

## RESEARCH

# Contemporary parenting norms and coparenting coordination: Exploring narratives of parents of adolescents

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## Abstract

**Objective:** This study examined how parents of adolescents make sense of their parenting in light of contemporary norms and the meanings they attribute to their coparental coordination.

**Background:** Contemporary parenting expectations emphasize meeting both the emotional and physical needs of children, and they are often guided by expert advice and media-driven recommendations. During adolescence, these norms may also conflict with the developmental need for autonomy, creating potential tensions in the parent–child relationship and in the coordination between coparents. Moreover, they may impact mothers and fathers differently due to prevailing gender roles, affecting how they coordinate and share responsibilities within the coparental relationship.

**Method:** Twelve individual interviews of parents of adolescents (six couples) were conducted and analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis within a socioconstructivist framework.

**Results:** Three main themes were produced: “endorsement of societal expectations about parental roles,” “the evolving parent–adolescent bonding,” and “gendered teamwork?” Whereas the first and second themes concern how

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parents make sense of their contemporary parenthood, the third has more to do with coordination within the couple.

**Conclusion:** Parents adopt intensive parenting norms while striving to respect adolescents' autonomy. Coordination within the coparental relationship tends to reflect complementary rather than equal roles, which can pose challenges, particularly for mothers. Despite these dynamics, both parents aspire to work as a cohesive team.

**Implications.**

This study sheds light on how macro-level factors, including prescriptive parenting and gender norms, shape coparenting practices during adolescence. It also offers insights for clinicians to better consider the distinct needs and expectations of each gender within the coparental relationship.

**KEYWORDS**

adolescence, coparenting, gender, parenting, reflexive thematic analysis, social expectations

## INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-1970s, the notion of “parenting” has shifted from being perceived as intuitive and instinctual to being understood as a responsibility requiring expert guidance (Faircloth, 2023; Lee et al., 2024). In contemporary Western society, parents are increasingly expected to fulfill all emotional and physical needs of their children, closely adhering to recommendations from experts (Lee et al., 2024). These expectations are further reinforced and perpetuated by various media sources (e.g., Miller, 2018). This dominant ideal of parenting is widely regarded as the “proper” way to raise children (Faircloth, 2023). Despite the broad recognition that such ideals may be unrealistic, unattainable, and even harmful, the framework of intensive parenting continues to play a central role in shaping the ways in which parents form their identities, values, and practices (Faircloth, 2021). Within this context, advice for parents on adolescent development, achievement, and safety has also proliferated (Darling & Steinberg, 2017; Lee, 2023). However, there is a significant lack of qualitative research on how parents of adolescents make sense of their role and on the expectations and norms surrounding parenting practices that may conflict with adolescents' need for autonomy. Furthermore, as the coordination between parental figures may significantly shape parenting behaviors (Feinberg et al., 2007), it seems crucial to examine how these parenting norms are adopted within the coparental relationship. This study aims to explore the perspectives of coparents, acknowledging that parenting is a shared experience and that coparenting dynamics merit close examination (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010). By examining how both mothers and fathers give meaning to and construct their experiences of parenting and coparenting during adolescence, we seek to deepen our understanding of how parenting practices are colored by macro-level factors, including prescriptive parenting norms and gendered expectations associated with parenthood.

### Parenting adolescents in the age of intensive parenting

Adolescence is a developmental phase characterized by specific challenges for both adolescents and their parents (Smetana & Rote, 2019). This period is defined by an increasing desire for

independence and autonomy (Smetana & Rote, 2019; Smetana et al., 2015). In fact, the development of autonomy becomes a pivotal task during this stage, as adolescents begin to spend more time away from home, and they exhibit a stronger inclination toward experimentation and the exploration of various identity alternatives (Smetana & Rote, 2019; Smetana et al., 2015; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2018; Zimmermann et al., 2017). Nevertheless, although the influence of peers becomes increasingly significant during adolescence (Rageliene, 2016), many researchers underscore that parents continue to play a crucial role by providing support throughout this developmental period (Pinquart, 2017; Smetana & Rote, 2019; Zimmermann et al., 2017). The key challenge for parents, then, is to balance their involvement in their adolescent's life to promote healthy development, while also allowing the necessary space for independent growth (Smetana & Rote, 2019; Van Petegem et al., 2013).

However, achieving this balance may be particularly challenging given contemporary parenting norms, which often require high emotional, physical, and financial involvement (Lee et al., 2024). The sociological literature refers to this approach as “intensive parenting,” which demands parents invest substantial efforts to secure their children's future success (Hays, 1996; Lee et al., 2024). Intensive parenting involves being highly child centered and enhancing children's social capital through enriching extracurricular activities (Lareau, 2018), as well as engaging in “status safeguarding” (e.g., by being highly committed to schooling) in order to help children attain a social position equal to or higher than that of their parents (Milkie & Warner, 2014, p. 3). It is grounded in the belief that children's outcomes hinge on parental input (Martin & Leloup, 2020). These often unattainable norms are reinforced by experts, as well as through traditional media and social media platforms such as Instagram and online forums (Scheibling & Milkie, 2023). In this context, parents often feel pressured to adhere to these standards in order to be considered “good parents” (Hays, 1996; Wall, 2010).

Yet, these norms may backfire and actually promote more negative than positive types of involvement. Indeed, past research among parents of adolescents suggests that the adherence to these ideals and the societal pressure to be a perfect parent are associated with overprotective parenting, which involves providing more protection than the adolescent's developmental stage requires (Thomasgard et al., 1995), and controlling parenting, which involves pressuring and intruding into the adolescent's emotional and psychological space by inducing anxiety and guilt to enforce compliance (Lamprianidou, Eira Nunes, et al., 2025; Venard et al., 2024). This raises questions about how such norms play out in parents' daily lives, as parents seek to navigate the intensive parenting demands requiring high parental involvement, which may be at odds with the developmental needs of adolescents who may strive for more independence from their parents.

## Gendered aspects of intensive parenting

Moreover, these parenting expectations differ for mothers and fathers, with the gendered dimensions particularly evident in the original notion of “intensive mothering” (Hays, 1996). An intensive parenting ideology is often accompanied by an essentialist conception of parenting, where mothers are seen as inherently more suited to child-rearing than fathers (Forbes et al., 2020). Thus, the norms of intensive parenting and the associated expectations disproportionately burden mothers, who continue to be considered as the more “naturally” capable parent (Hays, 1996; Ennis, 2014). Research has extensively shown that intensive parenting is strongly linked to mothers, tapping into their emotions and insecurities around their parenting roles (Verniers et al., 2022; Wall, 2010). Typically, mothers are held more accountable for overseeing and improving their children's emotional and cognitive development through additional caregiving tasks compared to fathers (Wall, 2010). In their comparative analyses conducted among posts from top-ranked mommy bloggers and dad bloggers in the United States and

Canada, Scheibling and Milkie (2023) revealed that ensuring children's success through education and extracurricular activities remains largely viewed as a maternal duty. As a result, mothers tend to spend more time with their adolescents (Mastrotheodoros et al., 2019; Phares et al., 2009) and experience greater pressure to embody the ideal of the "perfect parent" during this developmental period (Venard et al., 2024).

