

Parsons and Bales Revisited: Young Adult Children's Characterization of the Fathering Role

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In the mid-20th century, Parsons and Bales characterized the fathering role in terms of instrumental functions such as providing income, protecting, and discipline. In the present study the authors investigated the extent to which the fathering role has expanded to include expressive functions. An ethnically diverse sample of 1,989 university students from intact and divorced families retrospectively reported on instrumental and expressive father involvement. Results indicated that, although family form and ethnicity moderated the divergence between instrumental and expressive father involvement, fathers from both family forms and from all ethnic groups were rated higher on instrumental than expressive involvement. Strikingly, across both family forms and ethnic groups, seven of the eight most highly endorsed fathering functions were in the instrumental dimension.

Keywords: fathers, father involvement, divorce, gender, ethnicity

“The American family has, in the past generation or more, been undergoing a profound process of change. There has been much difference of opinion among social scientists, as well as among others concerned, as to the interpretation of these changes.” With these words, Parsons and Bales (1955, p. 3) opened their classic work *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process* half a century ago. What makes this introduction striking, of course, is that it could serve as the introduction to virtually any article, chapter, or book written on families today. In revisiting the work of Parsons and Bales 50 years later, we focus on the extent to which their portrayal of the fathering role in the intact American family remains accurate. Specifically: “If the nuclear family consists in a defined ‘normal’ complement of the male adult, female adult, and their immediate children, the male adult will play the role of instrumental

leader and the female adult will play the role of expressive leader” (Parsons & Bales, 1955, p. 315). In this study, we focus on Parsons and Bales’ characterization of the father’s role as instrumental and on what, if any, changes appear to have occurred in the father’s role in the intervening 50 years.

Research on Father Involvement and the Fathering Role

Research on father involvement has gained increasing momentum in recent years (Day & Lamb, 2004; Lamb, 1997; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002). Many scholars have argued that this emphasis is due, in large part, to the contention that father involvement is critical for healthy child and adolescent development (e.g., Palkovitz, 2002; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). For example, research has indicated that paternal involvement is associated with youth outcomes such as self-competence (O’Hannessian, Lerner, Lerner, & von Eye, 1998), school bonding (Flouri, Buchanan, & Bream, 2002), and social relationships (van Schaick & Stolberg, 2001).

Theory and research in father involvement consistently have identified multiple domains of fathering. In their classic work, Parsons and Bales (1955) divided parenting roles and re-

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sponsibilities into two primary categories: instrumental (e.g., providing income, discipline, and protection) and expressive (e.g., caregiving, companionship, and sharing activities). Although Parsons and Bales characterized the father's role as largely instrumental, many social scientists (e.g., Amato, 1998; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Palkovitz, 1997) have argued that, since the 1970s, the pendulum has swung toward favoring increased nurturant and expressive father involvement. Specifically, beginning with the social revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s, fathers are presumed to have become more involved in child rearing and other activities in the home (Giele & Holst, 2004). Perhaps as a consequence, fathers are assumed to have increased their involvement in expressive areas of parenting such as companionship and caregiving (see Amato, 1998; Marsiglio et al., 2000, for more extensive reviews).

The present study represents an empirical examination of the extent to which contemporary young adult children perceive their fathers as having enacted primarily instrumental or primarily expressive involvements. In the present study we use a measure of father involvement (Finley & Schwartz, 2004) from which expressive and instrumental subscales have been factor-analytically extracted. A finding that instrumental involvement is reported more than expressive involvement would be consistent with Parsons and Bales' (1955) traditional characterization of the fathering role. By contrast, a finding that both types of involvement are reported equally or that more expressive than instrumental involvement is reported would support a more contemporary characterization of the "new" expressive and nurturant father (e.g., Marsiglio et al., 2000).

Beyond examining whether fathers have assumed more expressive roles (at least in the eyes of their young adult children), we were also interested in studying the specific domains of young people's lives in which they reported that their fathers had and had not been involved. For example, a finding that fathers are playing more expressive roles leaves unanswered the question of precisely *which* aspects of the expressive role have become part of the father's expanded role and which aspects have not. Further, it may be worth examining whether the most traditional aspects of the fathering role—providing income, protecting, discipline, moral/

ethical development, and encouraging responsibility (Andrews, Luckey, Bolden, Whiting-Fickling, & Lind, 2004; Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001)—remain the aspects of the father's role that young adult children endorse most highly.

Ethnic, Family Form, and Gender Variations in Young Adults' Characterizations of the Fathering Role

There are a number of potential moderating variables that may be thought to affect the ways in which individuals characterize their fathers. This list of potential moderators includes ethnicity, family form (intact vs. divorced), and child gender. We briefly discuss these potential moderators here.

