The Effect of Task and Maternal Verbosity on Compliance in Toddlers

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The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between compliance in toddlers and maternal verbosity as well as the type of task. Mothers and their toddlers completed a warm-up task, a proactive toy clean-up task, and a prohibitive forbidden objects task. Mothers were assigned to one of two verbosity conditions (high versus low) and to one of two nurturance conditions (high versus low) where the rates of verbosity and nurturance were experimentally manipulated. It was hypothesized that toddlers would demonstrate higher noncompliance when given high levels of verbosity than toddlers given low levels of verbosity. It was expected that toddlers would demonstrate higher noncompliance when given low levels of nurturance than toddlers given high levels of nurturance. It was also expected that toddlers would demonstrate more noncompliance in the prohibitive task than they would in the proactive task. Results indicated that the rates of child compliance were related to the level of maternal verbosity with greater noncompliance being exhibited by children who received high levels of verbosity than those who received low levels of verbosity. Child compliance rates were also related to the type of task, with greater noncompliance exhibited in the proactive task versus the prohibitive task. Excessive detail about what children should or should not do appears to be related to child behavior and supports Patterson’s premise of ‘nattering’. Child behavior also was related to the type of task in which the child was engaged. These findings have direct implications for individuals working with or raising very young children. Copyright © 2009 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: parenting; child behavior; verbosity

Families are characterized by complex interactions and dynamics due to the number of subsystems between the parents, siblings, as well as the parent and child (Fine 1992; Stafford & Bayer, 1993; Walsh, 1982). From a systems

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perspective, the relationships within the family influence the family functioning as a whole and also influence the development of individuals within the subsystem. This is especially true for very young children, since the quality of the relationship and interactions with parents influence social and behavioral development (Greenberg & Speltz, 1998; Martin, 1981; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Shaw & Bell, 1993). Poor communication and poor parenting can negatively influence the parent–child subsystem placing children at risk for developing behavioral problems. Persistent behavioral problems during the toddler years may lead to the development of disruptive behavior problems such as Oppositional Defiant Disorder or Conduct Disorder, which account for the majority of child referrals to mental health clinics. Oppositional and non-compliant behaviors present significant challenges to parents, which may adversely affect the parent–child relationship, increase parental stress, and increase the risk of child maltreatment. Therefore, early identification of maladaptive patterns is important and may provide information that enhances early parenting practices.

One maladaptive parenting practice especially relevant for young children involves poor communication in responding to misbehavior. Patterson (1982) identified one pattern he labeled ‘nattering’, in which mothers respond to low-level aversive child behaviors with significant and excessive verbalizations. The effect of nattering may escalate negative child behaviors, which may then result in a coercive response cycle between the parent and child. Scaramella and Leve (2004) have described a similar coercion model specific to early childhood that involves parent–child interactions characterized by harsh, overreactive parenting. This involves parental displays of overly negative, intense emotionality, including increased anger, irritation, and increased verbosity, which increase the risk for problem behaviors.

Coercive interaction cycles can be maintained and strengthened through mutual reinforcement (Keenan & Shaw, 1995; Patterson, 1982). Parent behavior inadvertently reinforces difficult child behavior, which in turn increases the coercive parental behavior. Over time, the child learns to act out in order to get the parent’s attention, and in return the parent escalates (more verbosity) in response to negative behavior. This cycle has been found in families where physical abuse is present, but also in families with children with significant behavioral problems and in families where stress levels are high. This cycle is related to increases in children’s externalizing behavioral problems (Eisenberg, Fabes, Nyman, Bernzweig, & Pinuelas, 1994; O’Leary, Smith-Slep, & Reid, 1999; Shaw, Keenan, & Vondra, 1994), noncompliance (Kochanska, Tjebkes, & Forman, 1998), and internalizing problems (Shaw, Keenan, Vondra, Delliquadri, & Giovannelli, 1997).

