

# FATHER INVOLVEMENT AND LONG-TERM YOUNG ADULT OUTCOMES: THE DIFFERENTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF DIVORCE AND GENDER

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The present study investigated the relationship between retrospectively reported father involvement and current reports of psychosocial outcomes in an ethnically diverse sample of 1,989 young adults. Outcomes included subjective well-being, which has been traditionally used as an outcome of divorce, and desires for more or less father involvement, which have only recently been conceptualized as an outcome of divorce. The present results indicate that reported father involvement was related to subjective well-being primarily in children from intact families, whereas it was related to desired father involvement primarily in children from divorced families. Among participants from divorced families, young women were more likely than young men to desire more expressive father involvement than they received. Implications for family court practices are discussed.

**Keywords:** *fathers; divorce; subjective well-being; distress; outcomes; custody*

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Divorce has become increasingly prevalent worldwide during the past half century. It currently is estimated that nearly 50% of first marriages in the United States will end in divorce and that 25% to 50% of American children will experience parental marital dissolution before they reach the age of 18 (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997). For children, the effects of divorce may range from short-term emotional and behavioral difficulties (Malone et al., 2004) to compromised adult relationship quality (Riggio, 2004) and decreased socioeconomic status (Amato & Keith, 1991). In approximately 85% of divorces, primary physical custody is awarded to the mother (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Such arrangements relegate the father to the role of visiting parent, and they have the potential to marginalize and potentially sever the father-child relationship (Fabricius & Braver, 2003; Finley, 2003; Schwartz & Finley, 2005a).

A substantial amount of literature now exists on the effects and outcomes of divorce for children (for reviews, see Amato & Booth, 1997/2000; Braver & Cookston, 2003) and is more extensive than can be summarized in an empirical paper. Studied outcomes range from behavior problems and school adjustment shortly after divorce (e.g., Malone et al., 2004; Stewart, 2003) to intimacy issues in adulthood (e.g., Conway, Christensen, & Herlihy, 2003; Riggio, 2004). Psychological well-being and distress are among the most commonly examined outcomes among children of divorce (e.g., Gilman, Kawachi, Fitzmaurice, & Buka, 2003; Wood, Repetti, & Roesch, 2004).

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In the present study, we focus on two specific outcomes: indices of current subjective well-being and retrospective reports of desired father involvement. We do so for two reasons. First, and most critically, recent research (e.g., Vazsonyi, 2004; Williams & Kelly, 2005) has found that paternal involvement and the father-child relationship significantly predict child and adolescent adjustment above and beyond the effects of the corresponding maternal processes. Fathers clearly are important in the lives of their children and in their children's long-term life outcomes.

Second, individuals from divorced families generally have been found to desire more involvement from their fathers than they had received (Fabricius, 2003; Fabricius & Hall, 2000; Schwartz & Finley, 2005a). These desired fathering indices may well tap into "missed opportunities" or "emotional longing" for a father-child relationship and perhaps into a subtle index of divorce-related distress (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000). Laumann-Billings and Emery argue that young adults from divorced families, most of whom are otherwise assumed to function well and not to exhibit overt signs of psychopathology, may nonetheless express considerable regret about not having spent enough time with their fathers following the divorce. As Wallerstein (2005) notes, "no amount of success in adulthood can . . . erase the memory of the pain and confusion of the divided world of the child of divorce" (p. xx). Indeed, Marquardt (2005), in a national survey of young adults from intact and divorced families, found that 61% of young adults from divorced families, compared with 38% of participants from intact families, agreed with the statement "I often missed my father" (Finley, 2006). Desired father involvement, especially when it is measured relative to the amount of involvement that the individual actually received, may serve as a critical, and perhaps unique, outcome of divorce (cf. Fabricius & Hall, 2000). Indeed, desired father involvement is directly salient to the effects of divorce on the father-child relationship (cf. Kelly & Emery, 2003; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000). Thus, one objective of this study was to replicate and extend previous research suggesting that missed opportunities and emotional longing for fathering represent a unique outcome of divorce.

When desired father involvement is measured relative to the level of involvement reported, three levels of desired fathering can be created: (a) individuals desiring more involvement than they had received, (b) individuals desiring less involvement than they had received, and (c) individuals characterizing the degree of involvement received as "just right." Given the findings reviewed above, it would be reasonable to hypothesize that children of divorce would be overrepresented among individuals desiring more father involvement than they had received and would be underrepresented among the other two categories.

