

ADOLESCENT FATHERS NEED SUPPORT TOO! ASSESSING HOW  
GRANDMOTHER COPARENTING DIFFERS BETWEEN  
ADOLESCENT FATHERS VERSUS  
ADOLESCENT MOTHERS

by

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescent pregnancy reached a peak in the 1990s and, as of 2010, there has been a 51% decline in the amount of adolescent pregnancies (Boonstra, 2014). In spite of that fact, adolescent pregnancy continues to be a public health concern, especially within the Latino population (henceforth referenced as Hispanic, to reflect the data collection tool used to assess ethnicity) who experience the highest rate of pregnancy in the United States (U.S.) and make-up 18% of the U.S. population (Spear & Lock, 2003). The coparenting dynamic within adolescent parents has also been a topic that has been researched and explored by the research community (Spear & Lock, 2003). Current research, however, has primarily focused on adolescent mothers and is insufficient when studying adolescent fathers. Within adolescent coparenting dyads, support (warmth and cooperation), undermining (hostility and competition), and the division of labor in caretaking (e.g. feeding the child, bathing the child, changing the child) can affect how adolescent parents work together as a parenting team (Cabrera, Shannon, & La Taillade, 2009; Murphy, Jacobvitz, & Hazen, 2016). Studies have shown that the relationship between adolescent parents is strengthened if they work together when it comes to raising their child/ren and if they receive support from the community and their family. Coparenting does not only exist within the adolescent mother and father, research has shown that an adolescent mother's own mother (henceforth referenced as the grandmother) is the most influential source of support, especially when it comes to caretaking (Letourneau, Stewart, & Barnfather, 2004), and this support is linked to better adolescent adjustment (Sadler, Swartz, & Ryan-Krause, 2003). There is a gap in research when studying the coparenting relationship within adolescent fathers and their own

mothers, however, research on adolescent fathers is limited (Bunting & McAuley, 2004) and research on non-traditional coparenting dynamics (e.g., mother-grandmother, father-grandmother) is even more limited. Due to the scarce research on grandmother's support for the adolescent father, it is important to describe how adolescent fathers coparent with grandmothers and examine if these coparenting experiences differ for adolescent mothers and fathers.

### **Coparenting within Adolescents**

Coparenting occurs between two individuals who are working together to achieve the same parenting goals (Van-Egeren & Hawkins, 2004). It includes the joint parenting that exists within the context of the family and reflects the ability of parents cooperating as a team to raise their children (Buckley & Schoope-Sullivan, 2010). Individuals in a coparenting team do not have to be emotionally attached to each other to effectively coparent together (Arendell, 1996; Blandon, Scrimgeour, Stifter, & Buss, 2014; Feinberg, 2003; McClain & Brown, 2017). Parents that are coparenting with each other contribute to the parenting aspect by supporting each other and the roles that each one plays in the structure of their family (Arendell, 1996). How parents coparent a child is determined independently by each individual (e.g. their gender, personality, values, beliefs) and is often influenced by social and cultural contexts (e.g. schools, churches, family; Feinberg, 2003).

Theoretical conceptualizations of coparenting have primarily focused on adult relationships (Feinberg, 2002; 2003). Through this lens, they have operationalized three primary components of coparenting to describe the level of support (e.g., warmth, cooperation), level of undermining (e.g., hostility, competition, ridicule), and the division

of labor in caretaking (e.g. feeding the child, bathing the child, changing the child) that exists between coparents (Feinberg, 2002; 2003). Supportive coparenting, also known as cooperative coparenting, is the amount of support that each parent gives each other. Parents support each other by reinforcing each other's interactions with their child, and not contradicting one another's decisions. In contrast, undermining coparenting, also known as competitive coparenting, is the degree to which parents undermine each other in the presence of their child. Parents undermine each other, by contradicting the other's decisions in front of the child, or by trying to manipulate for control over their child and trying to be the favorite parent (Cabrera et al., 2009; Murphy et al., 2016). Undermining coparenting can lead to family conflict, and externalizing symptoms (e.g. aggression, anxiety, fear) in children (Schoppe, Mangelsdorf, & Frosch, 2001; Murphy et al., 2016). Another component involved in coparenting is the division of labor between two individuals. Although division of labor is a broad topic, for parenting individuals it includes dividing caregiving tasks and having mutual involvement with the child (Van-Egeren & Hawkins, 2004). Even though most of the research has focused on adult coparenting relationships, it can also be used when studying adolescent's coparenting relationships.