Although there is growing encouragement for fathers to take on nurturing roles and to spend more time directly caring for their children (Dermott, 2008; Harrington, 2011; McGill, 2014), fathers may face different types of pressure. Traditionally, they have been expected to serve as the head of the family, acting as the primary decision-maker, and the disciplinarian responsible for setting rules and enforcing obedience (Summers et al., 1999). Shirani et al. (2012) observed that although fathers generally tend to face less societal pressure than mothers and are more commonly involved in playful aspects of parenting, they nonetheless experience considerable stress related to their role as financial providers, which is viewed as a central aspect of their paternal responsibility. Relatedly, recent findings by Lampranidou, Eira Nunes, et al. (2025) suggest that fatherhood today involves navigating multiple, and sometimes conflicting, societal expectations. Using a person-centered approach, they identified a large group of fathers (65.1%) who displayed moderate sensitivity to intensive parenting norms. Yet, they also identified a specific profile of fathers (almost 25% of their sample) characterized by strong endorsement of both intensive parenting and essentialist beliefs. Fathers in this profile displayed higher levels of inadequate involvement, including overprotective and controlling parenting. This finding may reflect the contradictory messages directed at fathers in Western societies, which simultaneously promote the ideal of the involved, child-centered "new father" while maintaining traditional expectations of the father as primary breadwinner (Kangas et al., 2019).

Consequently, both mothers and fathers encounter parenting cultures that emphasize gendered distinctions in parenting roles and practices (Eira Nunes et al., 2025). Whereas mothers are often socially expected to take primary responsibility for managing their children's educational and socioemotional development, fathers tend to be viewed as supportive figures whose parental involvement is measured through financial contributions or quality time, rather than as equally accountable for the day-to-day labor of caregiving (Brugeilles & Sebille, 2015; Le Moal, 2024; Scheibling & Milkie, 2023; Shirani et al., 2012). To our best knowledge, how couples navigate intensive parenting norms and gendered expectations within the parenting relationship during adolescence has not yet been studied. This study, therefore, aims to explore how parents of adolescents may internalize these standards and make sense of their practices, as well as how these roles and expectations are negotiated within the coparental relationship.

## Navigating adolescence as a coparent

From a systemic perspective, the coparental relationship reflects a distinct relational dynamic that should be distinguished from individual parents' involvement in specific parenting practices. This coparental relationship is also shaped by internalized gender norms and shared beliefs about parental roles (Minuchin, 1974). Coparenting is defined as the "shared activity undertaken by those adults responsible for the care and upbringing of children" (McHale & Irace, 2011, p. 16). Feinberg et al. (2012) identified five interconnected domains of coparenting: (a) *Child-rearing agreement* involves aligning parental views on discipline, expectations, morals, and emotional needs; (b) *coparental support* includes affirmations of each other's parenting abilities and joint decision-making, whereas *coparental undermining* involves criticism and blame; (c) *division of labor* addresses the distribution of daily child-rearing tasks; (d) *joint management* focuses on establishing norms for family interactions, whether explicit or implicit; and (e) *coparenting closeness* measures the degree to which coparenting enhanced intimacy and strengthened the couple's relationship. Abundant research has shown that the quality of

the coparenting relationship is a predictor of parenting practices and child development (Bonds & Gondoli, 2007; Carlson & Högnäs, 2011). Regarding adolescents specifically, past research has shown that shared decision-making and joint parental involvement can shield adolescents from engaging in risky behaviors (Riina & McHale, 2014). Moreover, coparental cooperation promotes autonomy-supportive parenting, which ultimately encourages adolescents to engage in healthy identity formation (Albert Sznitman et al., 2019). Conversely, research has shown that a suboptimal coparental relationship—marked by conflict or triangulation—can undermine parenting quality. In such cases, where one parent draws the child into tensions with the other, adolescents are more likely to experience psychosocial maladjustment (Zimmermann et al., 2022).

As mentioned earlier, both parenting and coparenting practices extend beyond the parents' relationship, being significantly shaped by societal expectations and cultural norms (Minuchin, 1974). Although these norms and ideals do not strictly dictate behavior, they provide symbolic frameworks that guide the way in which parents organize their actions and reasoning (Faircloth, 2021, 2023). This cultural backdrop can create contradictions between the ideals upheld in couple relationships—such as equality, intimacy, and independence—and the expectations placed on parenting roles, which often prioritize a highly gendered view of caregiving, particularly emphasizing an intensive model of motherhood (Faircloth, 2021). Consequently, gender often plays a significant role in shaping coparenting dynamics and involvement levels. For instance, as women are often considered as particularly knowledgeable about care and child-rearing, it can sometimes lead to conflicts with their partners who may struggle to assert influence (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Stamp, 1994). However, both parents may play an active role in shaping their involvement. In this respect, Autret and van Eeden-Moorefield (2024) offered a nuanced account of parental involvement by emphasizing its complexity and highlighting the active role of fathers, thereby challenging the predominant emphasis on mothers' roles commonly found in previous studies. For instance, men and women justify limited involvement of fathers as more “practical” due to cultural and structural conditions, such as limited parental leave (Calarco et al., 2021). Additionally, Eira Nunes et al. (2025) suggested that mothers' gender equality values can either facilitate or be facilitated by fathers' warmth and collaborative coparenting. In sum, it is essential to explore how gender and parenting norms shape coparenting, responsibility distribution, and involvement, thereby examining how parents interpret and make sense of gendered disparities (in terms of time and effort) when parenting adolescents.

## The present study

With the growing presence of an “intensive parenting” ideology in traditional and social media (Lee et al., 2024), this study explores the way in which Swiss parents make sense of their experiences of contemporary parenting and coparenting. In Switzerland, where traditional family structures remain strongly prevalent, most couples with children under 25 years are married, with mothers being primarily responsible for household and childcare duties (Federal Statistical Office, 2019, 2024). This context invites an examination of how parenting and gender norms shape the experiences of parents of adolescents.

Adopting a social constructionist framework, according to which experiences and practices are seen as socially coproduced and reproduced through language and social interactions, we adopted a qualitative research methodology (Biggerstaff, 2012). We conducted semistructured interviews with each partner from six parental couples (i.e., 12 parents in total) and performed a thematic content analysis combined with a dyadic analysis to address two main questions: (a) How do parents describe their role as parents of adolescents in the context of intensive parenting, taking into account adolescents' growing autonomy needs, the meanings they assign to

parenting, and their views on the “perfect parent”? (b) How do parents make sense of their coparenting coordination, particularly regarding the division of parental and domestic tasks on a daily basis? This method enabled us to collect rich and in-depth qualitative data through an indirect approach, which facilitated the emergence of more nuanced insights into participants’ lived experiences (del Rio Carral, 2014).

## METHOD

### Participant recruitment

The data analyzed consisted of 12 semistructured, individual interviews with a sample of Swiss French-speaking parents (see Table 1), including one same-sex couple and five different-sex couples ( $N_{\text{mothers}} = 7$ ,  $N_{\text{fathers}} = 5$ ). Each participant was the parent of at least one adolescent (two girls, four boys), aged between 14 to 17 ( $M_{\text{age}} = 15.67$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ), who was not necessarily the firstborn child. Parents ages ranged from 42 to 60 years ( $M_{\text{age}} = 48.08$ ,  $SD = 5.44$ ). Most parents were married ( $N = 10$ ), with one mother and one stepfather cohabitating. Half of the sample held higher education degrees (at least bachelor’s level), and the remaining half had completed an apprenticeship (i.e., vocational training). Given the cultural sensitivity surrounding financial matters, participants were not asked to report their income. All participants resided in the vicinity of a midsized city. By focusing on a limited number of participants, this study ensured an in-depth exploration of each parent’s unique context and insights.