These coercive cycles likely develop when children are very young. One of the most difficult times for parents is children’s transition from infancy to toddlerhood (e.g. 2–3 years) (Scaramella & Leve, 2004). Children begin to actively explore their environment and learn that their behaviors elicit predictable responses from their parents. This is also when children increase their level of undirected anger (Shaw & Bell, 1993) and when children’s willful noncompliance increases (Kochanshka, 1995). Non-compliant behaviors are also due to developmental hurdles such as gaining independence (Forehand & Wierson, 1993). Rates of noncompliance for toddlers range from once every 8 min in a supermarket setting (Holden, 1983) to once every 3–9 minutes in the home (Lytton & Zwirner, 1975; Minton, Kagan, & Levine, 1971). This provides frequent opportunities for coercive cycles of parent and child behavior.
The difficulties parents of toddlers face are exacerbated by other factors as well. The early years are marked by the acquisition of both expressive and receptive language skills (Ainsfeld, 1984). However, toddlers have short attention spans that limit their receptive capacity. Parents may be especially likely to give excessive verbalizations or engage in nattering when using reasoning as a primary strategy. Reasoning is often recommended in order to enhance children’s internalization of rules and socialization norms. However, lengthy explanations may inadvertently promote excessive verbalizations beyond the child’s capacity, and thus may not be effective in enhancing compliance in toddlers.

Lengthy verbalizations, especially when following misbehavior, may actually increase child noncompliance. Arnold, O’Leary, Wolff, and Acker (1993) found an association between overly lax, reactive, and verbose parents and noncompliance in children. Pfiffner and O’Leary (1989) also found that gentle, delayed, long reprimands were related to increased child noncompliance. This would suggest that high verbosity would negatively influence child compliance. However, this might not always be true.

One factor that may influence the effect of verbosity on children’s behavior is the context or situation in which it occurs. In general, research has found that toddlers are more non-compliant in proactive situations when they are told to ‘do’ something than they are in prohibitive situations when they are told to ‘don’t’ do something (Kochanska & Aksan, 1995; Kochanska et al., 1998). However, the difficulty of the proactive situation may be lessened depending on the amount of verbosity. In these situations, verbosity may serve to engage and guide toddlers in the task, resulting in increased compliance. Currently, no research has examined the effect of verbosity on child compliance in both proactive and prohibitive situations.

The study was designed to examine the effect of verbosity and type of task on toddlers’ compliance. Nurturance was also included in the study because it has been found to influence children’s behavior, especially when used with other parenting strategies enhancing parenting (Lytton & Zwirner, 1975; Pfiffner & O’Leary, 1989).

A main effect of verbosity was hypothesized. More specifically, it was expected that toddlers would demonstrate higher noncompliance when given high levels of verbosity than when given low levels of verbosity. A main effect of nurturance was also hypothesized. It was expected that toddlers would demonstrate higher noncompliance when given low levels of nurturance than when given high levels of nurturance. A main effect of type of task was hypothesized. More specifically, it was expected that toddlers would demonstrate more noncompliance in the prohibitive task than they would in the proactive task. Lastly, it was expected that child compliance would vary as a function of both verbosity and task type.

METHOD

Participants

Forty mothers and their children, aged 24–42 months, participated in the study. Data from one mother were dropped because the mother did not complete the entire protocol. This resulted in a final sample of 39 mothers and their children. Participants were recruited from fliers at day-care centers.
and from newspaper advertisements. Twenty-three male and 16 female children with a mean age of 38.87 months (S.D. = 2.22) participated. Mothers' mean age was 31.05 years (S.D. = 6.00). The majority of participants were Caucasian (87.20%). Mean children’s externalizing T-scores on the Child Behavior Checklist 2/3 (CBCL/2–3) were 50.55 (range = 30–77, S.D. = 8.36). Hollingshead Indices (Hollingshead, 1965) were calculated to determine the SES level of the participants. The average score was 43.19. Thus, the majority of participants were of upper middle class. The majority (84.60%) were married. All mothers received $5.00 for participation, while their child received a small toy.

Procedure

Mothers and their children came into the laboratory for a 1 h visit. After obtaining informed consent, the researcher demonstrated the use of the bug-in-the-ear device, which is a wireless transmitter worn in the mothers’ ear, that allowed the experimenter to deliver instruction to the mothers, ensuring accurate manipulation of mothers’ behavior with respect to verbosity and nurturance. Participants completed a warm-up task in which the mother and child played together. The study occurred in a 17' by 8' room with chairs, low tables, toys, and a telephone. Toys used for the free play phase included plastic blocks, plastic cars, and plastic figures.