While current research is starting to focus more on the coparenting relationship of adolescent parents, past research tended to focus on adult coparenting relationships. Although adolescent pregnancy has lowered in recent years it continues to be a public health concern, especially within Hispanic adolescents (Spear & Lock, 2003). Due to this, research has expanded to study the coparenting relationship between adolescent parents, and has compared their coparenting relationship, with that of adults. Current research has



found that having a healthy coparenting relationship is associated with having a higher quality of parent-child relationships, and higher well-being for the adolescent mother (Fagan, 2008). Healthy adolescent coparenting relationships have been explained as having a positive parenting alliance (i.e. how parents support versus undermine each other), sharing and respecting the partner's values, and acknowledging the roles and tasks of the other (i.e. division of labor; Fagan, 2008). Thus, although the current research on adolescent coparenting has not used previous definitions of the subcomponents of coparenting (i.e., support, undermining, and division of labor), these subcomponents can also be found in the adolescent coparenting dynamic. The conceptualization of effective adolescent coparenting aligns with previous research of adult coparents with one key difference; adolescent parents report receiving more support from family members and friends, such as receiving emotional support, monetary support, and assistance with childcare, compared to adult parents (Castillo & Sarver, 2012); thus, alternate coparenting relationships may exist more readily within families with adolescent parents.

### **Coparenting with Grandmothers**

Current research has primarily focused on the social support that adolescent mothers receive. Social support is defined as the interaction between family members, friends, and health professionals with adolescent mothers (Letourneau et al., 2004). Social support is a way that individuals receive emotional and material support from others, which leads them to obtain access to opportunities like childcare, health insurance, monetary support (Castillo & Sarver, 2012). If adolescent mothers receive an adequate amount of support from family and friends, it alleviates some stress and helps them focus on meeting her baby's needs and their mental well-being (Spieker & Bensley,

1994). When an adolescent mother has emotional support from her family, it increases her ability to caretake her child (Castillo & Sarver, 2012; Spieker & Bensley, 1994). Although social support can include various systems that help with childcare, the teaching of parenting skills, and affirming the mother's childrearing abilities, research has shown that adolescent mothers rank the support they receive from their own mothers as the most influential support (Letourneau et al., 2004). An example of the coparenting support that adolescent mothers receive from their mother is the assistance of raising their grandchild through childcare. Having a grandmother's caregiving support is important for adolescent mothers who are playing two roles; the role of being a parent, and the role of being an adolescent (Apfel & Seltz, 1991; Spieker & Bensley, 1994). Receiving this high amount of support from their mother creates an alliance between the adolescent and their mother that qualifies the grandmother as a coparent rather than just a support system.

Two studies have specifically aimed to understand how adolescents and their mothers coparent together. In Apfel and Seitz's (1991) qualitative study of African American adolescent mothers' coparenting relationships with grandmothers, the researchers found that grandmothers provided high support in child rearing activities for adolescent mothers. More specifically, this study found four different conceptual models of coparenting (parental replacement, parental supplement, supported primary parent, and parental apprentice). Of these models, the most prevalent model was the Parental Supplement model, which appeared in 50% of the families. The Parental Supplement model was characterized with equal division of labor between the adolescent mother-grandmother, and some conflict (specifically related to negotiating caretaking tasks; Apfel & Seitz, 1991). Another study that focused on Mexican-origin adolescent mother-

grandmother dyads found four different coparenting profiles within adolescent mother-grandmother coparenting. The most prominent profile, Harmonious-Adolescent Primary was found among 56% of their participants. This coparenting profile consisted of high communication, low conflict, and the adolescent being involved in caretaking tasks more than the grandmother (Perez-Brena, Updegraff, Umana-Taylor, Jahromi, & Guimond, 2015). Based on current research on Hispanic and African American adolescent mother-grandmother coparents, the typical coparenting dynamic between them includes having high communication, low conflict, and an equal to moderately imbalanced (high adolescent vs. low grandmother) amounts of division of labor. Thus, these findings are salient to this thesis, and it brings about the expectation for the adolescent mother-grandmother coparenting dynamic to include high communication (a subconstruct of high support), low conflict (a subconstruct of low undermining), and an equal amount of division of labor (for this particular thesis, division of labor will focus on the grandmother's involvement of the child's caretaking).