Three couples were recruited via a snowball sampling method, initiated through the first author’s personal network and contact within her local community. Two additional couples were randomly identified from a previous quantitative study on parenting, where participants had the option to leave contact information for follow-up research. One additional couple was reached through initial participants. Eligibility criteria included being a parent of at least one adolescent aged 14 to 17. We focused on parents of adolescents in their final year of mandatory schooling or the first 2 years of postcompulsory secondary school (i.e., academic-track high school, known in Switzerland as the “gymnase”), as this is generally a transitional period during

**TABLE 1** Characteristics of the participants.

Couple	Name	Gender	Age	Profession	Employment rate (%)	Child’s gender	Child’s age	Number of children
1	Auguste	M	46	Writer	100	M	15	3
	Christelle	W	50	Housewife	n/a			
2	Pierre	M	52	Engineer	100	M	17	3
	Kate	W	45	Translator	80			
3	Fabien	M	48	Human resources	100	M	17	2
	Ariana	W	49	Administrative assistant/housewife	30			
4	Patrick	M	42	IT consultant	100	M	14	3
	Déborah	W	42	Handicraft teacher	100			
5	David	M	43	Decorator	100	W	15	4
	Monique	W	47	Decorator	100			
6	Christine	W	53	Teacher	100	W	16	2
	Chantal	W	60	Surgical technician	60			

Note: M = man; W = woman.

which teenagers gain greater independence, especially in the school context. Because the aim of the study was to explore parenting more broadly within contemporary society, identification as “intensive parents” was not part of the inclusion criteria. Before data collection, participants were informed of the study’s objectives and of their partner’s participation through an information sheet. This document also clarified participants’ right to withdraw at any time and the confidential handling of their data, including the use of pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. Written informed consent was then obtained from all participants. Basic sociodemographic information (age, profession, marital status, number of children, region of residence) was gathered via questionnaire. Based on this information, we were able to consider different types of coparental configurations, reflecting variation in socioeconomic status and in mothers’ employment rates. The study received approval from the Ethics Committee of the University of Lausanne.

## Data collection

Reflexivity is a key component of qualitative research, requiring researchers to consider how their background and experiences shape their perspective. In this study, it is noteworthy that the first author is a childless woman, psychologist, and PhD candidate whose perspective is informed by her own challenging adolescence and by exposure to diverse parenting approaches within a divorced family context. This personal background has driven her interest in understanding how contemporary parenting standards influence parenting during adolescence, particularly from the parents’ perspective.

Before conducting the semistructured interviews, an interview guide was developed to allow participants to explore and articulate their experiences related to parenting, parenthood, and their role within the parental couple. This interview guide (see Appendix in the supplemental materials) included open-ended questions on topics such as daily life, distribution of parental and household tasks, their apprehension of parenting requirements, coparenting, professional life, and potential social pressures related to parenthood. By using a wide range of open questions, we ensured participants could bring up and elaborate on topics beyond the predefined scope. For example, asking what a “typical day” looks like allowed participants to discuss organizational, parental, and coparental aspects in a more fluid manner (del Rio Carral, 2014). An initial pilot interview was conducted with the father of an adolescent girl to assess the interview guide’s quality. This interview was excluded from the analysis, as the guide was revised afterward to improve clarity. All interviews were conducted by the first author to maintain consistency in interviewing style and to ensure a cohesive interpretation of themes across participants.

Once a couple agreed to participate, individual interviews were scheduled with each participant at a location of their choice, such as their home, workplace, or a local café. In-home interviews were conducted either when the participant was alone or in a separate room, ensuring that children or partners could neither overhear the conversation nor interrupt the interview. Respondents were asked to refrain from discussing the interview with their partner until both had completed their interviews, so that the outcome of the first interview would not influence the second. We used the same set of questions for both partners, regardless of their individual responses. To preserve confidentiality, participants were not informed whether their narratives aligned with those of their partners.

Interviews lasted approximately 1 hour (ranging from 35 minutes to 1 hour and 39 minutes) and were audio recorded with the participant’s consent. Each interview was then transcribed verbatim, with all identifiable personal data removed to guarantee confidentiality.

Conducting separate interviews with partners allowed participants to express experiences and opinions that they might be hesitant to share in each other’s presence, fostering candid and personal accounts (Esterberg, 2002). From a social-constructivist point of view, as outlined by Reczek (2014), separate interviews facilitate the exploration of both similar and different

viewpoints, illuminating how individual perspectives are collectively shaped the parental team. It also offers a richer, multiangled understanding of family dynamics, capturing nuanced or even contradictory interpretations of coparenting (Reczek, 2014).

## Data analysis

Interview transcripts were first analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019), a specific variant of thematic analysis widely used in psychology. Reflexive thematic analysis provides a rigorous and systematic method for coding qualitative data, wherein themes are viewed as actively coconstructed by the researcher at the “intersection of data, analytic process and subjectivity” (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 594). This method is particularly well suited for exploring complex, multifaceted experiences such as parenting adolescents, as it embraces both the subjective and interpretative nature of the data. By emphasizing the researcher’s reflexivity, this approach ensures that the analysis remains both faithful to participants’ perspectives and open to broader patterns and themes within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Participants’ narratives were inductively analyzed, beginning with the creation of semantic codes, which were subsequently grouped into shared subthemes and overarching themes based on semantic similarities and differences. In a final step, these themes were critically reviewed and refined, ensuring coherence and relevance. Following the identification of themes and subthemes, we conducted a dyadic analysis to examine alignment and divergence in partners’ narratives across these themes (Reczek, 2014). In certain instances, parents provided divergent accounts, which were interpreted not as methodological flaws but as indicative of the inherently complex and subjective character of coparenting. By maintaining the same interview structure regardless of the partner’s responses, these differences enhanced the analysis by revealing both converging and contrasting viewpoints within couples.

The first author systematically coded the data using NVivo 14 software (QSR International, 2023) and followed a rigorous single-coding protocol validated through intra-coder consistency (Kawamoto et al., 2023), and the second and third authors independently coded three interviews, resulting in half of the interviews being double coded to enhance the reliability of the analysis (Church et al., 2019). This collaborative coding was enhanced through regular meetings to discuss initial codes, themes, and subthemes, ensuring a rigorous approach to reflexive thematic analysis. The three additional authors contributed to developing the research protocol, identifying key themes, and shaping the discussion of the results while also providing oversight informed by their expertise in developmental and family psychology, qualitative analysis, and gender studies—ensuring a robust and comprehensive analytical framework. To ensure the rigor of the findings, the lead researcher followed the Lincoln and Guba (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through in-depth data engagement and reflective memoing practices. A thick description of the research process supported transferability, and peer debriefing sessions enhanced both credibility and dependability. Confirmability was ensured by maintaining a reflexive journal, which documented the researcher’s personal reactions and mitigated potential biases, thus maintaining the right distance with people’s accounts.