Given the focus on young adults' sense of missed opportunities and emotional longing for relationships with their fathers, the present study used a retrospective design where young adults were asked to reflect back on their childhood and adolescence and to characterize the amount of father involvement that they would have wanted relative to the amount of involvement they had received. Such research is important, given that family court scholars have recognized the need for custody and access decisions to be rendered based on research of children's wants, needs, functioning, and relationships with parents (Kelly & Lamb, 2000). Mothers and fathers often have their own agendas and best interests in mind when making custody requests, and judges may be influenced by their own ideologies and viewpoints when making decisions.

Indeed, although "negotiating in the shadow of the law," where divorcing parents are assumed to negotiate their own custody arrangements, is an accepted practice in family law,

there are at least three troubling trends associated with this practice. First, in their groundbreaking Stanford Divorce Study, Maccoby and Mnookin (1992) found that in two thirds of cases where the father disagreed with the mother's request for sole custody, the father requesting joint custody was overruled by the judge and the mother was awarded sole custody. Second, as Thompson (1994) notes, "fathers who must negotiate with their wives over custody issues realize that, if their dispute comes to court, their chances of achieving a more generous custody settlement are remote at best" (p. 217). Third, Maccoby and Mnookin (1992) found that, even when mothers and fathers *agreed* on joint custody or on sole paternal custody, judges overruled these agreements in one-quarter of such cases. What was lost in all of these scenarios was the child's *own* best interests.

Retrospective reports are often used to measure reported and desired father involvement in young adults (e.g., Braver, Ellman, & Fabricius, 2003; Fabricius & Hall, 2000; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000) and represent a unique way of assessing children's views of their own best interests from a mature perspective (Warshak, 2003). Young adults may provide a uniquely valuable perspective because they tend to adopt a more mature viewpoint on their families of origin (Arnett, 1998). Although it is possible to obtain reports of current levels of desired father involvement from minors, minors from divorced families still may be involved in the family court system and legally are under the control or influence of one or both parents. Minors, especially young and preadolescent children, may not possess the perspective-taking skills necessary to understand what is in their best interest (cf. Kegan, 1982). Once individuals have reached the age of majority, however, they are legally adults and thus may be freer to speak their conscience. Furthermore, young adults are likely to possess the cognitive, psychosocial, and emotional maturity necessary to reflect back on their postdivorce arrangements and to evaluate the extent to which these arrangements provided them with the paternal nurturance and involvement that they desired or needed. Although these retrospective reports cannot influence the custody decisions enacted years earlier for the person providing the retrospective report, they can provide valuable information regarding the effects of the divorce process on children.

If, as hypothesized, desires for more father involvement represent an outcome of divorce, they should be more strongly and negatively related to reported father involvement for individuals from divorced families than for those from intact families. Such a finding would have important implications for custody and access decisions, given that the potential for missed opportunities and emotional longing for a relationship with one's father may be critical to consider when evaluating who should determine what is in the child's best interests (Fabricius, 2003; Fabricius & Hall, 2000; Finley, 2002).

There is evidence that outcomes of divorce may vary by gender. For example, Størksen, Røysamb, Moum, and Tambs (2005) found that divorce was associated only with school problems for boys, whereas divorce was associated with school problems, depression, anxiety, and psychosocial well-being for girls. Malone et al. (2004) found that behavior problems were more prevalent in boys than girls from divorced families. Moreover, young women from divorced families may be especially adversely affected in terms of intrapersonal/emotional consequences of divorce (Kilman, Carranza, & Vendemia, 2006). Clearly, more research on gender differences in long-term outcomes of divorce for children is warranted.

## FRAMEWORK AND PURPOSE OF THE PRESENT STUDY

In our program of research, we have incorporated theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and recommendations advanced by two sets of father involvement scholars. First,

our use of paternal nurturance as an index of father–child relationship quality is based on Rohner’s theoretical and empirical work on paternal acceptance–rejection (e.g., Khaleque & Rohner, 2002; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). Second, following suggestions offered by Hawkins and Palkovitz (1999), we assess both reported and desired father involvement in 20 different life domains. We assess the young adult child’s reports both to the extent of involvement *received* in each domain and of the extent to which she or he *would have wanted more or less involvement* from her or his father. This allows us to tap into both the young adult’s reported level of involvement and missed opportunities and emotional longing for a relationship with her or his father.