### **Adolescent Fathers and Coparenting**

Research on fathers has primarily focused on their capability to financially provide for their family and their lack of emotionally sustaining their family (Finley, Mira, & Schwartz, 2008). Many adolescent fathers are held accountable for financially providing for their child, which may prevent the adolescent father from being involved in their child's upbringing (Finley et al., 2008; Cabrera & Bradley, 2012). Adolescent fathers are typically expected to contribute financial support to their family, while mothers are expected to provide the emotional role (Wall & Arnold, 2007). The expectation that fathers should be financial providers for their children may lead maternal

grandmothers to deny father's access to their children if they are unable to provide that financial support (Dallas, 2004).

In addition, culturally informed gender roles may inform how fathers are supported. For example, fathers are usually portrayed as solely playing the instrumental role in their family, and emotionally withdrawing from their children (Cabrera & Bradley, 2012). Since fathers typically provide economically for their family, they're also expected to spend less time at home caretaking for the children (Cabrera, Volling, & Barr, 2018). Researchers suggest that these expectations are informed by the concept of *hegemonic masculinity*, the idea that men playing a dominant role in society is embedded in various social institutions (i.e. schools, church, family; Howson, 2006). This concept can affect the amount of support that a father receives as a parent, especially since they are believed to not support their children emotionally. Having these stigmas towards adolescent fathers can affect their ability to caregive, especially if they are affected by the self-fulfilling prophecy. This idea has the ability of making a false belief become fulfilled by conforming to what society depicts as being the norm (Madon, Willard, Gyll, & Scherr, 2011). New evidence, however, suggests that fathers value their role as teachers and enjoy playing an emotional role, aside from an instrumental role, in their child's life (Cabrera & Bradley, 2012; Cabrera et al., 2000; 2013; Wall & Arnold, 2007). The importance of coparenting support for adolescent fathers is further punctuated in Fagan and Lee's (2011) study where researchers found that adolescent fathers who report high levels of social support are more likely to have greater paternal engagement with their children, compared to those who report low levels of support.

Research on the support that adolescent fathers receive from other sources, especially from grandmothers, is limited (Bunting & McAuley, 2004). Thus, it is not known if and how fathers are supported through their transition into parenthood. One study provides some minimal insights. A research study assessing the experiences of paternal grandmothers and maternal grandmothers during the transition to fatherhood for unmarried, low-income African American adolescent fathers shows that grandmothers have a higher expectation for adolescent mother's level of parenting compared to their expectation of adolescent father's level of parenting (Dallas, 2004). Two studies that primarily looked at adult fathers noted that this difference in expectations of parenting may manifest into lower support for fathers, or even undermining the fathers' contributions to parenting. It may also manifest in grandmothers taking over parenting duties and reducing father's division of labor as fathers may not be expected to want to be involved (Cabrera et al., 2018) or be emotionally attuned enough to be a good father (Cabrera & Bradley, 2012). These findings hint at a potential difference in how adolescent mothers and adolescent fathers may be supported by their own mothers.

### **Current Study**

Research on fathers has primarily focused on their capability to financially provide for their family (Finley et al., 2008). Little research has focused on the amount of support that adolescent fathers receive compared to adolescent mothers from their own mother when it comes to caretaking tasks (Bunting & McAuley, 2004). The limited research available focuses on the support that grandmothers give to adolescent mothers (Letourneau et al., 2004) and shows that grandmothers are more likely to hold adolescent

mothers to a higher standard than adolescent fathers when it comes to caretaking, and therefor support them more with the childrearing activities (Dallas, 2004).