Next, participants completed both a proactive task and a forbidden objects task. The order of these tasks was counterbalanced across participants in order to control for order effects. Mothers were cued in all tasks to deliver specific statements to their children. During the proactive task, mothers told their children to pick up the toys (blocks, cars, and figures) and place them in a bin (e.g. ‘Pick up the toys’), while sitting in a chair and completing a series of questionnaires. During the forbidden objects task, mothers told their children to play with toys (blocks, cars, figures) and were told not to touch the forbidden objects (cookies, typewriter, mobile, wind chime, globe, and pencil caddy) located on the tables within the children’s reach (e.g. ‘Don’t touch the typewriter’).

Participants were assigned to one of two verbosity conditions (high versus low) and to one of two nurturance conditions (high versus low). The length and frequency of directives varied in each verbosity condition. The length and frequency of praise and interaction statements varied in each nurturance condition. See Figure 1 for a summary of these manipulations. Mother–child pairs were randomly assigned to each condition, resulting in 10, 10, 10, and 9 mother–child pairs in each condition. Data from previous studies (Blundell, 1997; Pfiffner & O’Leary, 1989) and pilot data collected in the lab were used to determine the levels for each. High verbosity was characterized by longer directive statements of 11 or more words (e.g. ‘Don’t touch those goodies Dillon because I told you not to when we came in’) delivered on average once per minute. Low verbosity was characterized by shorter directive statements of seven or fewer words (e.g. ‘Don’t touch that Dillon’) delivered on average once per 2 min. High nurturance was characterized by more frequent (average once per minute) and longer praise and interaction statements (11 or more words) (e.g. ‘Good job picking up the toys! Keep up the good work’) Low nurturance was characterized by less frequent (average once per 2 min) and shorter praise and interaction statements (seven or fewer words)
Data from the observation were tabulated for percent of occurrence.

**Materials**

**Demographic Questionnaire**

For descriptive purposes, mothers completed a demographics questionnaire that provided information about age, occupation, ethnic background, income, and characteristics of each family member.

**Child Behavior Checklist/2–3 (CBCL/2–3)**

The CBCL/2–3 (Achenbach, 1992) is a 100-item scale, using a three-point rating to assess emotional and behavior characteristic of children between the ages of two and three. A T-score for externalizing was calculated for each child to ensure that the children were not demonstrating behaviors in the clinical range. Achenbach (1992) reported that the CBCL/2–3 has both adequate test–retest reliability (average $r = 0.85$) and inter-parent agreement (average $r = 0.63$) and good evidence of convergence with other measures of problem behaviors and discriminant validity in distinguishing referred and non-referred children.

**Observational code**

Maternal and child behaviors were coded in continuous 10s intervals. Maternal behaviors included directives, praise, and interaction. Directives were coded for toys (DT), forbidden objects (DO), or leaving the designated area (DL). Praise statements (P) and interaction statements (I) were also included. Additional maternal behaviors included modeling (M) when the mother helped with or demonstrated picking up the toys or playing with the toys. Physical prompt (PP) was coded if the mother was...

Figure 1. Manipulation of independent variables. The order of the tasks* was counterbalanced.

(e.g. ‘Good job Monica! Keep working’). Data from the observation were tabulated for percent of occurrence.
required to use physical contact to bring the child back into the designated area or prevent the child from climbing on the furniture. Prompt (PT) was coded if the mother gave the child a verbal statement to direct or orient him or her.

Child behaviors coded were classified into compliance, noncompliance, solicitation for attention, and negative affect. Compliant behavior was coded when the child’s behavior was consistent with the particular task’s goal. During the proactive toy clean-up, compliance was coded when the child picked up the toys appropriately (PA). During the prohibitive forbidden object phase, compliance was coded when the child played appropriately with the toys (AP) instead of touching the forbidden objects. Non-compliant behavior was coded when the child’s behavior was inconsistent with the particular task’s goal. During the proactive toy clean-up, noncompliance was coded when the child played with the toys (TC) instead of picking up. During the prohibitive forbidden object task, noncompliance was coded when the child touched the forbidden objects (FO). During both the proactive task and the prohibitive task, noncompliance was also coded when the child left the designated area (LA). Other coded child behaviors included in both the proactive and prohibitive phases: solicitation for mother’s attention (SA) signified by a child’s attempt to gain the mother’s attention, and negative affect (NA) signified by verbal defying directives, whining, temper tantruming, or crying by the child. Both child and maternal behaviors were coded using partial interval codes in 10 s continuous intervals. Behaviors were tabulated for percent occurrence.