In sum, the purposes of the present study was (a) to provide additional validation for desired father involvement as an outcome of divorce and (b) to examine the relationships of paternal nurturance and involvement in childhood and adolescence to two quite different sets of outcome measures. The relationships between fathering and outcome variables were examined separately for intact versus divorced families and by gender. The two divorce outcomes were subjective well-being (Sheldon et al., 2004), the most commonly investigated outcome of divorce, and desired father involvement—which may tap into more subtle consequences of divorce (e.g., Fabricius & Hall, 2000; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000; Marquardt, 2005).

We hypothesized that young adults’ retrospective reports of father involvement would be positively related to subjective well-being. We also hypothesized that, for participants desiring more father involvement than they had received, reported and desired father involvement would be negatively related (i.e., individuals whose fathers were less involved would desire greater levels of additional involvement). We did not advance specific hypotheses regarding differences in the relationship of reported father involvement to subjective well-being in intact versus divorced families. Some studies have found that this relationship is stronger in intact families (Riggio, 2004), whereas other studies have found it to be stronger in divorced families (Guttmann & Rosenberg, 2003). We did hypothesize, however, that the relationship of reported and desired father involvement would be strongest in divorced families. Based on prior research (e.g., Kilmann et al., 2006; Størksen et al., 2005), we further hypothesized that all of these relationships would be stronger for women than for men.

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURES

The sample for this study is drawn from a larger study of father involvement and nurturance (Finley & Schwartz, 2004). The present sample consists of 1,989 young adult university students (69% female; mean age of 20.6 years) and represents 84.5% of the total sample collected. The current sample consists of participants from intact or divorced families who considered their biological father as the primary father figure in their lives. Of the total sample ( $N = 2,353$ ) from the larger study, 364 participants were excluded from the present analyses because: they identified a nonbiological father as their primary father figure (56%), they did not specify their family form (26%), they indicated family forms other than intact or divorced (16%), or they indicated that their parents were never married (2%). Participants completed the measures in class. Administration time ranged from 10 to 20 minutes.

In terms of family form, 75% of participants were from intact families, and 25% were from divorced families. The sample was ethnically diverse (24% non-Hispanic White, 10% non-Hispanic Black, 56% Hispanic, 7% Asian, 4% mixed). The majority of participants (67%) were U.S. born, whereas the majority of fathers (72%) were born abroad. All university grade levels were represented: 46% freshmen, 18% sophomores, 16% juniors, 14% seniors, and 6% graduate or special students. The majority of fathers (86%) had attained at least a high school degree, with 21% having attained college degrees and 24% having attained graduate or professional degrees. Eighteen percent of participants reported annual family incomes below \$30,000, 34% between \$30,000 and \$50,000, 35% between \$50,000 and \$100,000, and 13% above \$100,000.

Participants were recruited from undergraduate classes in which the instructor agreed to allow research assistants to administer the measures in class. Although participation was completely voluntary, we know of fewer than five students who refused to complete the measures. Classes in a number of academic disciplines were surveyed, including psychology, family studies, communications, and freshman English. The majority of participants (88%) were from a large public university with a largely Hispanic student body. To increase the numbers of non-Hispanics in the sample, additional data were gathered at two other universities with primarily non-Hispanic White student populations. The freshman English courses that we surveyed were required for all first-semester freshmen, suggesting that the sample was representative of the university from which the majority of data were gathered.

Although our sample is not representative of the current U.S. population because of the overrepresentation of immigrants and minorities, the considerable representation of minorities and immigrant families in our sample is consistent both with projected increases in the representation of immigrants and minorities in the United States (Day, 1996; Larsen, 2004) and with the overrepresentation of non-European countries among sources of recent immigrants (Schmidley & Deardorff, 2001). The considerable representation of Hispanics in our sample is consistent not only with the demographics of Miami (Stepick & Stepick, 2002), where the vast majority of data were collected, but also with (a) the overrepresentation of Hispanics among the foreign-born population (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003) and (b) the massive growth of the U.S. Hispanic population (Day, 1996). Consistency between the present findings and those from prior research with predominantly non-Hispanic White samples would suggest that the relationship between father involvement and young adult outcomes (subjective well-being and desired father involvement) is consistent across variations in ethnicity and nativity.