This thesis aims to describe how adolescent parents coparent with grandmothers and examine if this coparenting experience differs for adolescent mothers and fathers within the domains of undermining, support, and division of labor for adolescent mothers and fathers. Having this information will be helpful to understand how adolescent fathers could better be supported in their parenting role in order to improve their ability to caretake for their child. Because research is limited, the first goal of this study is to describe whom adolescent mothers and fathers consider a mother figure and describe what adolescent-grandmother coparenting looks like in the areas of support, undermining, and involvement. The second goal is to compare mother and father differences in their reports of coparenting with mothers. For this second goal, I expect adolescent father-grandmother coparenting dyads to report lower coparenting support and higher undermining, as compared to adolescent mother-grandmother coparenting dyads. Grandmothers might also take over the fathers parenting duties, as fathers may not be expected to want to be involved (Cabrera et al., 2018), and thus it's expected for adolescent fathers to report a higher level of grandmother involvement as compared to the adolescent mothers who are expected to report a lower level of grandmother involvement. In addition, the control variables for this thesis include age, since early parenthood is associated with risk-factors(i.e. depression, school dropout; Bunting & McAuley, 2004), race due to research showing that ethnic minorities place a greater emphasis on the family and working as a team (Vaux, 1985), living arrangement (living with grandmother vs. not; Spieker & Bensley, 1994), which has been linked to a higher

likelihood of grandmother involvement, and gender role attitudes (Vaux, 1985), as research has shown that these factors can impact the adolescent mother-grandmother coparenting relationship and influence the amount of support an adolescent parent receives.

## 2. METHOD

### Procedures and Participants

Observations were drawn from a larger study focused on understanding the social support networks and relationship dynamics of adolescent mothers and fathers. To identify participants, the names of adolescents who were pregnant or parenting were obtained from eight public high schools. Schools were selected to represent a range of socioeconomic situations with the proportion of students receiving free/reduced lunch varying from 31.1% to 90.3% across schools. Eligible participants were required to be pregnant, have a romantic partner who was pregnant, or be the biological parent of a child. They also had to be enrolled in one of the eight target high schools or be coparenting with a student who was enrolled in one of the eight schools. Because of our interest in both adolescent mothers and fathers, a second snowball sampling technique was used to identify additional fathers. Specifically, adolescent mothers were asked to name their child's biological father. If an adolescent father was not identified in the original list provided by school staff, then that father was added to our list of possible recruits and invited to participate in the study. Snowball sampling techniques are especially helpful to identify populations that are not easy to identify or access (Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

Once the University's institutional review board approved the study, eligible participants were notified of the project via a trusted staff member at the schools (e.g., nurse, social worker, childcare center director). Students were then provided with a recruitment folder that included a recruitment flyer, parental consent form, and adolescent assent forms. In addition, bilingual staff made follow-up calls, sent text



messages, or provided in-person reminders to answer any follow-up questions. Students were asked to return the recruitment packet if they chose to participate. When packets were complete and the students were enrolled, the data collection began. Students enrolled to participate in the intervention program completed surveys during appropriate class time using Qualtrics. The students who are not enrolled to participate in the intervention (primarily fathers) were recruited through a phone center at Texas State University, and invited to complete surveys via Qualtrics in exchange for monetary incentives.

A total of 425 pregnant and parenting adolescents agreed to participate in this study and provided pre-test data. However, for the purpose of this thesis, data where both the adolescent mother and the adolescent father provided a pre-test was examined, resulting in 226 participants (dyads = 113). Furthermore, participants that were pregnant and not currently parenting ( $n = 110$ ; dyads = 55) were excluded from the current analysis. Also, dyads where one or both parents completed the pre-test after age 19 were excluded, since this indicated they were not an adolescent dyad. The remaining sample consisted of 76 parenting adolescents (dyads = 38) which were primarily composed of Hispanic (86.80%;  $n = 66$ ) parenting adolescents. The age of the participants ranged from 14 to 19 with the average age being 16.99 ( $SD = 1.32$ ).

## **Measures**

All measures were forward translated into Spanish and reviewed by a team of bilingual (English and Spanish) speakers. All variables of interest were reasonably well distributed and skew and kurtosis values fell within the accepted ranges of  $< 3$  and  $< 10$

respectively (Kline, 2011). For more information regarding the measures and participants included in analysis refer to Table 1.