Pairs of undergraduate psychology students were trained on the observational codes for this study until they reached a criterion of 90% agreement on all coded behaviors. The observers were blind to the hypotheses and independently coded the videotaped interactions in 10 s intervals. Interrater reliability using kappa coefficients (Cohen, 1960) was calculated for each of the measured maternal and child behaviors for 100% of the observations. Average kappa values for the maternal behaviors ranged from 0.91 for prompt to 0.98 for praise. Average kappa values for the coded child behaviors ranged from 0.88 for solicitation of attention to 0.99 for picking up appropriately.

RESULTS

A 2 (high versus low verbosity) × 2 (high versus low nurturance) × 2 (toy clean-up versus forbidden objects task) mixed-design was utilized in which task was a within-subjects factor and verbosity and nurturance were between-subjects factors. In order to ensure that there were not pre-existing differences between groups, three separate analysis of variances (ANOVAs) were conducted for age of child, age of mother, and child CBCL/2–3 externalizing T-Score. All F’s were non-significant, indicating that experimental conditions did not differ in regard to the age of mother, the age of child, or in the severity of the child’s behavior. In addition, chi-square tests were conducted for the gender of child, ethnicity, family income, and marital status by experimental condition. The results indicated that all experimental conditions were comparable in demographic characteristics; thus, there were no confounds resulting from these variables.

Prior to the main analyses, manipulation checks were conducted in order to ensure that the experimental manipulation of verbosity and nurturance was implemented correctly. Results of a series of 2 (verbosity) × 2 (nurturance) × 2 (task) mixed-design ANOVAs revealed that the verbosity and nurturance factors
were implemented correctly. Rates of directives were significantly higher in the high verbosity condition than in the low verbosity condition \( (F(1, 35) = 11.31, p < 0.05) \). Rates of praise statements were significantly higher in the high nurturance condition compared with the low nurturance condition \( (F(1, 35) = 209.97, p < 0.05) \). Rates of interaction statements were significantly higher in the high nurturance condition compared with the low nurturance condition \( (F(1, 35) = 1241.32, p < 0.05) \). Other maternal behaviors (i.e. prompts, modeling, and physical prompts) did not vary across conditions or across task \( (F's \) were non-significant, \( p > 0.05) \).

Rates of child behavior are presented in Table 1. These data were used in the main analyses to test hypotheses. For the main analyses, separate 2 (verbosity) × 2 (nurturance) × 2 (task) mixed-design ANOVAs were conducted to examine the relationship to child behavior. Analyses first examined the rates of compliance across conditions. A main effect of verbosity was found for compliance \( (F(1, 35) = 7.80, p < 0.01, d = 0.78) \). Children receiving lower levels of verbosity engaged in more compliant behavior \( (M = 57.28, \text{S.D.} = 4.65) \) than children receiving higher levels of verbosity \( (M = 39.14, \text{S.D.} = 4.53) \). A main effect of task was also found for compliance \( (F(1, 35) = 25.77, p < 0.01) \) with higher rates in the prohibitive task \( (M = 62.54, \text{S.D.} = 3.56) \) compared with the proactive task \( (M = 33.88, \text{S.D.} = 4.94) \). No main effect of nurturance was found. No significant interaction effects were found between verbosity and nurturance, between verbosity and task, between nurturance and task, or between verbosity, nurturance, and task (Table 2).

In regard to child noncompliance, a significant main effect of task was found \( (F(1, 35) = 23.513, p < 0.01) \). Children exhibited lower rates of noncompliance during the prohibitive task \( (M = 18.85, \text{S.D.} = 2.67) \) compared with the proactive task \( (M = 45.41, \text{S.D.} = 4.91) \). No main effect of verbosity or nurturance was found. No significant interaction effects were found between verbosity and nurturance, between verbosity and task, between nurturance and task, or between verbosity, nurturance, and task.