## MEASURES

*Demographics.* We assessed age, gender, father's educational level, family income, year in school, family form, and participant's and father's nativity. Participants whose parents were permanently separated ( $n = 2$ ) were classified as divorced.

*Nurturant Fathering.* The Nurturant Fathering Scale (Finley & Schwartz, 2004) consists of nine items, rated on a five-point scale, which participants use to characterize their relationship with their fathers. Participants respond to each item using this five-point rating scale. The anchors for the scale vary as a function of item content. Cronbach's alpha in the current sample was .94. A sample item from this scale is, "When you needed your father's *support*, was he there for you?" (Finley & Schwartz, 2004, p. 160).

*Reported and Desired Father Involvement.* The Father Involvement Scale (Finley & Schwartz, 2004) lists 20 domains of father involvement, selected from the review and critique by Hawkins and Palkovitz (1999). For each fathering domain, participants are asked to indicate: (a) how involved their fathers were in their lives on a scale of 1 (*not at all involved*) to 5 (*very involved*) and (b) how involved they wanted their fathers to have been, relative to the level of involvement reported, on a scale of 1 (*much less involved*) to 5 (*much more involved*). A sample item from this scale reads, “\_\_\_\_\_ developing competence \_\_\_\_\_” (Finley & Schwartz, 2004, p. 162), where the participant is instructed to indicate reported involvement on the left side and desired involvement on the right.

The reported and desired fathering response scales are qualitatively different from one another. On the linear response scale, used for reported father involvement, a rating of 1 represents the lowest degree of involvement and a rating of 5 represents the highest degree of involvement. However, on the curvilinear response scale, used for desired father involvement, a rating of 3 (it was just right) represents the greatest degree of satisfaction with the reported level of involvement. Ratings of 1 (*much less involved*) or 5 (*much more involved*) both represent dissatisfaction with the father’s involvement. In our analyses, we therefore separated the desired father involvement into its component parts—satisfied, desired more, and desired less.

It is noteworthy that nurturant fathering and the three reported fathering scales were all intercorrelated at .80 or above, as were the two desired father involvement scales. These intercorrelations suggest that the various scales are measuring two underlying constructs—reported and desired father involvement. However, our previous research has provided some evidence for discriminant validity among the scales within each construct. Specifically, we have found that instrumental fathering functions are more heavily endorsed than are expressive fathering functions (Finley & Schwartz, 2006) and that instrumental fathering functions are most strongly impacted by divorce (Schwartz & Finley, 2005b).

Using exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, Finley and Schwartz (2004) empirically extracted three reported involvement scales and two desired involvement scales. Reported involvement scales include expressive involvement (caregiving, companionship, sharing activities, emotional development, social development, spiritual development, physical development, and leisure;  $\alpha = .93$ ); instrumental involvement (discipline, protecting, providing income, monitoring schoolwork, moral development, developing responsibility, career development, and developing independence;  $\alpha = .91$ ); and mentoring/advising involvement, which represents the empirical overlap between expressive and instrumental involvement (intellectual development, developing competence, mentoring, and giving advice;  $\alpha = .90$ ). The same factor structure emerged for reported and desired fathering, except that no desired involvement items loaded on both the expressive and instrumental factors (Finley & Schwartz, 2004). Desired involvement scales therefore included expressive (10 items,  $\alpha = .93$ ) and instrumental (10 items,  $\alpha = .92$ ) factors. In the desired involvement factor analysis, mentoring and intellectual development patterned on the expressive factor, and advising and developing competence patterned on the instrumental factor.

*Young Adult Subjective Well-Being.* A three-item scale assessing self-esteem, life satisfaction, and future expectations was used to measure subjective well-being (cf. Sheldon et al., 2004). Participants responded to each of these items using a five-point Likert scale with 1 (*very low*) and 5 (*very high*) as the anchor points. Cronbach’s alpha for scores on this scale was .75.