Ethnicity

Many writers have called for more research on fathering in ethnic and racial minority groups (e.g., Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). Although some researchers have followed this recommendation (e.g., Hofferth, 2003; King, Harris, & Heard, 2004; Toth & Xu, 1999), scant empirical attention has been paid to variations in the fathering role across ethnic or racial groups. Although the importance of family and the structure of the fathering role are likely to vary across ethnic groups, it remains to be determined whether differences between expressive and instrumental dimensions of fathering and among specific fathering functions (e.g., discipline, caregiving, and providing income) are consistent or discrepant across ethnic groups. However, studies conducted within some specific ethnic groups may provide some guidance. First, African American fathers in Hofferth's (2003) study were characterized as involved in instrumental functions (i.e., monitoring) but as relatively unaffectionate. Second, Hispanic fathers in Toth and Xu's (1999) sample were most likely to reinforce family rules and to monitor schoolwork. The distant Asian fathering role appears to lend itself more to instrumental than expressive functions (Shwalb, Kawai, Shoji, & Tsunetsugu, 1997).

Family Form

Divorce is known to exert a considerable impact on the father–child relationship (Arditti & Prouty, 1999; Riggio, 2004). Schwartz and Finley (2005) found that instrumental fathering functions may be more heavily compromised by divorce than expressive fathering functions. In intact families, there is often a mutually agreed-upon “division of labor” such that each parent takes primary responsibility for certain aspects of childcare, although parents may share and even enhance one another’s involvement in other areas (Parke, 2002). In divorced families, however, at least two different portrayals of the father’s role may emerge. Some divorced fathers with extensive time-sharing may be responsible for all aspects of childcare while the child is under their supervision, and as a result it might be reasonable to expect a more equitable distribution of fathering roles and functions. However, for other divorced fathers with limited visitation, the father’s role might be restricted to the role of a visitor or “leisure” role.

Gender

Child gender is another important issue to consider. Fathers often interact differently with boys than with girls (Lindsey & Mize, 2001; Rogers, Buchanan, & Winchell, 2003), and it may be reasonable to hypothesize that fathers may play more instrumental roles with boys and more expressive roles with girls (Paquette, 2004). However, such a hypothesis has yet to be empirically examined in the published literature.

Use of Retrospective Reports of Father Involvement

The program of research from which the present study has emerged focuses on young adult children’s retrospective perceptions of father involvement. Such a focus is adapted from Rohner and colleagues (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002; Rohner, 1986; Rohner & Britner, 2002; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001), who demonstrated that young adult children’s retrospective perspectives on paternal acceptance–rejection are uniquely associated with these individuals’ psychological and behavioral adjustment. The essence of this approach holds that what is impor-

tant to the child in the long run and what impacts most heavily on her or his current and future behavior are the parent’s long-term “residue” encapsulated within the child’s retrospective perceptions of that parent. Thus, if an adult child perceived that her father was highly involved in her life, then that father’s impact on his child is a consequence of this perception of high involvement, independent of the veridicality of that perception. This theoretical position argues that to best capture the overall long-term impact of father involvement it is most effective to ask young adults to report on the *totality* of the father’s involvement in the individual’s childhood and adolescence.

Goals and Hypotheses for the Present Study

The primary goal of the present study was to examine the degree to which young adult children from intact families perceive their fathers as having played primarily instrumental versus nurturant and expressive roles. We focused primarily on intact families because our objective was to revisit Parsons and Bales’ (1955) formulation, which was based on intact families. Secondly, we also examined the possible moderating roles of ethnicity, family form (intact vs. divorced), and gender.

Given recent sociological observations that the father’s role has expanded to include expressive as well as instrumental functions (Amato, 1998; Marsiglio et al., 2000), we hypothesized that fathers would have some involvement in the expressive dimensions. However, given the continuing division of labor in intact families (Parke, 2002), we hypothesized that instrumental functions would be endorsed more highly than would expressive functions. We anticipated that the most highly endorsed fathering functions would be those that have been most traditionally assigned to fathers (cf. Andrews et al., 2004; Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001)—providing income, protecting, discipline, moral/ethical development, and encouraging responsibility—and therefore that the thesis advanced by Parsons and Bales (1955) would continue to be supported in intact families.

A secondary goal was to examine the extent to which the difference between young adults’ retrospective ratings of expressive and instrumental fathering, along with the extent to which

fathers are perceived to have engaged in specific parenting functions, is moderated by ethnicity, family form, and gender. Given the relative dearth of research on variations in fathering functions across ethnicity, family form, or child gender, we did not advance specific hypotheses concerning the extent to which these variables would moderate either (a) the relative endorsement of instrumental versus expressive dimensions or fathering or (b) the predominance of specific fathering functions over others.

A number of studies have indicated that the use of pan-ethnic groups (e.g., Black and Hispanic) is misleading for a variety of economic, historical, and cultural reasons (e.g., Bryant, 2003; Umaña-Taylor, Diversi, & Fine, 2002; Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2001). As we have shown in our prior work (Schwartz & Finley, 2005), important differences may emerge among subgroups within pan-ethnic groups such as non-Hispanic Blacks and Hispanics. Therefore, in the present study we use the finest grained ethnic groups for which we had adequate sample size. It may be important to examine African Americans and Caribbean Islanders separately because (a) most Caribbean Islanders are first- or second-generation immigrants and (b) African Americans may be affected by residual effects of slavery and indentured servitude (cf. Wilson, 2002). In Miami, the Hispanic population is roughly half Cuban and half non-Cuban (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Cubans represent the dominant Hispanic group (Stepick & Stepick, 2002), although those who arrived earlier (and have U.S.-born young adult children) tend to have greater political and economic resources than those who arrived later. We were unable to examine Asian subgroups separately because of the relatively small number of Asians in the sample. As a result, we used eight ethnic groups in the present study: non-Hispanic Whites, African Americans, Caribbean Islanders, U.S.-born Cubans, foreign-born Cubans, non-Cuban Hispanics, Asians, and mixed ethnicity.