**Coparenting support and undermining.** The scale used as a measure for support and undermining the adolescent parents received was Feinberg, Brown, and Kan's (2012) Coparenting Relationship Scale (CRS). Specifically, the subscales of Support (4-items) and Undermining (2-items) were used to assess the frequency (1 = never to 4 = very often) in which adolescents perceived their mother supporting their parenting and undermining their parenting. Example items for the support subscale included: "My mother tells me I am doing a good job or lets me know I am being a good parent" and "When I am overwhelmed as a parent, my mother gives me extra support I need." Example items for the undermining subscale included: "My mother tries to show that she is better than me at caring for my child" and "My mother criticizes my parenting." Items within each subscale are averaged and a higher score indicates more of that construct. For the subscale of support, Cronbach's Alpha was .96 (Mother's  $a = .95$ , Father's  $a = .96$ ). For the subscale of undermining, Cronbach's Alpha was .74 (Mother's  $a = .76$ , Father's  $a = .67$ ).

**Parental involvement.** Grandmother involvement was measured using the Cabrera, Shannon, & LaTaillade (2009) Father Engagement Scale which is an 11-item scale that assesses the frequency (1 = never to 4 = often) of parents (in this case grandmothers) being involved with the child's upbringing. Previous research has used this scale to report on grandmother involvement because it serves as an appropriate proxy for that measure (Perez-Brena et al., 2015). Example items include: "Grandmother is involved in preparing meals or bottles for your child" and "Grandmother is involved in

washing or bathing the child.” Although the scale is not a direct assessment of division of labor, it serves as an appropriate proxy for this component of coparenting, because it assesses how involved the grandmother is in the caretaking of their grandchild. The Cronbach’s Alpha for this sample was .95 (Mother’s  $a = .91$ . Father’s  $a = .96$ ).

**Control variables.** For the purpose of this thesis, the following control variables were included. Participants were asked their gender (0 = female, 1 = male) and their race (0 = not Hispanic, 1 = Hispanic). Furthermore, participants were asked if they had a mother figure (0 = no mother figure, 1 = have a mother figure), and how they were related to them (mother, step-mother, partner’s mom, grandmother, aunt, oldest sister or sister-in-law, partner’s older sister, partner’s aunt, partner’s grandmother, adult friend, other), if a participant stated “other” as a mother figure they were asked to describe how they were connected to this person. Participants also informed us if they are currently living with the person they view as their mother figure (0 = do not live with mother figure, 1 = live with mother figure). To control for adolescents’ gender role attitudes, the *What is a Father Scale* (9-items, 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree; Palkovitz, 1984) was used. Some of the sample questions that were controlled for include “Mothers are naturally more sensitive to children’s needs than fathers” and “Fathers should spend more time with their children and less time at work.” The Cronbach’s alpha for this sample was .75 (Mother’s  $a = .79$ . Father’s  $a = .73$ ).

### **Analytic Plan**

For this thesis, there were two goals: to describe how adolescent fathers and adolescent mothers coparent with grandmothers, and to examine if this coparenting experience differs between adolescent mothers and fathers. To address the first goal of

describing how adolescent fathers and adolescent mothers coparent with grandmothers, descriptive statistics (mean score, standard deviations) were calculated for each of the constructs (support, undermining, involvement). These descriptive statistics were reported for mothers and fathers, and for adolescent parents who live with and without the grandmothers. Also, the frequencies of who the adolescent parent reports as their mother figure were calculated to assess who is the most frequently mentioned person adolescents report as their mother figure.

To address the second goal of examining the differences between the adolescent mother-grandmother and adolescent father-grandmother coparenting experience, three separate regression analyses, one for each subscale (support, undermining, grandmother involvement), were conducted. Regression analysis is used to examine the relationship between two or more variables of interest (Draper & Smith, 2014). Gender was included as the independent variable, and the undermining, support, and involvement scales were included as the dependent variables. All three-regression analysis included the control variables of age, race, living arrangement, and gender role attitudes.

### 3. RESULTS

#### **Goal 1: Describing the Adolescent-Grandmother Coparenting Context**

When assessing who the adolescent parents reported as their primary maternal figure, adolescent mothers reported their biological-mother, and partner's mother were the most likely mother-figure in their life. In contrast, adolescent fathers reported that their biological-mother, partner's mother, and aunt were the most likely mother-figure in their life (Table 2.). On average, adolescent mothers and adolescent father's reports of grandmother's support fell within the middle range (2.40-3.06) of the support scale, as well as reporting grandmother involvement in the middle-high range (2.65-3.09) of the involvement scale. In contrast, adolescent mothers and adolescent fathers' average reports of grandmother undermining fell within the low range (1.00-1.52; Table 3).