## RESULTS

### VALIDATION OF DESIRED FATHERING AS AN OUTCOME OF DIVORCE

Our prior research has shown that participants from divorced families desired more additional father involvement than did those from intact families (Schwartz & Finley, 2005a). However, in that analysis we did not separate the desired scale into its three parts: satisfied, desired less, and desired more. Further, we have not previously examined the extent to which gender moderates the magnitude or direction of family form differences in desired fathering. We therefore conducted chi-square analyses among desired fathering category, gender, and family form. We conducted these analyses separately for expressive and instrumental desired fathering, given that these dimensions of fathering may be differentially affected by divorce (Finley & Schwartz, 2006). Gender and family form were considered as a single categorical variable with four levels—intact male, intact female, divorced male, and divorced female. For expressive desired fathering, a significant overall effect emerged,  $\chi^2(6) = 25.06, p < .001, \phi = .11$  (see Table 1). Exploring this result indicated that participants from intact families were more likely than those from divorced families to characterize the level of expressive involvement received as “just right.” Although the overall chi-square test indicated that this difference was not moderated by gender,  $\chi^2(1) = 0.02, p = .89$ , a multinomial regression analysis indicated that women from divorced families were significantly less likely to characterize the reported level of involvement as “just right,” Wald  $\chi^2 = 10.75, p < .002$ . This finding suggests a main effect of family form on satisfaction with the amount of expressive father involvement received, with women overrepresented among participants from divorced families desiring additional involvement.

For instrumental desired fathering, the analysis yielded a significant overall effect,  $\chi^2(6) = 64.49, p < .001, \phi = .18$ . Again, participants from intact families were more likely than those from divorced families to characterize their reported level of father involvement as “just right,” and this effect was not qualified by gender,  $\chi^2(1) = 0.01, p = .94$ . Individuals from divorced families were more likely to desire more involvement than they had received and were less likely to desire less involvement than they had received. A multinomial regression analysis indicated that both men, Wald  $\chi^2 = 9.81, p < .003$ , and women, Wald  $\chi^2 = 27.85, p < .001$ , from divorced families were significantly less likely than participants

**Table 1**  
Desired Fathering Ratings by Family Form

Desired Fathering Category	Family Form—Gender Pairing			
	Intact Male	Intact Female	Divorced Male	Divorced Female
	<i>Desired Expressive Fathering</i>			
Desired Less than Received	37 (7.9%)	66 (6.7%)	13 (10.7%)	20 (5.5%)
Just Right	73 (15.6%)	171 (17.3%)	13 (10.7%)	29 (8.0%)
Desired More than Received	358 (76.5%)	751 (76.0%)	96 (78.7%)	312 (86.4%)
	<i>Desired Instrumental Fathering</i>			
Desired Less than Received	96 (20.5%)	234 (23.8%)	21 (17.2%)	50 (13.8%)
Just Right	117 (25.0%)	235 (23.9%)	16 (13.1%)	43 (11.9%)
Desired More than Received	255 (54.5%)	515 (52.3%)	85 (69.7%)	269 (74.3%)

from intact families to characterize their reported level of father involvement as “just right.” This pattern suggests that the effects of family form, on the extent to which children of divorce will manifest emotional longing or missed opportunities for instrumental father involvement, were equally strong across genders.

### **THE ROLE OF FAMILY FORM AND GENDER IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FATHER INVOLVEMENT AND YOUNG ADULT OUTCOMES**

To test the hypothesis that the relationships between father involvement and young adult outcomes would be moderated by family form and gender, correlations were computed between each of the reported fathering variables (nurturant fathering, expressive involvement, instrumental involvement, and mentoring/advising involvement) and each outcome variable. These correlations were then compared between family forms and between genders using the  $z$  test for independent correlation coefficients and the  $q$  index of effect size (Cohen, 1988). We used bivariate correlations, rather than multiple regression analyses, because the fathering scales are intercorrelated at .80 or above. Entering highly intercorrelated predictor variables into multiple regression analyses creates computational problems (multicollinearity) that threaten the validity and accuracy of results (Cohen & Cohen, 1983).

The relationships between reported fathering and young adult outcomes are reported in Table 2. Because each block of information in this table contains eight separate numbers, we outline here how this table is formatted. Within this table, we use the term “block” to refer to a set of correlation coefficients and differences involving one fathering variable and one outcome variable. Each block contains three rows of numbers. In the first row, the correlation coefficient for men from intact families is presented first, the correlation coefficient for men from divorced families is presented second, and the effect size for the difference between these correlation coefficients is presented third. The second row presents the corresponding results for women. In the third row, the effect size for the correlation difference between genders for intact families is presented first, and the corresponding effect size for divorced families is presented second.