## RESULTS

Through reflexive thematic analysis, three primary themes were identified. Although the themes “endorsement of societal expectations about parental roles” and “the evolving parent–adolescent relationship” primarily illuminate the first research question, the second question is addressed by the theme “gendered teamwork?”

## Endorsement of societal expectations about parental roles

This theme explores how parents portray their roles and how such constructions relate to broader societal expectations. By examining what they prioritize as parents and how they envision the “perfect parent” in today’s context, we gain deeper insight into the ways in which they engage with and adapt contemporary norms. The subtheme “emotional and physical availability” highlights the importance parents place on being present—both physically and emotionally—for their children, as well as the guilt they experience when feeling they fall short. The second subtheme, “parental expectations for development and success,” delves into the high expectations that parents hold, often reflecting societal views on the responsibilities of parenting.

### Emotional and physical availability

When asked about their view of the parenting role and what it means to be a “good parent,” parents commonly emphasized the importance of being both emotionally and physically present for their adolescents. This expectation was shared by both mothers and fathers, who emphasized the importance of maintaining a parental presence at home and organizing their routines accordingly. For instance, Fabien, a father of two, who was particularly attentive to their adolescents’ mental health, expressed this priority: “So, for me, the most important thing is really as I said earlier, it’s not necessarily the activity, but it’s the presence so that the children know that we’re available.” His wife, Ariana, echoed this sentiment, talking about her daily organization: “Where I don’t give up is that I don’t want to be absent, in fact. I don’t want them to miss me, that’s it.” Similarly, Christelle, a stay-at-home mother of three, emphasized the value of being physically present:

I can also include my husband, in fact we’re very we surround them well so we’re not always behind them but I think they have this presence at home as I don’t work outside so it’s true that they always have a reference who’s there who’s present.

In parallel, parents who felt they were not sufficiently present often experienced feelings of guilt. For example, David, a father of four, expressed this feeling when asked whether he felt that he was doing too much or not enough: “Not enough, clearly. I’d like to be around a bit more, but there you go We’ve chosen our life as bosses and freelancers, so when we must work, we work, and then we work a lot.” In the same vein, Fabien voiced frustration over not being as present and involved as he would like:

And not enough, yes, because we’d always like to be more present for the children, especially at weekends. Well, when it comes to school, it’s true that we come back from a day, we’re, we, we don’t necessarily have the energy we have in the morning.

This concern about being emotionally and physically available reflects a broader contemporary societal expectation. Many parents contrasted their approach with their own upbringings, recalling that their parents were less emotionally present or involved during their adolescence. They refer to this type of disengaged parenting as “old school” and no longer current or appropriate. For example, Monique, a mother of four, recalled that her parents were largely uninvolved in her emotional development: “They were present but not at all invested in ... They never asked me how I was living my adolescence, how no, it was really.” The way their parents

behaved is therefore rarely a reference point, and they distance themselves by referring to current standards of emotional attentiveness.

## Parental expectations for development and success

Beyond expectations for themselves, many parents also articulated specific requirements for their children, particularly regarding involvement in extracurricular activities, such as sports and music, which were considered essential for their child's successful development. These expectations of parents reflected their desire to equip their children with tools for future success. For instance, Pierre, a stepfather and father of three, emphasized the parents' role in broadening children's perspectives: "The role of parents is in opening their minds to things that may be important to others, that exist alongside what they do." His wife, Kate, echoed this view, emphasizing her commitment to exposing her son to cultural experiences:

He doesn't read at all So once during the summer vacations, I give him a book to read and then he goes along with it and respects. And then I have a subscription to the theater at [place] and every year I take him to three or four shows and he knows he has to come There's no discussion.

However, her partner took a more balanced stance, noting the importance of aligning expectations with the adolescent's developmental stage. In a similar manner, Chantal was firm about her two daughters participating in both sports and a musical activity: "In any case, I said they should at least have an instrument and a sport." Her partner, Christine, agreed, stressing the cognitive benefits of these activities:

There were some things I insisted she do like, well, that was Chantal, more music. And then sports. I think that if you want to study properly, if you want your brain to be well irrigated, then sport is just what you need.

When adolescents did not meet these expectations, parents often experienced guilt and self-blame. Patrick, a father of three, reflected on his son's decision to stop playing the piano: "I think I didn't push him enough for music. He gave up piano, but that's so typical." Similarly, Ariana felt guilty over her son's limited participation in sports and music, comparing herself to other parents:

When you hear friends telling you that their children, well they're doing great at school, that they're enrolled at the conservatory or that they're doing lots of sports and activities, and that's not necessarily the case with yours, yes. You don't feel like a great parent.

Her husband, Fabien, shared these concerns and self-blame about the lack of involvement of his son in extracurricular activities, wondering about his responsibility and comparing himself with other parents. Yet, Ariana tempered her guilt by putting things into perspective and emphasizing that the most important thing for her is that her child feels good about himself.

In summary, parental roles are colored by societal expectations that define what it means to be a good parent, emphasizing the importance of providing diverse experiences and opportunities to prepare children for the future. These expectations are often rigid, idealized, and sometimes contradictory, creating significant pressure for parents to conform. This tension highlights the disconnect between societal ideals—rooted in discourses and values—and the lived realities of parenting. As parents strive to reconcile these ideals with their own practices,

they may perceive themselves as falling short, which fosters a pervasive sense of guilt. This gap between societal standards and parental self-perception underscores the complex and often challenging nature of modern parenting of adolescents.

## The evolving parent–adolescent relationship

Another key theme in parents' narratives was the evolving character of their relationship with their adolescent children. Recognizing changes in their children's behavior, parents acknowledged the need to step back to foster autonomy. This theme is examined through three sub-themes: "seeking the right balance," where parents described their ambivalence to trust in their adolescent's capabilities; "setting of boundaries," highlighting parents' involvement in their adolescent's education and career planning, even as they encourage autonomy and independence; and "creating shared moments," underscoring the importance of family rituals in bonds and connections as adolescents become increasingly independent.

### Seeking the right balance

Parents' narratives highlighted an ambivalence between fostering children's autonomy and conforming to intensive parenting norms that prioritize substantial parental involvement. Accordingly, they described a notable shift in the parent–adolescent relationship, characterized by parents' increasing tendency to grant more autonomy, which requires them to trust in their adolescent's capacity to act responsibly. Monique, like many parents, noted that her daughter now spends much of her time alone, and she no longer feels able to control how her daughter manages her free time:

Now they have a private sphere. It's not like the little ones now you have to leave them in their room, leave them alone, manage their time, manage their life, and then keep a dialogue going at the same time, eh?

Her husband, David, emphasized the importance of allowing adolescents the freedom to grow while remaining available for support if needed: "You have to let go. They have to be able to evolve on their own. That's what I was saying earlier, give them the tools and then be there if there's a problem." Kate echoed this sentiment, particularly in acknowledging her ignorance about her son's daily activities: "Honestly, during the day, I don't know what he's doing, I don't know where he is at the moment."