#### **Goal 2: Adolescent Mother versus Adolescent Father Coparenting with Grandmothers**

After controlling for age, race, gender role attitudes, and living arrangement (i.e. residing with maternal figure), the regression analyses showed there was no significant associations between gender and the amount of support and undermining adolescent parents receive from the grandmother (Table 4). However, a significant association did emerge for gender and grandmother involvement, such that fathers' report of grandmothers' involvement was significantly lower compared to mothers' report of grandmother involvement. There was also a significant association between race and grandmother involvement, such that Hispanic adolescents' report of grandmothers' involvement was higher compared to non-Hispanic adolescents.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Currently, adolescent pregnancy is decreasing, but it continues to be a public health concern, especially within the Hispanic population who experience the highest rate of pregnancy in the U.S. (Spear & Lock, 2003). This thesis used data from a study which focused on understanding the social support networks and relationship dynamics of adolescent mothers and fathers, in order to address two goals: to describe how adolescent fathers and adolescent mothers coparent with grandmothers, and to examine if this coparenting experience differs between adolescent mothers and fathers. Strengths of this thesis included, being able to gain information from adolescent fathers, whom are currently an understudied population, and the use of dyadic information to have a greater ability to compare adolescent mothers to adolescent fathers.

In order to address the first goal of describing adolescent coparenting with their mother-figures, it was necessary to first understand who the adolescent parents viewed as their primary maternal figure. This was especially important since current research is limited when identifying who adolescent fathers identify as their primary sources of support (Bunting & McAuley, 2004). Results showed that adolescent fathers reported the primary mother figures who supported them were their biological mother, their partner's mother, their aunt, grandmother, friend, partner's grandmother, or they reported no mother-figure. Whereas, adolescent mothers reported their primary mother figures were their biological mother and their partner's mother. Only two adolescent mothers named another person as their mother-figure, therefore, the first two sources of maternal support were similar across adolescent fathers and adolescent mothers; however, adolescent fathers reported a greater variety of female mother figures. Knowing that fathers are

receiving maternal support from a larger variety of individuals helps inform service providers who work with adolescent fathers. Providers should be more cognizant of the language they use when asking an adolescent parent about their parents or asking for “parental” permission to enroll adolescent parents into service. Instead, providers can use more inclusive terms such as “parental figures,” or “legal guardian” which reflect a more diverse family structure.

Next, I aimed to describe how adolescent fathers and adolescent mothers coparent with grandmothers. Overall, adolescent fathers and adolescent mothers reported high support, low undermining, and middle-high grandmother involvement. Receiving this high amount of support and involvement from the grandmother is beneficial for the adolescent parent’s success (Kamp Dush, Kotila & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2011). Research has shown that a healthy coparenting relationship is associated with a higher quality of parent-child relationships, and the well-being of the adolescent parent (Fagan, 2008). A study conducted by Perez-Brena and colleagues (2015), showed that a typical adolescent mother and grandmother coparenting relationship consists of high communication (a subconstruct of high support) and low conflict (a subconstruct of low undermining). Those results align with the results of this thesis where high support and low undermining from the grandmother to the adolescent parent emerged. Understanding how adolescent fathers and adolescent mothers coparent with the grandmother is crucial to understanding the familial resources that adolescents have to help them navigate their transition into parenthood. Also, the results suggested that grandmothers were highly engaged in the infant’s life as their level of involvement fell within the mid-high range in the involvement scale. This is important to note as it highlights that adolescents perceive

grandmothers to be highly involved in their child's life, supporting the idea that grandmothers also play a coparenting role with the adolescent parent; therefore, it is important for service providers to recognize that a coparenting relationship can include adolescent-grandparent dyads in addition to the adolescent mother-father dyad. Also, providers should be more receptive of multi-generational familial dynamics and understand that grandmothers may play an active and supporting role in coparenting and, thus, their involvement as a coparent should be recognized, reinforced, and supported by service providers who are working with adolescent parents.