Method

Participants

The sample for the present study was a subset of a sample from a larger study (Finley & Schwartz, 2004). The majority of analyses fo-

cused on those participants who identified themselves as being from intact families and who considered their biological father to have been the primary father figure in their lives. This group consisted of 1,492 young-adult university students (32% male and 68% female; mean age 20.4 years). They represent 63% of the larger sample. Participants from divorced families ($n = 497$) were also included in a subset of the analyses. Among the demographic variables for which we collected data, intact and divorced families differed significantly and nontrivially only on ethnicity, $\chi^2(7, N = 1,830) = 26.53, p < .001, \phi = .12$. African Americans (38%) and Caribbean Islanders (34%) were more likely and Asians (13%) were less likely than members of other ethnic groups to be from divorced families. Of the 364 participants not included in any of the present analyses, 206 (9% of the total sample) did not identify their biological father as the most important father figure in their lives, 98 (4%) did not specify their family form, and 60 (2.5%) indicated family forms (e.g., father deceased) other than intact or divorced.

The majority of the sample was gathered at a public university in Miami, a city comprised largely of ethnic minorities. The university has been designated as a Minority Postsecondary Institution by the U.S. Department of Education (with total minority enrollment exceeding 70%). In terms of ethnicity, the sample was 26% non-Hispanic White, 24% non-Cuban Hispanic, 21% U.S.-born Cuban, 8% Caribbean Islander, 7% foreign-born Cuban, 7% Asian, 4% mixed ethnicity, and 3% African American. One hundred ten participants did not provide sufficient data (e.g., nativity or father's birthplace) to be categorized into one of the eight ethnic groups included in the present study. These 110 participants were included in all analyses except those focusing on ethnicity.

The majority of participants (65%) were U.S.-born, whereas the majority of fathers (76%) were born abroad. All university grade levels were represented: 46% freshmen, 18% sophomores, 16% juniors, 14% seniors, and 6% graduate/special students. Participants were recruited from classes in which the instructor permitted the administration of the instruments in class. Some instructors provided extra credit to participating students. Classes in a number of academic disciplines were surveyed, including

psychology, family studies, communications, and first-year English.

The majority of fathers (86%) had graduated from high school, and 45% were college graduates. Of those participants who reported annual family income, 15% reported less than \$30,000, 34% reported between \$30,000 and \$50,000, 35% reported between \$50,000 and \$100,000, and 13% reported more than \$100,000.

Measures

Demographics. Data were gathered on demographic indices commonly assessed in family research (Amato & Keith, 1991), including age, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and father's education, as well as other demographics appropriate for a minority college sample (nativity and year in school).

Father Involvement. Participants were asked to complete the Father Involvement Scale (Finley & Schwartz, 2004) regarding their biological fathers. The Father Involvement Scale lists 20 fathering functions selected from the review and critique by Hawkins and Palkovitz (1999). For each fathering function listed, participants are asked to indicate (a) how involved, on a scale of 1 (*not at all involved*) to 5 (*very involved*), their fathers were in their lives during their childhood and adolescence and (b) how involved they wanted their fathers to have been, relative to the level of involvement reported, on a scale of 1 (*desired much less involvement*) to 5 (*desired much more involvement*), with 3 being *just right*. A sample item from this scale reads, "_____ developing competence _____," for which the participant is instructed to indicate reported involvement on the left side and desired involvement on the right. Because the present study focused on reported fathering, desired fathering was not analyzed for the present report.

Factor analyses of the reported involvement items from the Father Involvement Scale in the larger sample yielded two reported involvement subscales (Finley & Schwartz, 2004). These included expressive involvement (caregiving, companionship, sharing activities, emotional development, social development, spiritual development, physical development, and leisure; $\alpha = .91$) and instrumental involvement (discipline, protecting, providing income, monitoring schoolwork, moral/ethical development, devel-

oping responsibility, career development, and developing independence; $\alpha = .85$). Items patterning strongly on both the expressive and instrumental factors (intellectual development, developing competence, mentoring, and giving advice; $\alpha = .86$) were assigned to a mentoring/advising involvement subscale. This third subscale therefore represents the conceptual and empirical overlap between the expressive and instrumental dimensions of fathering. To yield the cleanest comparison between instrumental and expressive fathering, however, only the corresponding subscales (representing the items patterning highly only on one of the two dimensions under investigation) were included in the present analyses.

