



## Infant behaviors influence mothers' provision of responsive and directive behaviors<sup>☆</sup>



Carrie A. Lloyd<sup>\*</sup>, Elise Frank Masur

Psychology Department, Northern Illinois University, United States

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### ABSTRACT

Mother–infant interactions are important to infant development because they are predictive of infants' social, cognitive, and language development (Lamb, Bornstein, & Teti, 2002; Tamis-LeMonda, Bornstein, & Baumwell, 2001). Because maternal responsive and directive behaviors are associated with differential infant outcomes, it is important to investigate influences on mothers' provision of responsive and directive behaviors. Yet, the dyadic interaction literature is predominantly unidirectional from maternal behavior to infant outcomes. Therefore, the current study examined infant initiating behaviors and consequent maternal responses in a sample of 26 13-month-old infants and their mothers, videotaped during 5 min of free-play. Findings revealed that infants produced a variety of initiatives, and that these different infant initiatives prompted differential patterns of maternal responsive versus directive behaviors. Further, results of analyses of divergent types of maternal directive behaviors – Responsive Directives, ReDirectives, and Intrusive Directives – also may help clarify major discrepancies in the current literature regarding the positive and negative effects of maternal directiveness.

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Mother–infant interactions are important to infant development because they are predictive of infants' social, cognitive, and language development (Carpenter, Nagell, & Tomasello, 1998; Lamb et al., 2002; Masur, Flynn, & Eichorst, 2005; Murray & Hornbaker, 1997; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2001). During interactions mothers and infants attend to each other as social partners and often share focus on the same objects. Their interactions also provide a rich setting for communication. In particular, mothers' use of responsive and directive behaviors and utterances has been associated not only with infants' immediate behaviors but also with their long-term development (Carpenter et al., 1998; Hughes, Dote-Kwan, & Dolendo, 1999; Masur et al., 2005; Schneider & Haney, 1992; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2001). Because mothers' provision of responsive and directive behaviors and utterances is related to infant development, it is important to discover factors that may influence their production. The current study contributes to the dyadic interaction literature, now predominantly unidirectional mother-to-infant, by considering infants' initiations, influences on mothers' behaviors, and whether mothers adjust the type of response in relation to their child's initiation. The present authors investigated whether three different kinds of infant initiatives differentially stimulated maternal responsive and directive behaviors.

Mothers' responsive behaviors and utterances are widely associated with positive infant social and cognitive developmental outcomes. A plethora of studies report a relationship between maternal responsiveness and positive infant social outcomes, including: attachment security and play engagement (e.g., Booth, Rose-Krasnor, McKinnon, & Rubin, 1994;

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<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL 60115, United States. Tel.: +1 2603558837. E-mail addresses: [clloyd@ncu.edu](mailto:clloyd@ncu.edu), [carrie.lloyd@my.gcu.edu](mailto:carrie.lloyd@my.gcu.edu) (C.A. Lloyd).

Rose-Krasnor, Rubin, Booth, & Coplan, 1996). Positive cognitive associations include intelligence (Mahoney, Boyce, Fewell, Spiker, & Wheeden, 1998) and multiple measures of language, such as verbal imitation, lexical acquisition, language comprehension, and syntax development (e.g., Baumwell, Tamis-LeMonda, & Bornstein, 1997; Carpenter et al., 1998; Masur et al., 2005; Newland, Roggman, & Boyce, 2001; Rollins, 2003; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2001).

Four main criteria typically define “Responsiveness” (sometimes used interchangeably and confused with “sensitivity”), including: (1) the mother responds promptly (Bornstein, Tamis-LeMonda, Hahn, & Haynes, 2008; Kochanska & Aksan, 2004; Pomerleau, Scuccimarri, & Malcuit, 2003); (2) the mother’s response is contingent on infant behavior (Bornstein et al., 2008; Masur et al., 2005); (3) the mother’s response is appropriate (Bornstein et al., 2008; Mahoney, 1992); and (4) the mother’s response is sensitive, demonstrating awareness and understanding of the infant’s behavior (Kochanska & Aksan, 2004; Murray & Hornbaker, 1997). Because these criteria characteristically define responsiveness, they are also included in the coding procedures utilized in this study.