The final goal of this thesis was to identify if there were any differences when it came to the amount of support, undermining, and grandmother involvement an adolescent parent received based on their gender. Results showed that there were no significant differences in the amount of support and undermining an adolescent parent receives based on gender. These non-significant results indicate that adolescent fathers and adolescent mothers do not receive different amounts of support or undermining from the grandmother. Although the results were non-significant, knowing that adolescent fathers and adolescent mothers are treated equally in those two aspects is a positive outcome since receiving high support and low undermining can be beneficial during the transition into parenthood (Fagan, 2008). Knowing that adolescent fathers and adolescent mothers are treated the same suggests that there may be a social shift from previous findings that adolescent fathers did not need to be supported with caretaking tasks because their main purpose was to financially provide for the family (Finley et al., 2008). Because research is limited with adolescent fathers, gender comparisons had not been tested previously, but the results from this thesis are helpful to understand that adolescent



fathers and adolescent mothers report equally high supported and low undermining from grandmothers.

Results from regression analysis demonstrated a significant association emerged for gender and grandmother involvement. Results showed that adolescent fathers' reported grandmother involvement was significantly lower compared to adolescent mothers. This thesis did not examine whether the adolescent father lived with the child. Thus, it would make sense that if the adolescent father is not residing with the child, paternal grandmother involvement would be lower. Another reason for this could be because past theories emphasize that fathers typically play the role of being the financial provider and are expected to spend less time caretaking for their children (Cabrera et al., 2018). Having expectations that adolescent fathers are not as involved in the caretaking of their children could inform paternal grandmothers' level of involvement. Perhaps, because paternal grandmothers don't expect fathers to be as involved, and they may not see themselves as needing to be as involved either. Receiving this low amount of involvement from the grandmother could be detrimental for the adolescent father. Research has shown that having grandmother's involvement in caretaking tasks is greatly beneficial to the well-being of the adolescent parent, especially since the adolescent parent is playing two roles: the role of being a parent and the role of being an adolescent (Apfel & Seltz, 1991; Sadler et al., 2003; Spieker & Bensley, 1994).

Finally, the regression analysis also showed a significant association between race and grandmother involvement, where Hispanic adolescents reported a higher amount of grandmother involvement compared to non-Hispanic adolescents. A potential reason for this result could be that within the Hispanic community there is a high sense of

collectivism, which is the idea of placing an emphasis on the family rather than the individual (Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990). A study conducted by Almeida and colleagues (2009) found that foreign-born Hispanic reported a stronger sense of familism (i.e. centrality and importance of family) and support compared to their non-Hispanic counterparts. The current thesis had a primarily Hispanic sample population, which takes away from the validity of the above statements as the results may have been driven by the unbalanced sample characteristics. Future research should assess familism and the concept of support when it comes to the perceived support within a more diverse sample population of adolescent parents.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Although this thesis included strengths, it also included limitations. First, there was no information gathered from the grandmothers. Instead, data was based off self-reported surveys from the adolescent parents' perspective. This could potentially be a problem if the participant was trying to respond to the questions in a socially desirable way. Additionally, the sample in this thesis was small which can increase the margin of error, reduce the variability, and decrease the power of detecting differences between adolescent fathers and adolescent mothers coparenting relationship with grandmothers (Wilson & Morgan, 2007). Also, the sample population was primarily Hispanic making the thesis not generalizable to the general population. Further, nine adolescent mothers and four adolescent fathers reported their partners mother as the individual they see as their mother figure, increasing the likelihood that some responses might reflect the same grandmother, thus increasing multicollinearity, since grandmother involvement might be reported twice (in adolescent mother and adolescent father report). Future research would

benefit from collecting a larger sample of adolescent parents, recruiting more diverse samples, and examining multiple time points of a coparenting relationship (i.e. pregnant, parenting). This final suggestion would help to see if the grandmother's amount of support, undermining, and involvement changes depending on the age of the child.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Becoming an adolescent parent is a period of transition and identity crisis that can be detrimental to the well-being of the adolescent parent; however, research has shown that having a supportive coparenting relationship can help counterbalance the negative outcomes that this transition can bring (Kamp Dush et al., 2011). The current thesis aimed to understand adolescent fathers and adolescent mother's perception of grandmother support, undermining, and involvement, while also comparing if their coparenting relationship differed based on gender. This thesis added to the scarce research there is on adolescent fathers by examining their coparenting relationship with the grandmother. Results showed that adolescent fathers and adolescent mothers are not being supported less or undermined more than one another, which is a good outcome to report. However, adolescent fathers are perceiving less grandmother involvement than adolescent mothers and are reporting a more diverse group of perceived mother figures. Service providers should acknowledge that adolescent fathers' legal guardian extends further than what is socially expected (i.e. biological mother, biological father). In addition, the role the grandmother plays within the adolescent parent's relationship should be acknowledged and strengthened as grandmothers were perceived to play an important and positive coparent role in adolescents' lives.