### **YOUNG ADULT SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING**

For both genders, correlations of all four reported fathering indices to young adult subjective well-being were significantly and moderately positive for individuals from intact families. However, these correlations were nonsignificant and trivial for individuals from divorced families (see Table 2). Moreover, correlations between young adult subjective well-being and all four reported fathering indices differed significantly and notably by family form. None of these correlations differed significantly by gender.

### **DESIRED FATHER INVOLVEMENT**

A considerable number of participants indicated that the level of expressive involvement ( $n = 286$ , 15% of those providing valid data) and/or instrumental involvement ( $n = 411$ , 21% of those providing valid data) was “just right” (i.e., a mean of 3.0 across the ten instrumental or expressive domains) (see Table 1). Individuals characterizing the involvement received as “just right” were not included in the correlational analyses for the corresponding desired involvement subscale because, for these individuals, desired involvement is a constant. For both the expressive and instrumental desired fathering subscales, participants

**Table 2**  
Correlations Between Reported and Desired Fathering, by Desired Fathering Category

Variable	Nurturant Fathering Intact, Divorced ( $q^a$ )	Reported Expressive Involvement Intact, Divorced ( $q$ )	Reported Instrumental Involvement Intact, Divorced ( $q$ )	Reported Mentoring/ Advising Involvement Intact, Divorced ( $q$ )
<i>Young Adult Subjective Well-Being</i>				
Male	.40***, .07 (.35***)	.37***, .08 (.31**)	.36***, -.01 (.39***)	.36***, -.04 (.42***)
Female	.36***, .14* (.23***)	.35***, .15* (.21***)	.30***, .12* (.19**)	.30***, .12* (.19*)
Gender Difference ( $q^b$ )	.05, .07	.02, .07	.07, .13	.07, .16
<i>Desired Expressive Involvement</i>				
Desired Less than Received				
Male	.55***, .47* (.11)	.53***, .53** (.00)	.52***, .51** (.01)	.58***, .57** (.01)
Female	.39***, .75*** (.56***)	.30***, .77*** (.71***)	.35***, .75*** (.61***)	.29***, .76*** (.70***)
Gender Difference ( $q^b$ )	.21 <sup>§</sup> , .46 <sup>§</sup>	.28*, .43	.21 <sup>§</sup> , .41	.36**, .35
Desired More than Received				
Male	-.21***, -.55*** (.41***)	-.13*, -.55*** (.49***)	-.14**, -.55*** (.48***)	-.20***, -.56*** (.43***)
Female	-.31***, -.64*** (.44***)	-.27***, -.61*** (.43***)	-.19***, -.60*** (.50***)	-.25***, -.60*** (.44***)
Gender Difference ( $q$ )	.11, .14	.15*, .09	.05, .07	.05, .06
<i>Desired Instrumental Involvement</i>				
Desired Less than Received				
Male	.34**, .65** (.42)	.24**, .58** (.42)	.30**, .58** (.35)	.32**, .58** (.33)
Female	.22**, .72*** (.68***)	.15*, .66*** (.64***)	.14*, .82*** (1.02***)	.14*, .72*** (.77***)
Gender Difference ( $q$ )	.13, .13	.09, .13	.17, .49 <sup>§</sup>	.19, .25
Desired More than Received				
Male	.05, -.41*** (.49***)	.13*, -.42*** (.58***)	.05, -.45*** (.62***)	.02, -.43*** (.48***)
Female	-.06, -.59*** (.62***)	.02, -.52*** (.60***)	-.03, -.59*** (.71***)	-.01, -.55*** (.61***)
Gender Difference ( $q$ )	.11, .24 <sup>§</sup>	.11, .13	.08, .19	.03, .16

<sup>a</sup> Effect size for the difference between correlation coefficients by family form by gender, within family form.

<sup>b</sup> Effect size for the difference between correlation coefficients by family form by family form, within gender.

Note: Individuals reporting that their reported level of father involvement was “just right” were not included in the analyses presented in this table. Because statistical significance is a function of both effect size and sample size (Kline, 2004), the significance of a given effect size varies as a function of sample size.

<sup>§</sup>  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

with item means between 1.0 and 2.9 were classified as desiring less involvement than they had received, and individuals with item means between 3.1 and 5.0 were classified as desiring more involvement than they had received.<sup>1</sup>

*Desired Expressive Involvement.* Among participants who desired more expressive involvement than they had received, all correlations between desired expressive involvement and indices of reported involvement were negative. These correlations were all significantly stronger in divorced families than in intact families, and there were no noteworthy ( $q \geq .20$ ) gender differences in any of these correlations.