Procedure

Before conducting the study, we obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board at Florida International University. Participants completed the Father Involvement Scale and the demographic form in class. Participants were asked to think of the father or father figure who had the most impact on their lives and to characterize the totality of that person's involvement in the participant's childhood and adolescence. Participants were asked to write their responses directly onto the questionnaire sheets. The administration time for the entire assessment ranged from 10 to 20 minutes. All data were double entered to ensure accuracy. Data were collected between June 1998 and February 2000.

Results

Plan of Analysis

Analyses for the present study were conducted in five steps. First, we tested for differences in endorsement of the overall fathering *dimensions*. This involved comparing mean instrumental and expressive fathering scores for participants from intact families to ascertain the presence and directionality of differences between instrumental and expressive fathering ratings. Second, we conducted more fine-grained analyses comparing fathering reports among the 16 specific fathering *functions* (e.g., caregiving, companionship, and discipline). This step allowed us to further explore how patterns

of differences in the overall fathering dimensions might look in terms of the individual fathering functions. For example, a finding that instrumental fathering scores are higher than expressive fathering scores might be bolstered by a finding that the majority of the most highly endorsed fathering functions are in the instrumental dimension.

Third, given the ethnic diversity of our sample, we examined the extent to which ethnicity might moderate the patterns of differences observed in the first set of analyses. These analyses permitted us to explore whether the patterns of differences among fathering dimensions and functions are generalizable across ethnic groups or vary from one group to another. Fourth, we included participants from divorced families in a subanalysis to examine the extent to which the patterns of differences observed between fathering dimensions and among fathering functions might vary between intact and divorced families. Such an analysis provides information as to whether the components of the father's role are characterized similarly by children of intact and divorced families or whether these characterizations are affected by family form. Finally, we examined the moderating effects of gender in both intact and divorced families to ascertain whether the patterns of differences observed are consistent across or vary by gender.

Comparisons in Intact Families

We first compared expressive and instrumental fathering in the sample of intact families (i.e., collapsing across ethnicity, family form, and gender). This analysis yielded a highly significant and strong effect, Wilks' $\lambda = .55$, $F(1, 1481) = 1233.81$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .45$. Instrumental fathering scores ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 2.06$) were higher than were expressive fathering scores ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 2.64$), where possible scores range from 1 to 5.

Differences Among Fathering Functions. A repeated measures analysis of variance indicated the presence of significant differences in endorsement levels among the fathering functions, Wilks' $\lambda = .26$, $F(15, 1447) = 274.52$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .74$. We then examined the individual fathering functions to identify those that may have carried the overall effect (see

Figure 1). As can be seen from the figure, seven of the eight fathering functions for which the highest involvement ratings were reported were in the instrumental category, whereas seven of the eight reported fathering functions for which the lowest involvement ratings were reported were in the expressive category. To identify which fathering functions young adults' reports of paternal involvement may have been significantly and meaningfully differently from one another, we conducted pairwise t tests between each pair of functions with adjacent mean involvement ratings. Four pairs of adjacent functions differed significantly and meaningfully from one another, suggesting the presence of four cutpoints in the distribution of reported fathering scores across functions: providing income versus protecting, $t(1485) = 9.15$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .05$; moral/ethical development versus caregiving, $t(1485) = 9.06$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .05$; career development versus companionship, $t(1486) = 6.29$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .03$; and physical development versus spiritual development, $t(1485) = 4.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .02$. The first cutpoint appears to separate the most primary fathering function (providing income) from the other four most traditional fathering functions (protecting, discipline, moral/ethical development, and encouraging responsibility). The second cutpoint appears to separate these five traditional functions from the remaining instrumental functions (i.e., encouraging independence, career development, and involvement in school) and from caregiving. The third cutpoint appears to separate the instrumental functions from the expressive functions, and the fourth cutpoint appears to set off the least highly endorsed fathering function (encouraging spiritual development) from the remaining expressive functions.

It is important to note that, although expressive fathering functions were generally endorsed to a lesser degree than were instrumental fathering functions, all of the expressive functions received ratings between 3 (*sometimes involved*) and 4 (*often involved*). Therefore, the young adults in intact families did perceive their fathers as having been expressively involved in their lives, at a minimum, at the *sometimes involved* level.