However, this desire to grant greater independence often resulted in a sense of ambivalence regarding the parental role. Pierre, Kate's partner, acknowledged the ongoing challenge of finding the appropriate balance between control and autonomy:

Yes, of course, it's always difficult to put the cursor in the right place. And sometimes you see that you've let go a bit too much, and sometimes you see that you need to cut yourself some slack. But it's a constant work in progress.

In a similar manner, Christelle and her partner, Auguste, struggled to set appropriate boundaries, especially regarding schooling and household responsibilities:

Well, at the same time, I'd like them to be more autonomous, but at the same time I say to myself that here. I'd have to be more uh directive and at the same time, I shouldn't be too, because I think they've already got so much it's a question of

finding the right balance, but for the moment I haven't found it yet.

(Christelle, 50)

Overall, parents expressed a growing trust in their teenagers, increasingly recognizing them as responsible and independent individuals while attempting to balance this trust with appropriate guidance and structure.

## Setting of boundaries

According to the accounts of the parents, although they supported their adolescent's autonomy, they also emphasized the importance of maintaining clear boundaries, particularly around smartphone use, outings, and school-related responsibilities. These rules, though often flexible and subject to negotiation with the adolescent, were seen as necessary for guiding behavior. For instance, Patrick explained how phone usage is regulated in his household: "The phone on certain applications will tell him 'you've reached your time limit,' and he can ask for more. Sometimes he comes to me asking for an extra hour, and I'll approve it if it's the weekend." By contrast, his wife Déborah adopted a stricter stance, worried about lowered attention span due to technology use and the possible impact on their schooling: "So yes, I set the rules, but Patrick actually takes the rules away [laughs]. When I'm at home, there are rules." Patrick further clarified that his focus extends beyond screen time to the content being accessed: "For her, the computer's no good, but I'm more concerned with how they use it, rather than just saying no." Similarly, David enforced a rule of access to his daughter's phone content at any time he asked for it to ensure appropriate use: "One rule is that we can have access all the time that she can show me the contents of her phone."

When it came to social outings, parents sought to maintain a structured framework without completely restricting their adolescent's freedom. For example, Chantal and Christine allowed their daughter to go out once per weekend to ensure her schoolwork is not compromised. The curfew was flexible, as Chantal explained: "We give them a time to come back, and sometimes they send us a message asking for an extension. Then we discuss it and decide yes or no." This approach reflects a trend of negotiating rules, with teens and parents collaboratively setting boundaries.

Academic success and future career prospects, however, remained a major area of parental concern. Many parents described feeling responsible for "securing" their children's future and reported difficulty in relinquishing control over academic matters. Patrick, for example, considered his son's academic performance as a prerequisite for being able to maintain a certain lifestyle: "Try to do well at school so you can have a job that will enable you to maintain the life you had when you were young." Déborah similarly stressed the value of education: "If we've come this far, it's because we've worked the children are used to a certain standard of living, and I want them to maintain that standard." Many parents said that they felt entitled to be more directive in this area if they perceived issues, although this sometimes led to second-guessing. Kate, for example, talked about how she allowed her son to decide whether to repeat a year at school, but later questioned this decision: "I shouldn't have given him the choice because he didn't have the maturity." Overall, parents displayed varying degrees of concern about their adolescent's future but unanimously agreed on the importance of setting boundaries as well as guiding academic and career-related choices.

## Creating shared moments

As adolescents gained greater autonomy and spent more time with peers, parents emphasized the importance of maintaining family routines, such as shared meals, as a means of sustaining

regular interactions and nurturing the parent–adolescent relationship during this critical developmental period. For instance, Christine described a long-standing tradition in her household: “On weekends, we have a tradition: Friday night is pizza night. So we know that everyone has to be there on Friday night for pizza.” This ritual held greater significance for Christine than for her partner, Chantal, who was less insistent about being reunited for eating: “My wife would like us to be around the table all the time. I don’t force anyone to eat, but I don’t make another meal for someone who doesn’t like what’s being served.”

Certain parents introduced new rituals in response to their adolescent’s increasing independence. For example, Kate explained, “We recently introduced a family night where everyone’s present, and everyone participates. [...] On the other hand, the rest of the evenings are a mess.” Similarly, Fabien noted the importance of shared mealtimes as moments of connection: “But it’s clear, when he comes to eat and we’re all at the table, for us, it’s a it’s, it’s normal, there’s no phone for anyone, it’s a moment we spend together, we talk.” By preserving these shared moments, parents sought to maintain meaningful connections with their adolescents, despite the reduction in time spent together. These routines also served as a structural framework within a context of growing independence and autonomy.

## Gendered teamwork?

The final theme focused on interviewees’ accounts of how care-related tasks were organized within the couple and how responsibilities for their adolescents’ education were distributed (or not). Although all parents expressed a commitment to collaborative parenting for their adolescent children’s benefit, their roles were often shaped by traditional gender norms. This theme is unpacked through three subthemes. The first, “Mommy as the family manager,” underscores the primary role mothers play in family organization and the mental load they often bear. Despite this, parents frequently described their roles as complementary, yet delicate, a notion explored in “parental complementarity and inequity.” Last, “making a coherent team” underscores that, despite role differences, parents generally strived to support each other and engaged in joint discussions regarding their children’s education and upbringing, fostering a unified approach.

### Mommy as the family manager

The first subtheme emphasizes the mental load that mothers bear and their central role in managing the family. Across interviews, mothers were consistently portrayed as the primary organizers, ensuring the smooth running of the household. Monique took charge of the children’s schooling and the organization of family activities. Monique commented, “The organization of free time as a family is 100% me.” Her husband did not mention family time management, but when questioned, he admitted that Monique was also largely responsible for their children’s education: “It’s mainly my wife who handles it, I’m always close by, but yeah, she’s the one who takes care of it. Parent-teacher meetings too, I’ve attended one or two, but it’s a hassle.” It was also a heavy responsibility, as Kate recalls, describing how it sometimes wakes her in the middle of the night.

Strictness also emerged as a related issue, with mothers frequently seen as more stringent than fathers in enforcing rules. For instance, during an interview, Kate realized that she held higher expectations for good manners, whereas her partner, Pierre, perceived parenting as a more instinctive process. He suggested that the pressure Kate felt might be a result of her own personal expectations: “But of course, yes, you can feel under pressure. But I think it’s often the person themselves who feels that pressure.” Nevertheless, all the mothers acknowledged their

stricter stance, as exemplified by Déborah, who was identified by both herself and her partner, Patrick, as the primary enforcer of rules. In sum, mothers were generally seen as coordinators of family activities, maintainers of routines, and primary enforcers of rules.

## Parental complementarity and inequity

In most interviews, parents mentioned “complementarity” when they described their coordination, referring to how they balanced and coordinated their distinct approaches to raising their children. Typically, one parent took on a stricter role while the other was more lenient, creating a balanced dynamic often described as a “good cop, bad cop” strategy. For instance, for Patrick and Déborah, this complementarity was seen as beneficial, as Patrick noted: “Duality is very important to me. That we complement each other well, and that’s something we do very well, I think, with Déborah.” In the same way, Christine, Chantal’s partner, observed the following: “So, I’m the good cop, Chantal is the bad cop, because of her temperament.” This example, from a same-sex couple, indicates that such a role division can transcend traditional gender expectations. However, both fathers and mothers acknowledged the possible difficulty of this dynamic, as Auguste noted: “It’s difficult my wife thinks I’m not strict enough, and it’s hard not to assign the policeman role to one person while the other plays the nice one.” This illustrates how tensions can arise when one parent is consistently assigned to the “bad cop” role.