In regard to solicitation for attention, a significant main effect of verbosity was found for solicitation for attention \( (F(1, 35) = 5.94, p < 0.05, d = 0.40) \). Children solicited mothers' attention at higher rates when they received higher levels of maternal verbosity \( (M = 33.12, \text{S.D.} = 2.98) \) compared with children who

Table 1. Mean rates (standard deviations) of child behaviors by task and condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low V/low N</th>
<th>High V/high N</th>
<th>High V/low N</th>
<th>Low V/high N</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proactive toy clean-up</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>47.53 (36.77)</td>
<td>27.21 (26.00)</td>
<td>18.91 (32.05)</td>
<td>41.88 (28.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TC</td>
<td>49.02 (27.63)</td>
<td>52.43 (28.08)</td>
<td>42.88 (38.28)</td>
<td>37.33 (26.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>4.81 (8.31)</td>
<td>11.16 (14.32)</td>
<td>12.68 (27.10)</td>
<td>10.23 (17.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>21.55 (10.38)</td>
<td>24.45 (10.86)</td>
<td>32.08 (23.65)</td>
<td>22.19 (13.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>11.30 (29.60)</td>
<td>5.83 (6.77)</td>
<td>12.72 (17.76)</td>
<td>5.99 (9.86)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prohibitive forbidden object</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td>65.55 (26.37)</td>
<td>52.17 (29.83)</td>
<td>58.27 (14.89)</td>
<td>74.16 (13.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FO</td>
<td>11.48 (12.97)</td>
<td>32.50 (21.81)</td>
<td>16.61 (16.32)</td>
<td>14.82 (13.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>6.30 (11.51)</td>
<td>1.83 (2.99)</td>
<td>5.17 (10.58)</td>
<td>1.16 (3.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>21.48 (12.37)</td>
<td>43.83 (20.15)</td>
<td>32.10 (22.76)</td>
<td>25.66 (12.55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1.30 (3.31)</td>
<td>17.66 (19.76)</td>
<td>6.22 (8.92)</td>
<td>6.00 (8.68)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. PA/AP = indicators of compliance and TC/FO = indicators of noncompliance.

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received lower levels of maternal verbosity \((M = 22.72, \text{S.D.} = 3.06)\). No main effect of task or nurturance was found for solicitation for attention. No significant interaction effects were found between verbosity and nurturance, between verbosity and task, between nurturance and task, or between verbosity, nurturance, and task.

In regard to children’s level of negative affect, no main effects of verbosity, nurturance, or type of task was found. However, a weak but significant task by nurturance interaction effect was found \((F (1, 35) = 5.16, \ p < 0.05)\). Children receiving lower levels of nurturance in the toy clean-up task demonstrated the highest rates of negative affect \((M = 12.00, \text{S.D.} = 4.09)\) compared with children in the other conditions. Significant interaction effects were not found for verbosity and nurturance, verbosity and task, or verbosity, nurturance, and task.

Descriptive analyses were conducted to assess the ecological validity of the laboratory observation. Results of the debriefing questionnaire indicated that mothers identified little to no difference between their behavior and their child’s behavior during the study with the majority of the mothers (87%) of the mothers reporting that the situation was very typical and realistic.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to examine verbosity and the type of task in relationship to children’s compliance levels. The present study found that verbosity was related to the level of compliance, as well as to how often children solicited their mother’s attention, regardless of type of task. This supports Patterson’s premise (Patterson, 1982) that excessive nattering or verbosity increases child misbehavior even with very young children without a history of significant behavioral problems. Parental response to the misbehavior, especially containing high levels of verbosity, may negatively reinforce these behavioral problems even further. The present study also found that children’s behavior varied as a function of the type of task. Children demonstrated more

| Table 2. Analysis of variance for compliance and noncompliance |
|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Source            | Compliance      | noncompliance   |
|                   | df  | F   | p   | df  | F   | p   |
| **Between subjects** |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Verbosity (V)     | 1   | 7.80** | 0.01 | 1   | 1.94 | 0.17 |
| Nurturance (N)    | 1   | 0.04  | 0.84 | 1   | 0.56 | 0.46 |
| V \times N        | 1   | 0.01  | 0.98 | 1   | 0.15 | 0.06 |
| Error             | 35  | (820.77) |     | 35  | (633.62) |     |
| **Within subjects** |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Task (T)          | 1   | 25.77** | 0.00 | 1   | 23.51** | 0.00 |
| T \times V        | 1   | 0.39  | 0.54 | 1   | 0.40 | 0.53 |
| T \times N        | 1   | 1.00  | 0.99 | 1   | 0.95 | 0.34 |
| T \times V \times N | 1   | 1.61  | 0.21 | 1   | 0.16 | 0.69 |
| Error             | 35  | (620.10) |     | 35  | (583.85) |     |

