometimes even taking their children with them to protest policies. Don participated in the Women's March "to show support to women and opposition to Trump's policies on health," bringing his 8-year-old Latino son along with him. Others donated to organizations (e.g., the ACLU; LGBTQ rights organizations). Such activism helped them to feel like they were making a difference while helping them to feel better emotionally. Adam, who had an 8-year-old multiracial son and whose extended family supported Trump, said that "engaging in protests has been very important and has made me feel better." Similarly, Emily, who had a 10-year-old Guatemalan daughter, shared that she was "living my life the best I can each day, and also getting involved in organizations or movements that will help the situation." Her work, and the work of many other parents, served as a coping mechanism (i.e., a way to feel better personally) as well as a means of enacting change (i.e., make a difference on a larger scale), which aligns with prior work on how minorities cope with stressful, unpredictable situations (e.g., Toomey et al., 2018).

Another way that parents ($n = 7$, 14%, 3 mothers, 4 fathers) chose to alleviate election-related stress was to avoid thinking about the outcome of the election. For instance, some parents purposely chose to disengage from discussions or activism related to the election, which helped alleviate some stress. "I've decided I'm done with engaging," said Devin, father to a 10-year-old African American son. Devin acknowledged that his White, male status may have afforded him the ability to retreat from politics

when other less-privileged parents felt forced to engage: "We do have some economic and class privilege that will help buffer whatever may happen." Similarly, Travis, a White gay father of a 15-year-old multiracial son, said that "I've been withdrawing more. It's a little strange." He too, conceded that he and his husband were in a position of privilege, protected because of their race and socioeconomic status: "I am not too worried about being targeted as White, professional men," he explained.

Finally, a few participants ($n = 3$; 2 mothers, 1 father) mentioned, unprompted, that they turned to substances (a coping mechanism for those in discriminatory environments; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010) to work through their frustration about the election outcomes. "[I've been] smoking a lot of pot. It's a lifeline," said Vivian, mother to an 8-year-old biracial daughter. She expressed that she was in despair over the election results and didn't see "any rhyme or reason to anything" in her life. While she had reached out to extended family members (e.g., her sister) for support and to express her fears, she explained that they "have no idea how important [the election] was to me," and that "they just simply refuse to engage in conversation about it," leaving her feeling disenfranchised and unseen.

Discussion

This qualitative study is the first to examine the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election and its impact on sexual minority adoptive parents, many of whom were members of multiracial families. Indeed, this sample's minority statuses uniquely shaped their experiences of an election season that was particularly focused on politics around specific identities (e.g., sexual, gender, and racial identities; Strolovitch et al., 2017).

Our first research question addressed parents' emotional reactions to the election and their fears and concerns for their families in light of their intersecting sexual, racial, and family identities. Parents' emotional reactions were largely negative (e.g., sadness and fear). The "relative powerlessness" (Herek et al., 2009, p. 33) that many parents experienced in the aftermath of the election underscores the ambiguity, lack of control, and uncertainty that members of multiple marginalized groups encounter when faced with an administration whose goals and agendas may explicitly and implicitly harm them. While

some parents linked this feeling of powerlessness to their complete surprise at the election outcome or concerns about the impact on the country, others specifically highlighted their concerns about family safety or their children's future. For some, too, the election led to preoccupied thinking regarding their multiple minority statuses (Hatzenbuehler & Pachankis, 2016), which has been linked to depressive symptoms among sexual minorities (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010). Parents' fears parallel finding in other studies of the aftermath of the 2016 election, where LGBTQ participants expressed concern that current federal laws protecting LGBTQ+ people would be overturned under the new presidential administration (e.g., Brown & Keller, 2018), triggering minority stress in the midst of political and social uncertainty.