*Desired Instrumental Involvement.* Among participants who desired more instrumental father involvement than they had received, correlations between desired instrumental involvement and reported involvement indices were near zero in intact families and significantly negative in divorced families. These correlations were all significantly stronger in divorced families than in intact families, and only one gender difference (in the correlation with nurturant fathering) exceeded an effect size of .20.

## DISCUSSION

Perhaps the most striking finding in the present results is that the types of outcomes to which father involvement is linked in the long-term appear to be strongly determined by whether the family remains intact or undergoes divorce. In intact families, retrospectively reported father involvement was positively related to subjective well-being (self-esteem, life satisfaction, and future expectations) in young adulthood. There was no such relationship for divorced families.

By contrast, in divorced families, the absence of father involvement is linked to greater long-term desires for father involvement, which have been described as subtle indices of divorce-related distress (cf. Kelly & Emery, 2003; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000). The present results suggest that father involvement is differentially related to positive and negative outcomes for children of intact versus divorced families. Subjective well-being appears to serve as an outcome variable primarily in intact families, whereas emotional longing and missed opportunities appear to serve as outcome variables primarily in divorced families (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000; Marquardt, 2005). Critically, it is possible that, by focusing only on subjective well-being as an outcome in children of divorce, the negative impact of divorce on children may be underestimated.

In sum, the present results indicate that, in divorced families, desired father involvement is powerfully linked to reported levels of father involvement. The vast majority of participants from divorced families desired more father involvement than they had received. As a result, it appears that divorce leaves many children with unmet desires for paternal involvement—desires that remain salient for many years after the divorce is finalized. This pattern of results is consistent with what Warshak (2003) has called “the collective voice of children” and has argued that this should be used more extensively when making custody and access decisions within the family court system.

Intriguingly, for young adult children of divorce, desired instrumental fathering appears to represent a more salient outcome than does desired expressive fathering. Specifically, in the instrumental domain, children of divorce were more likely than those from intact families to desire more involvement than they had received and less likely to desire less involvement than they had received. In the expressive domain, the only significant family form difference was in the proportion of individuals characterizing the level of involvement

received as “just right.” The implications of these findings for physical custody decisions appear to be twofold: (a) the father must be physically present to carry out the instrumental aspects of his role and (b) instrumental fathering is most strongly affected by divorce (cf. Finley & Schwartz, 2006; Schwartz & Finley, 2005b). It seems implausible for instrumental functions such as discipline, monitoring schoolwork, and protection to be carried out on a visitation schedule. The father’s frequent physical presence in all aspects of his child’s life appears to be required if he is to fulfill his instrumental role obligations.

The expectation that the effects of divorce would be stronger in young women than in young men was only partially supported. Among participants from divorced families, significantly more women than men desired more expressive father involvement than they had received. This suggests that the effects of divorce on missed opportunities or emotional longing, especially for emotional aspects of fathering, may be more pronounced in females than in males. There were no gender differences in the relationship of father involvement to subjective well-being.

The present results suggest that the father-visitation arrangements that often accompany divorce are not sufficient to provide the fathering, most specifically the instrumental fathering, that children may desire or require (cf. Braver et al., 2003; Fabricius & Hall, 2000). Thus, our results, in combination with those of others, may have important implications for decisions regarding children’s best interests (Finley, 2002). These decisions have generally been attentive to parents’ perceptions and to short-term outcomes of divorce, but not attentive to the voices of the children of divorce themselves, nor to long-term outcomes. As has been cogently argued in recent literature (e.g., Fabricius, 2003; Warshak, 2003), children’s perspectives on their own best interests, particularly in the long term, are critical for researchers and policy makers. Equitable joint physical custody appears to be the post-divorce arrangement most preferred by children of divorce in the long term (Fabricius, 2003; Fabricius & Hall, 2000). Our results appear to suggest that providing custody arrangements that increase paternal involvement following divorce will result in decreases in feelings of missed opportunities and emotional longing in children from divorced families.

## LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The results of the present study must be considered in the context of several limitations. First, 72% of the fathers rated in the present study were immigrants. Although the ethnic diversity in the present sample is consistent with the changing demographics of the United States, the ethnic diversity in the present sample is somewhat specific to the Miami area. For example, although approximately half of all Hispanics in the sample were Cuban, national statistics indicate that Cubans represent only about 4% of the U.S. Hispanic population (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003). Nonetheless, the present results are consistent with those reported with predominantly non-Hispanic White samples (Fabricius & Braver, 2003; Fabricius & Hall, 2000; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000).