## APPENDIX SECTION

Table 1.  
*Descriptive statistics for all study measures*

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Age	-							
2. Race	0.00	-						
3. Living Arrangement	0.38**	0.10	-					
4. Gender Role Attitude	-0.16	0.05	-0.27*	-				
5. Gender	0.35**	-0.08	0.17	-0.01	-			
6. Support	0.09	0.02	-0.17	0.06	0.00	-		
7. Undermining	-0.19	-0.03	-0.16	0.14	-0.22	-0.42**	-	
8. Involvement	-0.03	0.26*	-0.04	-0.07	-0.25*	0.33*	0.36	-
<i>M</i>	16.99	0.87	0.93	3.36	0.50	3.00	1.38	2.88
<i>(SD)</i>	1.32	-0.34	-0.26	0.65	0.50	1.03	0.69	0.86
Skewness	-0.08	-	-	-1.00	-	-0.75	2.01	-0.72
Kurtosis	-0.63	-	-	3.81	-	-0.68	3.63	-0.15

*Note.* Race is (0 = not Hispanic, 1 = Hispanic). Living Arrangement is (0 = do not live with mother figure, 1 = live with mother figure), Gender is (0 = Female, 1 = Male). For Dichotomous codes, means reflect the prevalence of students who reported belonging to code 1 within a dichotomous measure. Skewness and kurtosis are not presented for dichotomous measures.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

Table 2.  
*Frequencies of who adolescent parents report to be their mother figures*

	Overall 72 (94.70%)	Adolescent Mothers 37 (48.70%)	Adolescent Fathers 35 (46%)
Biological Mother	52 (68.40%)	26 (68.40%)	26 (68.40%)
Partner's Mother	13 (17.10%)	9 (23.70%)	4 (10.50%)
Adult Friend	2 (2.60%)	1 (2.60%)	1 (2.60%)
Aunt	2 (2.60%)	-	2 (5.30%)
Grandmother	1 (1.30%)	-	1 (2.60%)
Partner's Aunt	1 (1.30%)	1 (2.60%)	-
Partner's Grandmother	1 (1.30%)	-	1 (2.60%)
None	1 (1.30%)	-	1 (2.60%)

*Note.* Four participants decided not to provide this information and were omitted from this table.

Table 3.  
*Description of average (SD) reports of grandmother coparenting, separated by gender and living arrangement*

		Overall 72	Mothers 37 (51%)	Fathers 35 (49%)	Living with Grandmother 67 (93%)	Not Living with Grandmother 5 (7%)
Support	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	3.00 (1.03)	3.06 (1.01)	3.00 (1.01)	3.05 (0.98)	2.40 (1.51)
Undermining	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	1.38 (0.69)	1.53 (0.80)	1.22 (0.50)	1.41 (0.70)	1.00 (0.00)
Involvement	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	2.87 (0.86)	3.09 (0.68)	2.65 (0.98)	2.88 (0.84)	2.75 (1.21)

*Note.* Four participants did not provide complete data in these scales and were omitted from this table.

Table 4.  
*Regression models predicting grandmother coparenting*

	<u>Support</u>			<u>Undermining</u>			<u>Involvement</u>		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	-.75	2.26	.74	1.81	1.49	.23	1.42	1.82	.44
Age	.15	.11	.17	-.05	.07	.54	.07	.09	.43
Race	.20	.40	.62	-.07	.26	.79	.72	.32	.03
Living Arrangement	.93	.54	.09	.16	.36	.65	.18	.48	.71
Gender Role Attitudes	.05	.20	.82	.11	.13	.42	-.09	.16	.55
Gender	-.06	.27	.83	-.24	.18	.18	-.48	.22	.04
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.06		.56	.08		.37	.14		.08

*Note.* Race is (0 = not Hispanic, 1 = Hispanic). Living Arrangement is (0 = do not live with mother figure, 1 = live with mother figure), Gender is (0 = Female, 1 = Male).



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