The sexual minority adoptive parents in this study, many of whom were situated in multiracial family contexts, belonged to multiple subordinate groups. An intersectional lens (e.g., Cole, 2009) enables us to understand how these multiple, intersecting forms of oppression (e.g., racism, homophobia) may contribute to elevated levels of stress (McConnell et al., 2018) after events like the election (Veldhuis et al., 2018). Parents' experiences of the election were largely similar across social categories and identities, although their experiences were not identical (Cole, 2009). For example, while most parents reported feeling stress about the election and uncertainty about the future, the cautious optimism and even positive emotions that some participants felt were likely related to their position as White parents, which would protect them from personally experiencing hostile attitudes and discrimination because of their race (e.g., Flitter & Kahn, 2016). Living in a Democratic-leaning state helped some parents to feel protected from discriminatory laws, yet did not protect them against strained relationships with partners and family and the need for increased vigilance (e.g., Gonzalez et al., 2018a; Meyer, 2003). While some parents explicitly acknowledged aspects of their identities that placed them in a position of privilege (e.g., White, male, and stable income), others noted that their identities as sexual minorities could open them up to violence, adjusting their plans for public spaces to protect themselves and their families (a decision which also reflects privilege). Parents in this study carried both privilege and oppression (Windsong, 2018), which shaped their postelection experiences.

Our second research question addressed how parents' emotional responses to the election impacted immediate and extended family relationships. Some participants shared that their relationship with their partner had become strained because of different emotional responses or by becoming overwhelmed by stress and negative affect. While all participants had voted the same way as their partner, the intensity of the emotional reactions to the election or use of coping strategies sometimes differed between couples, which at times led to conflict, which is in line with previous work (e.g., McCarthy & Saks, 2019). Even when partners were on the same page politically, when the strength or intensity of their reactions to the election did not necessarily align, this had the potential to amplify tensions and stress in their relationship. Also, in one instance, there was a conflict between parents and their (older) children as a result of different political opinions, changing family dynamics. The election appeared to strain some parent–child and partner relationships as the addition of general and minority stressors overwhelmed coping capacities or led to different coping strategies (Frost & Meyer, 2009; Hatzenbuehler, 2010).

For many participants, emotional responses to the election caused friction with extended family, leading participants to cut off contact or to avoid discussing the election entirely. These findings are in line with prior work on the impact of the 2016 election on queer family relationships (Gonzalez et al., 2018b), but extend it to include parents who had adopted a child (who was often a child of color), thereby illustrating how the election impacted individuals, families, and children with diverse and marginalized identities. Consistent with the minority stress model (Meyer, 2003), participants experienced heightened emotions related to the possibility of discrimination, risk, and stigma, in addition to experiencing a lack of support and validation from family. Many chose to limit time with those family members as a way to protect themselves and their children, in alignment with past research (e.g., Gonzalez et al., 2018b; Wheeler et al., 2018). In the context of these tensions, parents may lose valued sources of extended family support (e.g., childcare), and could experience fractured relationships with additional family members over time, further contributing to stress.

Our final research question asked how parents managed or coped with their election-related emotions amidst a future in which the safety and well-being of themselves and their children appeared to be at stake. Many parents described using active, positive strategies to manage their emotions including strategies that specifically addressed the source of their fears (e.g., activism around the election) and more general stress-management strategies (e.g., self-care practices like exercise). In particular, participants' engagement in activist work appeared to be targeted at helping them to regain a sense of control. Whether attending a march, or meeting up with other like-minded people, connecting with others was a positive coping mechanism that many participants relied on. The literature on resilience suggests that connecting with a community can aid in resilience and can provide resources that serve the greater good (e.g., support groups, information, advocacy; Meyer, 2015). These coping mechanisms, particularly that of community-seeking, can be effective strategies for LGBTQ people in lessening the impact of negative feelings related to uncertain and challenging political climates (Gonzalez et al., 2018a; Russell & Richards, 2003) and buffering the effects of minority stress (Meyer, 2015), giving them agency at a critical time of powerlessness. These findings also extend the scholarship on positive psychology (see Vaughan et al., 2014), particularly in the appreciation of beauty in nature, and optimism (albeit cautious) during a tumultuous time.