Note. Values enclosed in parentheses represent mean square errors. Compliance = picking up appropriately and appropriate play. noncompliance = toy contact and touching forbidden objects. *\(p<0.05\), **\(p<0.01\).
compliant behavior in the prohibitive task compared with the proactive task. Not only does this support previous research (Kochanska & Aksan, 1995), it also solidifies the idea that child compliance levels may differ simply because of the type of task the children are engaged in and not just based on the interactions between the parent and child. However, parents may benefit from being prepared for more noncompliance in proactive tasks and may need to be especially careful to avoid engaging in coercive patterns where the parent natters the child. The present study also found that nurturance did not have a significant influence in and of itself on levels of compliance, but was related to the level of negative affect children exhibited. Children who received lower levels of nurturance in the toy clean-up task demonstrated the highest rates of negative affect compared with children in the other conditions. This indicates that nurturance may be especially important in situations/tasks that are more difficult for children. Children will need more encouraging statements versus punitive statements in situations in which things are difficult or in situations that they do not understand what is asked of them.

The limitations of the present study suggest several additional directions for future research. Participants in this study were volunteers who responded to advertisements and who received a small incentive ($5). Participants were predominantly from upper middle class, Caucasian families whose toddlers’ behaviors were within the normal range. Given the fairly homogenous sample, generalizability of the results is of concern. It is unknown whether these same results would be obtained with children of different ethnicities, different socio-economic classes, or with children with clinically significant behavioral problems. The present study employed high levels of experimental control to examine the specific influences of these variables. Future studies should attempt to examine these two factors in both a controlled laboratory setting as well as in the naturalistic setting of the home to see whether results differ based on the amount of experimental control and the setting. Future studies should further investigate the relationship between parent behavior and child behavior to see whether or not parental verbosity is always associated with negative child behavior. It is possible that in some situations, verbosity may have positive effects on child behavior. Determining at what point and in what situations maternal verbosity increases negative child behavior versus facilitating positive child behavior is needed. Even though mothers in the present study reported that the interactions with their children in the lab were fairly typical, this was not assessed directly (e.g. through direct observation). Therefore, future studies should also include an unstructured observation of the mother–child interaction in order to assess whether or not the interactions were indeed similar to their typical interactions. Future studies should also test the sensitivity of the child to the experimental manipulation of different parent behavior.

Despite the limitations given above, the conclusions from the present study were strengthened due to several factors. The present study obtained data to support its ecological validity. Information per mothers’ report regarding the similarity of the task to tasks typical in the home environment reduces the concern regarding the generalizability of the results. The present study was one of the first to isolate and manipulate the specific parenting parameters of verbosity and nurturance in order to examine the relationship to child compliance in both a proactive task and a prohibitive task as a way to examine the early precursors to coercive interactions.

Most importantly, this study has implications not only for parents, but also for those who work with young children by increasing our knowledge about the
efficacy of various parenting strategies. This has direct implications for the types of techniques taught in parenting programs as well as the types of interventions utilized in the clinical treatment of children with behavioral problems. This study would suggest that it is important to keep directives short and simple, especially in disciplinary encounters. Parents differ in their parenting styles with some parents being naturally more verbose in their interactions with their children. Even at this young age with relatively ‘normal’ children, excessive detail about what children should or should not do appears to be negatively associated with misbehavior. The negative effects may increase if this continues as the child ages, especially in at-risk families with children demonstrating problematic behaviors. This in turn may increase the level of difficulties that parents have in navigating this period. Therefore, the chances that problem behaviors will persist increase along with the level of parental stress. These things may then affect the level of parental satisfaction.

Toddlers struggle more in proactive situations, which may result in more solicitation of parents’ attention. Therefore, parents may become more frustrated and be more likely to be more verbose. In these situations, it is important for parents to use other strategies such as modeling of the tasks, rewarding any accomplishment toward completing the tasks, and giving the child frequent breaks in order to decrease the strain. Ultimately, if strain begins to emerge within the parent–child subsystem due to child misbehavior, it is important for parents to consider alternative consequences for managing the misbehavior. If they choose to use directives or reprimands, parents need to keep their responses short in disciplinary encounters in order to avoid creating a coercive cycle by nattering the child.

REFERENCES