Complementarity also extended to the traditional division of household and parenting tasks, with mothers typically assuming greater responsibility—often justified by both themselves and their partners on the grounds that they were less involved in the professional sphere than their partners. This prioritization of family over career often began with the birth of their children and persisted into adolescence. Monique expressed feeling sometimes overwhelmed by this arrangement: “I manage everything at home—the logistics, the laundry, the meals—but sometimes it feels like a heavy burden to handle the hobbies and the family’s free time all by myself.” She also noted occasional disputes with her husband over this imbalance:

I’d like a little help sometimes I have crises where I tell him I’m fed up, then he organizes something, and it works for two or three weeks before he forgets again, and I have to tell him once more.

Some couples reported, however, a more flexible, day-to-day organization. For example, Patrick mentioned their shared responsibility in preparing midday meals: “It’s fine, we both do it naturally, depending on who’s available. Right now, it’s usually me because I’m home for lunch, while she works more.” Even in these situations, mothers nevertheless maintained a guiding role, as Patrick’s wife Déborah clarified: “Well, I always have to tell him to put this dish in the oven at a certain time or ... so I prepare the meals ahead.” This illustrated the limitations of the concept of complementarity for some parents, highlighting how, even in flexible setups, mothers often retained primary oversight of family logistics.

## Making a coherent team

Despite the challenges concerning the coordination of parental roles sometimes mentioned in the interviews, parents generally strived to form a coherent and supportive team in their parenting efforts. In fact, although parents at times struggled to complement one another, there remained a clear emphasis on the importance of forming a parenting team. Typically, many emphasized the importance of presenting a united front to their children, even when they privately disagreed on certain issues. Christine described this approach:

The framework can be flexible, but it has to remain consistent. And if we disagree, my wife and I have learned to never criticize each other in front of the children. Even if we don't agree, we work it out together.

Similarly, Patrick acknowledged that, although he didn't always share his wife Déborah's enthusiasm for certain activities, he supported her initiatives: "She wanted to visit the museum on Saturday, and I wasn't motivated at first. But I still encouraged her, and I found a way to motivate the kids too: 'Come on, let's go, it'll be fun.'"

Parents also underscored the importance of jointly discussing educational strategies to provide unified support for their adolescents. David explained their collaborative approach to setting rules: "Hardly any major decisions are made unilaterally. There's always the two of us. When my wife says something, I'm behind it, and vice versa, so there's consistency. At least, we try." Kate and Pierre similarly emphasized frequent conversations about parenting decisions, as Kate noted: "I always ask for his opinion, and while I may not always follow it, I value his input." Pierre concurred, adding, "It's all about teamwork." However, when parents didn't agree, it sometimes led to conflict, like Fabien and Ariana. Fabien explained that his more diplomatic approach occasionally undermined Ariana's stricter stance, resulting in friction: "By intervening after the facts, I've sabotaged her a bit. That's what she reproaches me for."

In conclusion, based on participants' accounts, although gender shaped the division of parental responsibilities, parents consistently strived to maintain a coherent and supportive parenting team. By ensuring that their roles complemented each other, they aimed to provide a stable and consistent environment for their adolescent children.

## DISCUSSION

Previous research on parenting, coparenting, and intensive parenting has largely focused on the early stages of parenthood, often emphasizing gender dynamics within couples (Faircloth, 2021). Studies involving parents of adolescents and the tension between autonomy-granting and intensive parenting have primarily relied on quantitative methods (e.g., Lamprianidou, Eira Nunes, et al., 2025; Venard et al., 2024). Only a few studies have used qualitative approaches to examine how parents interpret and make sense of their experiences and practices and how this resonates with contemporary parenting norms (e.g., Lamprianidou, Venard, et al., 2025), limiting our understanding of this subject during this developmental phase. Furthermore, dynamics shaping coparenting during adolescence, as well as the nuanced ways in which gendered dynamics manifest during this developmental phase, remain largely underexplored. To address these gaps, our study provides a qualitative, in-depth exploration of parental couples' narratives focusing on their converging and diverging conceptions of parenting and coparenting. Using reflexive thematic analysis and dyadic analysis, we identified three core themes that capture parents' perspectives. The first theme, "endorsement of societal expectations about parental roles," reflects parents' views on their roles as parents of adolescents, influenced by expectations linked to intensive parenting. The second theme, "the evolving parent-adolescent relationship," reflects the evolving dynamics between parents and adolescents, as the need to balance a sense of closeness and the dictates of an intensive parenting ideology with the granting of autonomy and independence becomes particularly salient in these relationships. Last, "gendered teamwork?" explores how couples navigate their coparenting roles, balancing collaboration and the influence of traditional gender norms. Overall, this study provides insights into the complex interplay between societal expectations, evolving parent-adolescent relationships, and gendered coordination within coparenting relationships, contributing to a richer understanding of the factors that shape parenting practices and parenthood experiences during adolescence.

First, we highlighted how parents made sense of their role as their children entered adolescence, which was shaped by the endorsement of contemporary intensive norms and the evolving parent–adolescent relationship. Many parents emphasized the importance of being present at home and attentive to the adolescent’s well-being, with daily routines often centered on ensuring that at least one parent was available at home. Interestingly, respondents often noted that their approach differed from that of their own parents, who typically placed less emphasis on being physically and emotionally available. This shift reflects the emergence of contemporary parenting norms that prioritize the child’s emotional and physical needs, which has now become largely normative (Lee et al., 2024; Scheibling & Milkie, 2023). However, although the intention to be available is often well meant, it may become burdensome for parents and potentially even counterproductive during adolescence. Indeed, when parents’ involvement is not adjusted to adolescents’ growing need for autonomy, it may be experienced as intrusive, overly protective, and controlling, potentially eliciting conflict and tension within the parent–child relationship (Van Petegem et al., 2020; Venard et al., 2023). Interestingly, this preoccupation of being involved seemed to be shared by both mothers and fathers, highlighting the fact that intensive parenting norms impact both parents (Lee et al., 2024; Lamprianidou, Eira Nunes, et al., 2025).

In addition to the importance attached to parents’ emotional and physical presence, parents also articulated specific expectations for their adolescents and themselves, including promoting participation in activities such as sports or learning a musical instrument, as highlighted by the subtheme “parental expectations for development and success.” These expectations align with the desire to prepare their child to become a high-performing and successful adult, as reflected in the concept of “concerted cultivation” (Lareau, 2018). Concerted cultivation refers to a parenting style, particularly prevalent in Western families, involving deliberated and organized efforts to cultivate children’s talents, skills, and abilities (Lareau, 2018). Our results, alongside prior studies (e.g., Wall, 2010), link these parental efforts to a focus on cognitive development, which frequently involves the adoption of expert advice. Moreover, such involvement may often reflect parents’ wish to provide their adolescents with opportunities that the parents themselves may have lacked (Wuyts et al., 2015). Indeed, in such cases, parents may hold particularly high expectations for their child, either wanting their child to succeed where they could not, or viewing their child’s achievements as a reflection of their own success as parents (Wuyts et al., 2015). When parents felt that they were falling short of meeting these expectations, they frequently reported feelings of guilt or misalignment, echoing broader societal pressures tied to parenting norms and social comparison dynamics (Lee et al., 2024; Wall, 2010). Thus, this ambivalence regarding their own parenting practices illustrates how the intensive parenting ideology may elicit both positive and negative self-assessments, affecting how parents judge their approach to raising adolescents compared to their own upbringing.