Second, the use of a university sample may have screened out young adults from lower socioeconomic and educational brackets or whose parents never were married to one another. The percentage of participants from divorced or permanently separated families in the present sample (25%) is lower than is the percentage (50%) reflected in recent national statistics (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2001; National Center for Health Statistics, 2004). It is possible that some children of divorce may not attend college for financial, emotional, or other reasons. However, the proportion of participants from

divorced families in the present sample is identical to that reported by Fabricius and Hall (2000) in their study of introductory psychology students. It is also important to note that many studies conducted with college-student samples have been used to make recommendations regarding family law and divorce policy (e.g., Braver et al., 2003; Fabricius & Braver, 2003, 2004; Fabricius & Hall, 2000; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000).

Moreover, despite the disparity in the representation of children of divorce between our sample and national statistics, our findings are consistent with Fabricius (2003), who notes that “we have encountered no evidence that college students from divorced families represent a ‘select few’ who escaped the ill effects of their parents’ divorces” (p. 305). Indeed, Fabricius and Braver (2004) report that, in their sample of university students from divorced families, 18% of participants reported not seeing their fathers at all following the divorce, and 45% reported seeing their fathers less than 15% of the time. Although we did not collect data on visitation schedules, the patterns reported by Fabricius and Braver (2003, 2004) are strikingly similar to the results obtained in our sample. Similarly, our results are consistent with Marquardt (2005), who reported that, in her nationally representative sample, nearly two thirds of young adults from divorced families, compared to just over one third of young adults from intact families, reported having often missed their fathers while growing up (Finley, 2006).

Third, all variables were measured concurrently. Therefore, we cannot discount the possibility that young adults’ reports of their fathers’ past involvement may have influenced, or been influenced by, their reports of subjective well-being, desired father involvement, or their current relationships with their fathers.

Despite these limitations, however, the present findings have demonstrated that divorce decreases the impact of fathering on young adults’ subjective well-being and increases the impact of father noninvolvement on young adults’ perceptions of missed opportunities and emotional longing for relationships with their fathers. Not only does divorce lessen the father’s positive impact on his children’s lives, but it also exacerbates the negative impacts of paternal noninvolvement on indices of divorce-related distress.

In conclusion, there appear to be at least two take-home messages from the present results. First, although the present study differs from prior research (Fabricius, 2003; Fabricius & Braver, 2003; Fabricius & Hall, 2000; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000) in terms of the sample used (i.e., multicultural versus predominantly non-Hispanic White) and the specific questions posed to young adult participants (i.e., father involvement ratings versus custody preferences and regrets about insufficient father–child contact), we note a robust replication of the core finding across all studies reviewed—that most children of divorce wanted more meaningful contact and a stronger emotional bond with their fathers.

Second, because different outcome measures appear to be associated with father involvement in intact versus divorced families, it may be inappropriate, and indeed may be misleading, to use outcome variables drawn from studies of intact families (e.g., subjective well-being) to evaluate outcomes in children from divorced families. Although subjective well-being is of considerable interest to researchers, divorce-related distress, emotional longing, and missed opportunities may be more appropriate outcome measures to capture the self-identified best interests of children of divorce (Fabricius, 2003; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000).

It is hoped that the present results will contribute to expanding the empirical basis for both family policy and family legislation. Our findings, in conjunction with the prior studies cited in this report, clearly argue for a change in family policy, family legislation, and legal practice in the direction of favoring equitable physical custody—which is what many young adult children of divorce perceive to have been in their own best interests (Fabricius,

2003; Fabricius & Hall, 2000). In our view, the self-reports of young adult children of divorce regarding their own perceptions of their own best interests should prevail over the views and beliefs of others, including legislators, judges, lawyers, mothers, and fathers (Finley, 2002).

## NOTE

1. To our knowledge, previous research has not described young adults who desire less father involvement than they had received. Although this is an interesting and intriguing population, none of the variables in our data set elucidated the relationships obtained with this group. We are currently conducting a follow-up study, including mother involvement and nurturance as well as a greater range of outcome variables, to further explore this important population. We present data for these individuals in Table 2 to encourage others to explore this population as well.

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