Maternal directiveness has also been correlated with global outcomes of development; yet this relationship is less consistent and contradictory. Even though directiveness is typically defined as the mother’s requests and/or commands intended to direct the infant’s behavior or attention (e.g., Mahoney, 1992), there is considerable discrepancy in the literature. Directiveness has most often been negatively related to child developmental outcomes, including social engagement and dyadic mutuality, cognitive performance, and language acquisition (Akhtar, Dunham, & Dunham, 1991; Hampson & Nelson, 1993; Hughes et al., 1999; Jones et al., 1997; Masur et al., 2005). Yet, a few studies have found maternal directiveness unrelated (Baumwell et al., 1997; Carpenter et al., 1998; Hoff & Naigles, 2002; Tomasello & Todd, 1983) or even positively related to various developmental outcomes (Akhtar et al., 1991; Pine, 1992; Schaffer & Crook, 1980).

Differences in operational definitions may account for the discrepant findings with directiveness. For example, Pine (1992) separated “attentional” from “behavioral” directives, and Akhtar and colleagues (1991) found negative infant correlations only for directives that “lead” infants’ focus of attention rather than following it. Hughes et al. (1999) found that maternal use of “appropriate” directives was positively correlated with infant use of pragmatic language. These findings support the value of distinguishing between directives that share a controlling quality and those that do not. Because of this, the current study distinguished between directives that have a more positive nature from those that were more negative and controlling, while also including a third category – behaviors and utterances that redirect children’s focus but do so only to engage children’s attention in appropriate activities when they are unengaged or engaged in disruptive or non-play activities. The present study is the first to separate these appropriate “ReDirectives” from Intrusive Directives.

Because mothers’ responsiveness and directiveness predict children’s development and behavior, it would be valuable to identify influences on mothers’ production of these behaviors. A common assumption in literature (e.g., Pine, 1992) is that they arise from mothers’ personal styles or dispositions. In keeping with such a possibility are reports of stability over time intervals ranging from a few days to several months in mothers’ rates of responsive and directive utterances (e.g., Baumwell et al., 1997; Masur & Turner, 2001). In the longest intervals reported, Pan, Imbens-Bailey, Winner, and Snow (1996) found stability in the ratios of maternal utterances following children’s focus of attention to those leading children’s attention or behavior from ages 14 to 20 and even 32 months.

Before concluding that these findings of stability and consistency in responsive and directive speech point exclusively to origins in mothers’ personal styles, however, it would be important to consider whether children’s behaviors might also be influential in eliciting these utterances. Bell (1988) and Bell and Chapman (1986) argued against a unidirectional approach assuming social influence only from mothers to infants. Bell’s control system model would lead to predictions that negative child behaviors would be most likely to evoke parental directives while positive and competent child behaviors would elicit nondirective parental speech. Bell and Chapman reviewed 14 experimental studies; the majority employing child confederates trained or induced to act in particular ways, whose findings provide support for their model. Bell advised that to ignore factors that affect maternal behavior within the seemingly complex mother–infant interaction would be a disservice to understanding the entire mother–infant relationship and the subsequent consequences on infants; yet, all factors other than simply mother’s behavior affecting their children’s behavior have been ignored.

Some evidence of this influence, from infant to mother, can be found within correlational studies. Evidence from correlational studies reporting concurrent relations between mothers’ responsiveness and infants’ social initiative or responsivity (Masur & Turner, 2001) and between maternal directiveness and children’s lack of interest in toys (Schneider & Haney, 1992) can plausibly provide support for the view that infant behavior may be affecting maternal behavior; because, although correlational studies reporting concurrent relations give the impression that the sole direction of influence is from mother to child, the opposite direction of effect is equally probable. Although these researchers (e.g., Kochanska & Aksan, 2004; Pine, 1992) presumably recognize that their study is correlational, the impression that being a responsive mother produces a responsive infant is typically concluded with parent-driven models. That is, many correlational researchers discuss results as mothers being the influencing agents. But because most research data in this area is correlational, it is equally plausible that infant behavior may be affecting maternal behavior.

Even if infants do not have a direct influence on maternal responses and response types, infants may, at least indirectly or partially, influence maternal behavior. It seems plausible that maternal behavior is not solely the result of maternal innate style, but that they respond differentially to different types of infant initiations. Further, mothers may react differentially to infants that exhibit different rates of initiation.

Recently, researchers have begun to look more systematically at whether infants’ behaviors might be influencing certain maternal behaviors. Bornstein et al. (2008) examined maternal responsive utterances that followed four kinds of infant

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