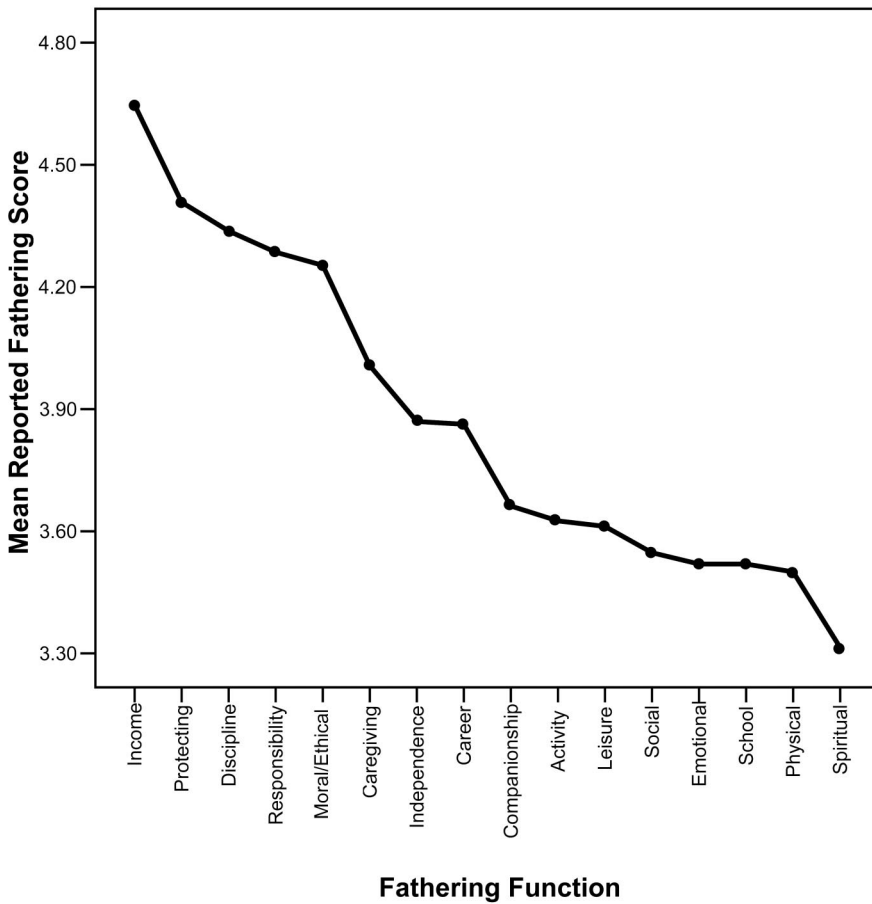


Figure 1. Father involvement by fathering function

Examining the Moderating Role of Ethnicity

Our next step was to reconduct both sets of analyses across ethnicity to ascertain the extent to which the findings were consistent or discrepant across ethnic groups. To examine the extent to which the overall difference between reported expressive and instrumental fathering differed by ethnicity, we conducted a 2 (Fathering Dimension) \times 8 (Ethnicity) mixed analysis of variance (ANOVA). This analysis yielded a significant main effect of fathering dimension, $F(1, 1356) = 454.91, p < .001, \eta^2 = .25$, and a significant Fathering Dimension \times Ethnicity interaction, $F(7, 1356) = 4.25, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02$. Because the interaction was fairly weak, we split the sample by ethnicity to examine whether

the effect of fathering dimension on father ratings was indeed qualified by ethnicity. The results suggested that, although instrumental fathering ratings were higher than expressive fathering ratings for all ethnic groups, ethnicity moderated the magnitude of the discrepancy between young adults' ratings of expressive and instrumental fathering (see Table 1). Differences between expressive and instrumental fathering were highest in Asians and Caribbean Islanders and lowest in African Americans and non-Hispanic Whites.

To examine the extent to which the ordering or magnitude of differences among fathering functions was moderated by ethnicity, we conducted a 16 (Fathering Function) \times 8 (Ethnicity) mixed ANOVA. This analysis yielded a

Table 1
Expressive and Instrumental Fathering Ratings, Separately by Ethnicity

Ethnic group	Expressive (<i>M</i> , <i>SD</i>)	Instrumental (<i>M</i> , <i>SD</i>)	<i>F</i> ratio	η^2
Asian	3.39 (0.99)	4.09 (0.81)	156.47***	.57
Caribbean Islander	3.30 (1.12)	4.02 (0.95)	116.14***	.55
Mixed ethnicity	3.54 (0.98)	4.12 (0.75)	49.87***	.51
Non-Cuban Hispanic	3.62 (0.89)	4.21 (0.66)	287.93***	.47
U.S.-born Cuban	3.70 (0.86)	4.22 (0.64)	231.28***	.44
Foreign-born Cuban	3.75 (0.95)	4.26 (0.72)	80.49***	.44
Non-Hispanic White	3.59 (0.94)	4.07 (0.75)	228.69***	.39
African American	3.69 (1.13)	4.10 (1.01)	10.48**	.24

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

main effect of Fathering Function, Wilks' $\lambda = .41$, $F(15, 1333) = 130.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .59$, and a Fathering Function \times Ethnicity interaction, Wilks' $\lambda = .84$, $F(105, 8542) = 2.19$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .02$. Again, because the interaction was fairly weak, we reconducted the analysis of fathering function ratings, this time separately by ethnic group. Although some discrepancies emerged, the overall pattern of ratings across fathering functions was remarkably consistent among ethnic groups. Effect sizes (η^2) within each ethnic group ranged from .65 for non-Hispanic Whites to .80 for Asians. This finding suggests the robustness across ethnic groups of the pattern of differences among fathering functions, and it provides evidence for cross-ethnic internal replication and consistency of the patterns observed in the sample of intact families.