Considering the evolving dynamics of parent–adolescent relationships, although there is an emphasis on parental presence and encouragement of continued participation in family activities, many parents also demonstrated support for their adolescents’ autonomy. Taking into account their developmental stage, parents tended to respect adolescents’ personal space and place trust in them, which is beneficial for adolescent development (Smetana & Rote, 2019). However, certain areas, such as education and smartphone use, remained under parental control (e.g., Lamprianidou, Venard, et al., 2025), reflecting parents’ concerns about their children’s performance and cognitive development. Indeed, parents often expressed worries about lowered attention span due to technology use and the possible impact on their schooling. According to their narratives, their role is to ensure their children maintain a certain standard of living, often linking career choices to overall well-being and life satisfaction (Can, 2023). Moreover, employment inequalities and job insecurity also drive parents to become more actively involved in their children’s educational matters (Van Petegem et al., 2024). Nevertheless, in respecting their adolescent’s autonomy, rules were often discussed and regularly reevaluated, which is typical during this developmental period (Smetana & Rote, 2019). The

fact that adolescents were often left to manage themselves, yet at the same time pushed to excel academically, could also reflect the broader societal context in which they are growing up. Indeed, although Switzerland is characterized by a strong emphasis on individual autonomy, it simultaneously upholds high expectations for achievement and success, as reflected in the Hofstede Insights framework, which analyzes national cultures along key dimensions such as individualism and performance orientation (Norgesklubben, 2018).

Another dimension related to the evolving parent–adolescent relationship involved the importance parents attached to shared moments, particularly shared meals. These family gatherings may serve to maintain relational bonds and facilitate the exchange of ideas, often acting as a cornerstone in family systems (Wolin & Bennett, 1984). It can also represent a moment in which certain norms of parenting become visible, notably through the care often provided by mothers to ensure that everyone enjoys the experience and consumes food that is both healthy and appealing (Brenton, 2017; Le Moal, 2024). Research suggests that structured routines play a critical role in children’s development by fostering social skills and behavioral improvements through stable environments that allow for the practice and refinement of emerging developmental skills (Spagnola & Fiese, 2007). Additionally, participation in consistent and predictable family routines appears to reinforce parent–child relationships and contribute to greater alignment in family members’ perceptions of relationship quality (Boat et al., 2025). These different accounts related to our first research question reflect an ongoing transformation in how parents conceptualize being a good parent. Many appear to have internalized intensive parenting standards that simultaneously promote high involvement and recommended the gradual process of “letting go” during adolescence.

Although both mothers and fathers are shaped by the norms of intensive parenting, the way they perform their roles remains markedly different, and several important points emerge when approaching our second research question about the parental coordination within couples. First, as our results suggested, contemporary discourse on equality in parental and household tasks between partners, though increasingly prominent, does not yet fully align when parenting adolescents, echoing findings from early stages of parenthood (Faircloth, 2021). Despite fathers’ increasing involvement and their expressed desire to be present, which confirms contemporary conceptions of fatherhood—where it is expected that fathers are more involved in the child-rearing than before (e.g., Dermott, 2003, 2008)—mothers often talk about their parental responsibility in a different way and tend to take the lead in shaping the family’s overall approach, particularly when setting and enforcing family rules. This maternal managerial role contrasts with the traditional view of fathers as primary decision-makers and guardians of the family (Collier & Sheldon, 2008; Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999) and reflects a contemporary reconfiguration of parental roles. In line with previous research (Blair-Loy & Jacobs, 2003; Scheibling & Milkie, 2023), most fathers appeared to renegotiate their “work devotion schema,” which previously limited their engagement and emotional involvement in family life. This shift challenges the traditional portrayal of fathers as emotionally distant (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999). They are often positioned as “helpers” or the “fun” parent (Brugeilles & Sebillé, 2015; Le Moal, 2024). In fact, the interviewed mothers also assume a significant coordinating role, reflecting their continued centrality in family life and the mental load they carry as a consequence. The concept of mental load—encompassing managing family schedules, remembering appointments, and organizing household tasks—serves as a powerful illustration of “doing gender,” characterized by the ongoing performance and reinforcement of gender norms through everyday interactions and social practices (Daminger, 2019; Haupt & Gelbgiser, 2024; West & Zimmermann, 1987). Thus, the “Mommy as the family manager” pattern would persist through this often unspoken cognitive labor, which is usually considered as an implicit duty of mothers (Daminger, 2019; Faircloth, 2021), reinforcing the stereotype of women as naturally suited to caregiving roles (Forbes et al., 2020). By taking on these responsibilities, mothers enact socially prescribed roles tied to culturally defined expectations of femininity, perpetuating

gendered dynamics within the family (Forbes et al., 2020). In parallel, despite good intentions, it can be challenging for fathers to become more involved, as some fathers reported experiencing internal conflicts between their traditional restrained role and their wish to be more present (Barbeta-Viñas & Cano, 2017; see also Meeussen et al., 2020). Finally, the way mothers conceive their parenting responsibility may lead them to be more involved, potentially overcompensating in their efforts to fulfill their caring role. In fact, in line with this, several studies show that mothers tend to be, on average, more overprotective than fathers (e.g., Venard et al., 2023, 2024).

In this context, participants' accounts highlighted a dynamic of complementarity rather than one of strict equity or equality between partners. Indeed, complementarity seems to be the most accurate term to describe this dynamic, with a common pattern being the mother adopting a stricter role and the father adopting a more flexible approach when implementing decisions. This term can serve to justify the continuation of an unequal division of labor, potentially limiting fathers' involvement to the more enjoyable aspects of parenthood (Brugilles & Sebillé, 2015). Moreover, although parents often attribute unequal caregiving roles to mothers' reduced professional engagement, research shows that in heterosexual coparenting arrangements, women are still disproportionately expected to manage parenting and domestic responsibilities. Fathers' involvement in child care is largely influenced by both partners' work hours, whereas mothers' caregiving remains only partly shaped by their employment status (Gaunt & Deutsch, 2024). This imbalance became particularly visible during the COVID-19 pandemic (García, 2022) and is especially pronounced when parents hold essentialist beliefs that position maternal care as biologically irreplaceable (Gaunt & Deutsch, 2024).

From a coparenting perspective, the benefits of complementarity have their limits. Disparities in certain domains—such as when one parent feels unsupported or perceives an unequal distribution of responsibilities—can contribute to coparental conflict (Feinberg, 2003; Feinberg et al., 2012). This was especially noted in situations where one partner did not enforce a rule consistently or failed to contribute to organizational tasks. In fact, discrepancies in the division of responsibilities can become problematic when there is a gap between parents' expectations and their perceptions of their childcare roles (Feinberg, 2003). As past research indicates, this misalignment may be linked to increased risk for depression and reduced marital adjustment in both parents (Frisco & Williams, 2003). Furthermore, rigidity in these role divisions may also hinder the family's ability to adapt to transitions or stress (Feinberg, 2003).