Some participants described withdrawing from interactions with others in order to manage their election-related emotions. For a few, the ability to retreat was afforded to them because of their race and/or socioeconomic status: Protected by being White and high-income, sexual minority men in particular could pull back from engagement, in some cases recognizing that they were unlikely to experience serious discrimination under the new Administration because of their privileged identities (Gamarel et al., 2012). These findings mirror prior work suggesting that higher socioeconomic status is linked to lower levels of discrimination, and therefore lower depressive symptoms (Gamarel et al., 2012); indeed, economic protections reduce individuals' vulnerability to stigma and "lower the stakes" for engaging politically, insomuch as political upheaval disproportionately affect more marginalized people (i.e., not them; Cooper & Pugh, 2020). Furthermore, our findings point to the need to attend to intersections of race, class, gender,

and sexual orientation to better understand how exposure to stigma and experiences of discrimination may vary from individual to individual, and even moment to moment (see Parent et al., 2013).

Finally, a few participants mentioned that they used alcohol and other substances to manage their emotions, echoing prior work on coping as a minority in stressful environments (e.g., Livingston et al., 2017; Parent et al., 2019). That substance use can be a way for sexual minority parents to cope with living in a discriminatory environment is in line with prior research on LGB people that specifically links discrimination and coping (e.g., Hatzenbuehler, et al., 2010; Hudson et al., 2016; Parent et al., 2019). Significantly, this approach to managing emotions may, over time, lead to lower levels of physical and mental health (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010; Parent et al., 2019). Furthermore, it is important to consider these substance use behaviors in the context of a family: Indeed, problematic alcohol and drug use may contribute to poorer outcomes for these parents and their families (Compton et al., 2014; Lander et al., 2013; Parent et al., 2019).

Thus, participants utilized a variety of methods to alleviate their feelings about the election. While some parents tried to avoid thinking about the future, others channeled their energies into exercise, outreach, and activist work, echoing prior work on LGBTQ populations (Hope et al., 2018; Toomey et al., 2018). Parent responses to the emotions they felt shaped both immediate relationships (e.g., with partners), and more distant ones (e.g., with extended family).

Implications and Applications

Our findings suggest that sexual minority adoptive parents may experience significant distress in the wake of challenging political events, such as the 2016 presidential election. Those working with these families, such as mental health practitioners, are in a unique position to help parents experiencing added fears and interpersonal tensions. We next offer suggestions for practitioners working with parents in families with multiple minority statuses.

Our findings around the differing use of coping strategies between partners are important, particularly since it can lead to distance, conflict, and shifts in family dynamics. Practitioners should assess relationship dynamics between partners, recognizing that while all couples experience stressors, same-sex adoptive parents are grappling with multiple minority statuses during a time when it is unclear what the future holds for themselves and their family members (see Brenoff, 2016; Frost & Fingerhut, 2016). Practitioners can provide support and offer strategies for strengthening partner relationships. For instance, they can reframe experiences of discrimination in a way that externalizes the root of the problem outside the couple (Frost, 2014). Practitioners can also help couples focus on the positive aspects of their relationship in order to improve communication and relationship quality (Scott et al., 2019). This may be particularly important for lesbian mothers, who may place a higher emphasis on relationship quality than gay fathers (see Balsam et al., 2017).

Our findings around tensions with extended family members have implications for mental health practitioners, who should be careful not to be dismissive of clients who may want to process changes in family relationships. Politics can create schisms and tensions within families, a reality that is important to acknowledge and normalize. Practitioners can help parents strategize how to respond to hostile extended family members, who may hold political views that are contrary to their own. Clinicians can also provide support for those who decide to reduce or cut off contact with extended family in order to protect themselves and their children. Families of choice, including friends, partners, and members of the community, may be in a better position to offer support to families with multiple minority statuses (see Khaddouma et al., 2015).

While a relatively small number of parents mentioned turning to substances as a way to manage their emotions in the wake of the election, for some people, alcohol and other drugs can be an unhealthy way to cope (e.g., Compton et al., 2014). Clinicians should be sensitive to their clients' use of substances and should help them consider how substances are impacting their lives and the lives of their family members (Parent et al., 2019). Further, practitioners should be attuned to the potential for social isolation among LGBTQ parents post-election, which in turn increases the risk of depression (Lander et al., 2013).