Examining the Moderating Role of Family Form

To examine the moderating role of family form, we conducted a subanalysis examining participants from divorced as well as intact families. We also tested for interactions involving family form and ethnicity. To examine differences in expressive versus instrumental fathering scores, we conducted a 2 (Fathering Dimension) \times 2 (Family Form) \times 8 (Ethnicity) mixed ANOVA. Because the three-way interaction term was not statistically significant, $F(105, 27015) = 0.97$, $p = .56$, $\eta^2 < .01$, we reconducted the analysis as a 2 (Fathering Dimension) \times 2 (Family Form) mixed ANOVA. The main effect of family form was highly significant, $F(1, 1973) = 487.18$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .20$, with participants from intact families rating

their fathers higher on all of the fathering functions. The Fathering Function \times Family Form interaction was statistically significant and was associated with a nontrivial effect size, $F(15, 1959) = 8.40$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$, suggesting that the patterns of differences among fathering function ratings varied somewhat by family form. We then plotted the involvement ratings by fathering function separately by family form (see Figure 2). Three conclusions can be drawn from this figure. First, the effect size for the comparison across fathering functions was smaller in divorced families ($\eta^2 = .53$) than in intact families ($\eta^2 = .74$). Second, the ratings do not appear to descend in the same order for divorced families as for intact families. When the fathering functions are ordered in descending order of ratings for intact families, some "peaks and valleys" (as shown in Figure 2) are evident for divorced families. As a result, the magnitude of mean differences between intact and divorced families varied considerably across the fathering functions (η^2 values ranged from .08 to .23; see Table 2). Third, when the fathering functions are arranged in descending order of ratings for participants from divorced families (not shown), the curve is more gradual for divorced families and contains only one cutpoint, representing a statistically significant and nontrivial difference between school and spiritual involvement, $t(493) = 4.56$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$.

Examining the Moderating Effect of Gender

To examine the moderating effect of gender, we conducted the two primary analyses (differ-

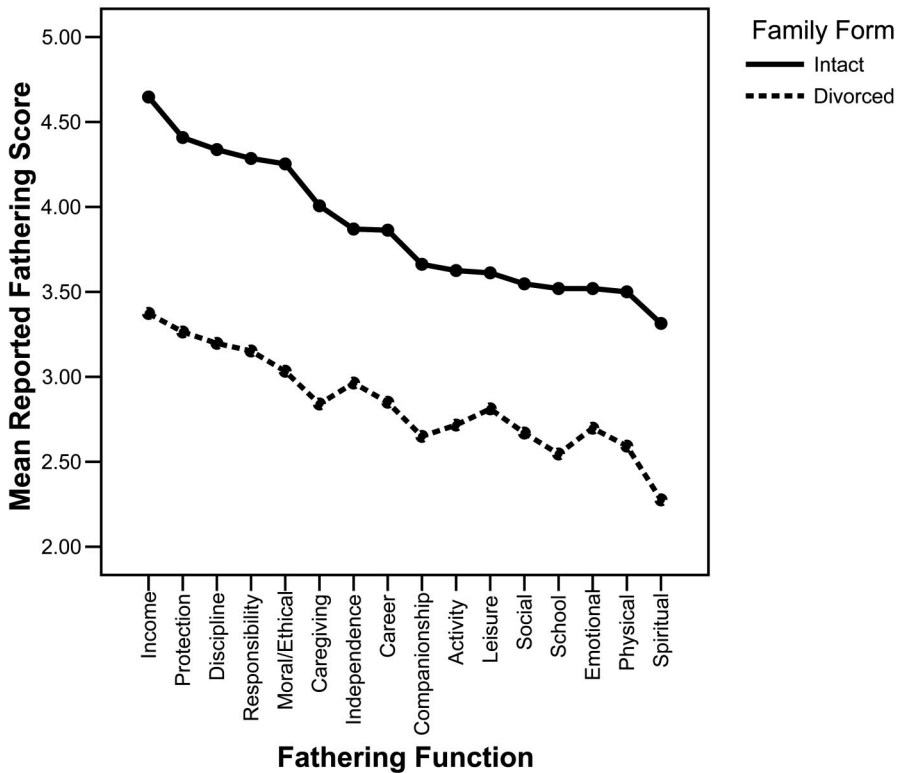


Figure 2. Father involvement by Fathering Function × Family Form.

ences in ratings by fathering dimension and by individual fathering function) with gender included as an additional independent variable. Because the sample size within some of the ethnic groups was too small to examine Gender × Ethnicity × Family Form interactions, we conducted each of the primary analyses by Gender × Ethnicity and by Gender × Family Form.

In the comparison of expressive versus instrumental fathering ratings, a Fathering Dimension × Gender × Ethnicity mixed ANOVA yielded a nonsignificant and trivial main effect of gender, $F(1, 1800) = 2.87, p = .09, \eta^2 < .01$. Both the three-way interaction, $F(7, 1800) = 0.92, p = .49, \eta^2 < .01$, and the Fathering Dimension × Gender interaction, $F(7, 1800) = 0.01, p = .97, \eta^2 < .001$, were statistically nonsignificant and associated with trivial effect sizes. When we conducted a Fathering Dimension × Gender × Family Form mixed ANOVA, the three-way interaction was not statistically significant and was associated

with a trivial effect size, $F(1, 1970) = 0.01, p = .94, \eta^2 < .001$.