Importantly, although parents may at times struggle to complement one another equitably, they nonetheless placed strong emphasis on the importance of forming a united parenting team. Notably, participants often prioritized the ideal of teamwork over concerns about fairness in task division, suggesting an internalization of gendered norms surrounding parental roles and responsibilities (Calarco et al., 2021). They underscored the significance of mutual support in building a cohesive coparental team, which is associated with parent and child adjustment, including improved perceived parental competence and fewer behavior problems in adolescents (Floyd & Zmich, 1991). Concerning joint management, although alliances could form between child and parent when the latter is more lenient, parents expressed their desire to avoid interparental conflicts in front of the children, which is beneficial for adolescents (Grych et al., 2004). This study, therefore, brings to light specific coparenting benefits and challenges pertinent to contemporary parenting practices, such as balancing the division of labor and achieving consensus in child-rearing strategies.

Our overall results regarding parental roles and coordination within the coparental relationship are situated within the specific context of Switzerland, a country characterized by strong economic competitiveness and a traditionally conservative approach to family policy (Norgesklubben, 2018). Economic prosperity enables parents to engage in and support concerted cultivation while also emphasizing autonomy and competitiveness, as previously noted. However, family policies, such as parental leave for fathers and access to childcare facilities,

remain limited. Consequently, mothers are more often responsible for household tasks (60% of mothers compared to 6% of fathers) and child care (48% of mothers compared to 6% of fathers; Federal Statistical Office, 2019, 2024). Although fathers report being more involved than their own parents were, mothers continue to be regarded as the primary caregivers, reinforcing complementarity within the coordination of the two parents and limiting equal involvement.

Finally, we believe it is important to highlight the strengths of dyadic analysis in understanding the parental couple. First, as elaborated by Eisikovits and Koren (2010), this method captures each individual's subjective experience while maintaining the broader dyadic context. It also provides a more nuanced and complex understanding of how dynamics unfold within the couple. In fact, by analyzing what is expressed both individually and as part of a couple, it is possible to examine the content on both personal and relational levels. In this study, although roles often seemed to be established, parents generally shared a common narrative, coconstructing their representations of parenthood. Typically, although rules and rituals are often established together, each parent can add nuance to their meaning and validity. Moreover, although parents jointly raise the same child, they may interpret their parental roles differently and ascribe distinct meanings to their parental coordination.

## Practical implications

Examining parents' accounts provides valuable insights into both parenting and coparenting processes during adolescence. Our findings reveal that both mothers and fathers may experience tension between contemporary norms surrounding parenthood and the need to support their adolescent's autonomy during this developmental period. As guilt and pressure are known to negatively impact parenting (Venard et al., 2024; Wall, 2010), it is crucial to explore strategies for helping parents to cope with these challenges effectively. Additionally, the present contribution offers valuable insights in coparenting dynamics, which can help clinicians develop more personalized and effective interventions that take both these coparenting dynamics as well as parental gender into account. Indeed, the results from this study underscore the importance of understanding gender dynamics, of addressing the role of social and cultural contexts, and of advocating for social change. Although parents often share core values and a common family identity—such as engaging in family rituals—key areas such as the division of labor and child-rearing agreements require attention to improve coparenting dynamics. As Feinberg et al. (2012) noted, unresolved issues in these areas can hinder cooperation and satisfaction within the coparental relationship, which may eventually trickle down into suboptimal parenting strategies (e.g., Albert Sznitman et al., 2019). Furthermore, internalized societal norms may exacerbate discrepancies between partners, potentially leading to frustration when one partner perceives the complementarity in their roles as inadequate. Therefore, it is essential for the therapist to address these dynamics in order to promote a more balanced and supportive coparenting relationship. Moreover, implementing more family-friendly policies could help mitigate the disparities that often emerge during the transition to parenthood (de Laat et al., 2023; Faircloth, 2021). For example, the introduction of generous, non-transferable paid parental leave for both mothers and fathers would promote shared caregiving and help challenge traditional gender roles. Complementary measures, such as flexible work arrangements and access to affordable high-quality child care, can further alleviate the professional and financial pressures faced by parents, particularly mothers (de Laat et al., 2023).

## Limitations and future research

Even though this qualitative study contributes to deepening our understanding of how parents perceive their parental role given contemporary parenting norms and how they make sense of

their coordination within the coparental couple, several limitations should be mentioned. First, the sample consisted of Swiss parents living in the same area of Switzerland. Future research should interview parents from different sociocultural contexts, where parents may hold different views on parent–adolescent relationships and coparenting (Lansford, 2022; Norgesklubben, 2018). Additionally, our sample included four biological parent couples, one blended family couple, and one same-sex couple. Although we believe this composition accurately reflects the diversity of Swiss families, we acknowledge the potential for sampling bias. Typically, though some studies show that stepfather involvement is generally similar to that of the father (Adamsons et al., 2007), others show that they are less involved (Schwartz & Finley, 2006). Regarding same-sex couples, although our particular case did not necessarily reflect this, research suggests that task-sharing in same-sex couples is generally more egalitarian compared to different-sex couples (Goldberg, 2013), which may have influenced our findings on parental coordination. Finally, this study did not account for the adolescent's gender, instead addressing parenting practices more generally. Although some studies report only minor gender-based differences (Endendijk et al., 2016), others suggest that parental approaches often vary depending on the adolescent's gender (Mesman & Groeneveld, 2018). For instance, in the context of sexuality, parents tend to adopt more restrictive attitudes toward daughters than sons (Endendijk et al., 2020), although findings in this domain remain mixed and context dependent (Lamprianidou, Venard, et al., 2025).

From a methodological perspective, although individual interviews provide valuable personal insights, they present certain limitations (Reczek, 2014). Interviews conducted with one family member may inadvertently shape the responses of subsequent interviewees, as prior interactions can introduce bias and influence personal narratives. This potential for contamination could restrict the authenticity and reliability of the data, thereby limiting the possibility of individual interviews to fully capture complex family dynamics. Additionally, individual interviews are not able to capture relational dynamics that could otherwise be observed during the direct interaction between individuals. Future research might benefit from employing dyadic or family interviews involving adolescents, enabling the construction of a collective familial narrative. Such an approach could reveal differing or complementary perspectives within the family, enhancing the understanding of everyday family dynamics.

## CONCLUSION

Social expectations surrounding parenting are increasingly prominent in the media and can influence how parental couples discuss their roles and coordination. In our study, we adopted a socioconstructivist approach to better understand these issues. The findings reveal that parents hold certain expectations for themselves and their children that align with the norms of intensive parenting. Further, parents indicated being sensitive to their adolescent's autonomy, except for schooling and social media, where there remains heightened attention. Regarding the meaning they attach to their parental coordination, our findings indicate that parents view their family more as complementary than equal, which may come with challenges for mothers in particular. Nonetheless, the desire to form a cohesive team takes precedence over other concerns. Overall, parents coconstruct their parental role, guided by social norms and their interactions with their partner and adolescent.

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