Finally, practitioners can turn to positive psychology to help parents utilize their community and individual-level strengths (see Lytle et al.,

2014). For instance, they can support parents as they become engaged in activist work, which tends to increase feelings of control and hope about the future (Levitt et al., 2009), in addition to being a source for community transformation (Jones & Voss, 2006). Practitioners should be knowledgeable about the types of activities occurring in their communities and be prepared to connect parents who express interest in enhancing social supports and enacting change with local and online advocacy and support groups. Practitioners should also help parents assess how they may bring their children into activist work, if they wish to do so, and to consider how activism may affect children.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, this sample of adoptive parents may not be fully representative of the larger data set from which they were drawn. Indeed, although they mirrored the larger data set on key social locations (e.g., income, race/gender of their first child, and race of the parent), the parents in this sample were likely more motivated to be involved with this study than other parents and may have stronger feelings and different experiences of the election than parents who did not choose to participate. Relatedly, there was a small number of participants, likely because the request for participants was extremely time-sensitive and involved completing a questionnaire within a few days.

Second, we only examined the responses of one parent in the couple, and we did not directly seek out the emotional responses and experiences of the children to the election. While participants were able to share how they thought their partner felt, or how they talked with their children about the election, these perspectives are necessarily limited. Also, many of these families had more than one child, and it is likely that the ways in which parents engaged with their children differed according to the child's developmental stage (see Goldberg et al., 2016). Additionally, had we included the children's reports of their experiences, they would have likely differed from their (predominantly White) parents' perspectives in meaningful ways. For instance, children may avoid telling their parents about negative experiences (e.g., bullying around race, adoption status, or having two mothers/fathers) at school (Mishna, 2004). Future studies should include the

perspectives of adopted children, who may have different experiences of political events and their aftermath than their parents given their own identity constellations.

Third, our sample was relatively homogenous with respect to race, education, and socioeconomic status: Most were White, well-educated, and well-off financially. In turn, some parents did indeed reference the degree of privilege they held. The demographic characteristics of our sample are similar to other samples of adoptive parents (e.g., Farr et al., 2019), but may not reflect the experiences of those from lower socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, particularly families with parents who are racial minorities. Our sample's demographics also did not align with literature suggesting that same-sex couples are more likely to adopt children of color and out of the child welfare system (e.g., Gates, 2013; Gates et al., 2007). Our sample's experiences therefore may be different from other same-sex couples who adopt.

Fourth, our own biases and expectations as researchers undoubtedly shaped our research process. While we worked to minimize these effects (e.g., through team discussions), we may have missed alternative interpretations of our data. Further, we made judgments about participants' experiences (e.g., "positive" and "healthy"), which were influenced by our own perspectives as psychologists, mental health professionals, and academics. While we strived to examine our data with "open minds and curiosity" (Sim et al., 2012, p. 68), others may arrive at different conclusions.

Conclusions

Our findings align with and extend previous research on reactions to and emotions around stressful political events, but explore this topic in a unique sample: Namely, sexual minority adoptive families, many of whom were multiracial, in the context of the 2016 presidential election. Now, several years later, parents' feelings about the Trump administration may have changed as new policies have been enacted and as children have matured. Future research should assess LGBTQ parents' anticipation of and reactions to national presidential elections over time, beyond the initial event. Furthermore, such work can more precisely examine participation in advocacy and activism, including the

consequences of engaging in this work overtime (e.g., new relationships, burnout).

This study revealed the ways in which the 2016 election added general and minority stress to the lives of sexual minority adoptive parents. Findings illustrated how family systems sometimes became strained as parents coped differently or extended family members held opposing viewpoints from parents, and how parents engaged in a variety of healthy and unhealthy coping strategies. These findings highlight the impact of national events on the stress and coping of individuals and families with multiple marginalized identities.

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