In the comparisons among the individual fathering functions, a Fathering Function × Gender × Ethnicity mixed ANOVA yielded a nonsignificant three-way interaction, $F(105, 27000) = 0.94, p = .65, \eta^2 < .001$. The Fathering Function × Gender interaction was statistically significant but was associated with an effect size that was essentially zero, $F(15, 27000) = 3.79, p < .001, \eta^2 = .002$. When we conducted a Fathering Dimension × Gender × Family Form mixed ANOVA, the three-way interaction was statistically nonsignificant and trivial, $F(15, 29550) = 0.89, p = .58, \eta^2 < .001$. As a result, we concluded that gender did not play a substantive role in the present results.

Discussion

Given Parsons and Bales' (1955) classic model of the division of paternal and maternal

Table 2
Differences in Father Involvement Ratings by Family Form

Fathering function	Intact (<i>M, SD</i>)	Divorced (<i>M, SD</i>)	<i>F</i> ratio	η^2
Income	4.65 (0.76)	3.37 (1.49)	603.14***	.23
Moral/ethical	4.25 (0.97)	3.03 (1.45)	445.00***	.18
Discipline	4.34 (0.97)	3.20 (1.49)	380.57***	.16
Protecting	4.41 (0.98)	3.26 (1.50)	379.76***	.16
Responsibility	4.29 (1.00)	3.15 (1.49)	367.35***	.16
Caregiving	4.01 (1.16)	2.84 (1.44)	331.09***	.14
Companionship	3.66 (1.20)	2.65 (1.44)	239.08***	.11
Career	3.86 (1.21)	2.85 (1.52)	227.02***	.10
Spiritual	3.31 (1.36)	2.28 (1.30)	220.16***	.10
Activity	3.63 (1.15)	2.72 (1.36)	211.58***	.10
School	3.52 (1.28)	2.55 (1.43)	202.19***	.09
Social	3.55 (1.16)	2.67 (1.31)	199.16***	.09
Physical	3.50 (1.21)	2.59 (1.33)	197.98***	.09
Independence	3.87 (1.19)	2.96 (1.50)	188.21***	.09
Emotional	3.52 (1.13)	2.70 (1.29)	182.85***	.09
Leisure	3.61 (1.16)	2.81 (1.38)	159.18***	.08

*** $p < .001$.

labor in intact families published a half century ago, the primary focus of the present analysis was to examine whether the father's role in contemporary intact families continues to be primarily instrumental or has expanded to include expressive functions. Such an examination is important in light of the massive social changes in family forms caused by the women's movement and the sexual revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s (Giele & Holst, 2004). These social role changes have placed massive role demands on fathers to expand their involvement in children's lives to include nurturance and expressive involvement as well as traditional instrumental functions (Amato, 1998; Marsiglio et al., 2000; Palkovitz, 1997). Thus, the critical question posed in the present study is: Have these social changes succeeded, at least in the retrospective eyes of young adult children from intact families, and have fathers broken from the Parsons and Bales mold and begun to perform expressive as well as instrumental roles? Given that Parsons and Bales focused their analysis on intact families, our core focus was on the characterization of the fathering role in participants from intact families. A secondary goal of the present study was to ascertain the extent to which ethnicity, family form, and adult child gender moderated (a) the differences between young adults' reports of instrumental versus expressive father involvement and (b) the predominance of instrumental over expressive fathering functions.

Summary of Findings

Four noteworthy findings have emerged from the present study. First, despite the widespread social changes that have characterized the past several decades, young adult children from both intact and divorced families reported that the highest levels of father involvement were in instrumental functions. The finding that, in both family forms, seven of the eight most heavily endorsed fathering functions were in the instrumental dimension further demonstrates the predominance of instrumental over expressive fathering. Although the magnitude of the differences among the ratings assigned to the various fathering functions was smaller in divorced families than intact families, the patterns were largely consistent across family form. Second, ethnicity moderated only the magnitude of the difference between the expressive and instrumental fathering mean scores. Effect sizes for the divergence between instrumental and expressive involvement ranged from .24 (African Americans) to .57 (Asians). Third, no gender differences emerged in this pattern of findings. The fact that the patterns of differences replicated across eight ethnic groups and across gender, both at the subscale level and in examining individual fathering functions, provides evidence for cross-gender and cross-ethnic consistency and provides two critical internal replications. Third, in intact families, fathers from all

ethnic groups were, on average, characterized as being at least “sometimes involved” in expressive functions. This suggests that at least to some degree, fathers in intact families are involving themselves expressively with their children. However, the mean levels of instrumental involvement reported, across ethnic groups, were all above *usually involved*, suggesting extremely high levels of instrumental involvement. Fourth, in divorced families, absolute levels of both instrumental and expressive fathering were considerably lower (cf. Schwartz & Finley, 2005). On average, divorced fathers were characterized as *sometimes involved* instrumentally and as between *rarely involved* and *sometimes involved* expressively. However, instrumental fathering ratings were higher than expressive fathering ratings for young adults from both family forms.

As speculated by Parsons and Bales (1955) and more recently by Andrews et al. (2004) and Christiansen and Palkovitz (2001), the predominance of instrumental involvement was probably carried by five of the most traditional fathering functions—providing income, protection, discipline, moral/ethical development, and encouraging responsibility. Not surprisingly, these five fathering functions were endorsed most highly by young adults from both intact and divorced families in the present study. Intriguingly, these five fathering functions also were associated with the largest discrepancies in mean ratings between intact and divorced families, suggesting that the five most traditional fathering functions are also the ones that are most compromised by divorce. Of the eight fathering functions associated with the highest involvement ratings, caregiving was the only one classified into the expressive dimension. This finding agrees with the results of Andrews et al. (2004), who found caregiving to be the only expressive function that has made its way into popular conceptions of the fathering role.

Comparing the Present Results With Parsons and Bales’ Formulation

Because we lack comparative data from a half-century ago, we are unable to quantitatively examine the extent to which there have been historical changes either in absolute levels of perceived expressive paternal involvement or in the magnitude of the gap between instrumen-

tal and expressive paternal involvement. We can consider only Parsons and Bales’ (1955) theoretical work. What can be concluded from such a comparison, however, is that Parsons and Bales’ characterization of the fathering role as primarily instrumental remains substantially accurate a half century after their original writing, even for nonresident fathers. The fathering role appears to remain weighted in favor of traditional functions such as providing income, discipline, developing responsibility, encouraging moral/ethical development, and protection. In sum, although young adult children from intact families perceived their fathers as being at least *somewhat* expressively involved, a clear gap remains between fathers’ participation in instrumental versus expressive roles a half century after Parsons and Bales’ classic work and despite many powerful and multifaceted attempts to engender greater nurturance and expressive involvement on the part of fathers. The characterization of divorced fathers as being *rarely involved* in expressive functions is also a cause for concern.

Limitations

The present results must be considered in light of several limitations. First, and most critically, we do not have comparable data from the 1950s to make a direct comparison between fathering roles at that time and at the beginning of the 21st century. Second, because we collected data only on fathers and not on mothers, we do not know how the young adults in the present sample would have rated their mothers in terms of expressive and instrumental involvement. Paternal involvement is intertwined with both maternal involvement and workforce participation (Parke, 2002), along with other family systems variables such as family cohesion and conflict (Whiteside & Becker, 2000). Therefore, it is important to gather and analyze data on the entire family system. In particular, we did not gather data on parents’ work schedules or division of child rearing tasks. Third, more than two thirds of the present sample was female. Although gender did not appear to contribute statistically to our results, it is not known whether similar results would have emerged with a more gender-balanced sample. Fourth, and consistent with our child-centered approach, we gathered data only from the young-

adult child's perspective. It is not known whether fathers would have characterized themselves as fulfilling primarily instrumental roles or whether they would have portrayed themselves as more nurturant.

Suggestions for Future Research

A number of suggestions for future research follow from the present study, its limitations, and its results. First, it is not known whether the structures of instrumental and expressive fathering are similar to or different from the structures of instrumental and expressive mothering. It has been suggested (Pruett, 1995) that fathers and mothers play different roles in the family system. To the extent that this is the case, the structures of paternal and maternal involvement would be expected to differ from one another. Alternatively, it is possible that the set of fathering functions that we extracted from Hawkins and Palkovitz (1999) are actually *parenting* functions that apply similarly to both mothers and fathers. Collecting data on both mothers and fathers, using a single set of parenting functions, would allow for empirical examination of the extent to which the structures of mothering and fathering are similar to or distinct from one another. Second, mothering and fathering may both be affected by more general processes in the family system, such as cohesion and conflict (Whiteside & Becker, 2000). The precise effects of family level processes on specific aspects of mother and father involvement are in need of study. We currently are gathering such data. Third, and relatedly, the interplay between maternal and paternal involvement warrants study. It is not known, for example, whether high levels of maternal involvement in a given area of a child's life might preclude the father from being involved in that area or might mutually enhance both maternal and paternal involvement. Fourth, although the present results appeared to be consistent across ethnicity, it is not known whether the same pattern of findings would have emerged in a sample with a greater representation of non-Hispanic Whites and native-born fathers. Future researchers should compare samples varying in ethnic composition to ascertain the extent to which the ethnic makeup of the sample, as well as the representation of immigrants from "traditional" groups, might affect the results.

In conclusion, and despite these limitations, the present results clearly shed light on the ways in which the fathering role has and has not changed in the last 50 years. Strikingly, and strongly consistent with the original formulation of Parsons and Bales (1955), when asked to retrospectively report on their fathers' involvement—across ethnic groups, family forms, and genders—young adults continue to characterize their fathers as having been more instrumentally than expressively involved. Although the future of the fathering role remains uncharted, at a minimum the present study has provided a database for future comparisons. Remaining to be seen is whether the fathering role will expand to include greater nurturance and expressiveness or will remain predominantly instrumental.

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