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Trait Verbal Aggressiveness and the Appropriateness and Effectiveness of Fathers' Interaction Plans II: Fathers' Self-Assessments

Jill E. Rudd, Michael J. Beatty, Sally Vogl-Bauer, and Jean A. Dobos

Although mothers account for the vast majority of child care, the limited published research that has examined fathering documents marked influences on sons' interpersonal experiences and social development (Beatty & Dobos, 1992a, 1992b, 1993a, 1993b, 1993c; Beatty, Burant, Dobos, & Rudd, 1996; Beatty, Zelle, Dobos, & Rudd, 1994; Brook, Brook, Whiteman, & Gordon, 1983). For example, studies indicate that college-aged men whose fathers were authoritarian were more impulsive and demonstrated less interpersonal sensitivity during interaction than did other college-aged men (Brook, Brook, Whiteman, & Gordon,

1983). In a series of studies, Beatty and his colleagues found that college-aged men who described relationships with their fathers as problematic experienced more negative affective experiences about interacting with their fathers (e.g., anxiety, dissatisfaction, rejection, Beatty & Dobos, 1992a, 1992b, 1993c), and were more likely to be described by romantic partners as disconfirming listeners (Beatty & Dobos, 1993a, 1993b).

Hostile and aggressive messages, which are often embedded within authoritarian parenting styles (Baumrind, 1967, 1972; Bayer & Cegala, 1992), are prevalent in problematic father-son relationships and play a central role in the development of those relationships. In a recent study, Beatty et al. (1994) found that college-aged men's reports of the amount of criticism, sarcasm, and overall verbal aggression received from fathers, especially when discussing controversial topics, was positively correlated with fathers' self-reported trait verbal aggressiveness. In conjunction with the rather large magnitude of the association (Cohen, 1988) between fathers' trait verbal aggressiveness and the set of sons' reports, the trait-like nature of verbal aggressiveness measure (Infante & Wigley, 1986) employed suggests a strong predispositional component to father-son interactions.

Drawing from Infante's (1987) work, Beatty et al. (1996) extended the Beatty et al. (1994) study, arguing that "verbally aggressive fathers' interpersonal tactics represent manifestations of their generalized hostility, which are stimulated by any form of opposition, rather than messages that are responsive and adapted to the specific issues raised during interaction." Based on Infante's (1980) proposition that verbal plans reveal the strategic underpinnings of intentional communication, Beatty et al. (1996) examined the effectiveness and appropriateness of fathers' verbal plans for interacting with an oppositional young son as possible outcomes of trait verbal aggressiveness. Conceptually, *effectiveness* refers to "accomplishment of relatively desirable or preferred outcomes" (Spitzberg, 1994, p. 31). *Appropriateness*, on the other hand, has been defined as "acting in a manner that is fitting to the context, thereby avoiding the violations of valued rules, expectancy, or norms (Spitzberg, 1994, p. 31). In their study, Beatty et al. (1996) administered Infante and Wigley's (1986) trait verbal aggressiveness scale to fathers who subsequently generated plans in response to a scenario depicting an extended interaction between a father and son. Fathers' plans were rated for appropriateness and effectiveness by separate groups of participants. In this study, moderate to strong negative relationships between fathers' trait verbal aggressiveness and plan appropriateness and effectiveness were detected.

RATIONALE

Purpose of the Present Study

Reviews of the literature pertaining to parent-child interactions clearly show considerable attentiveness to mothers' communication with children (e.g., Cicchetti, 1993; Fitzpatrick & Badzinski, 1994; Stafford & Bayer, 1993). Although continued research into dimensions of mothers' parenting attitudes and behaviors is important, extensive literature reviews also illuminate the relative lack of studies focussed on fathers' interactions with children (Cicchetti, 1993). In fact, scholars have gone so far as to argue that our understanding of the maltreatment of children has been hampered by an almost exclusive focus on mother-child interactions, proposing that empirical priority" (Cicchetti, 1993, p. 420). The present study was undertaken to extend the line of research initiated by Beatty and his colleagues, focussing on father-son interactions. While Beatty et al. (1996) linked fathers' trait verbal aggressiveness with independent

assessments of fathers' interaction plans, the present study investigated the possible relationship between trait verbal aggressiveness and fathers' perceptions of the appropriateness and effectiveness of aggressive tactics.

Development of Hypotheses

In recent years, scholars have increasingly viewed tactical responses during social interaction as dependent on communicators' perceptions of social appropriateness and effectiveness (Canary & Spitzberg, 1987, 1989). Therefore, because (1) incorporating particular tactics into a communication plan implicates favorable assessments along the lines of appropriateness and effectiveness, and (2), trait verbal aggressiveness represents a predisposition to select tactics that either inflict or threaten psychological or physical harm on recipients, it is reasonable to expect a relationship between fathers' trait verbal aggressiveness and their assessment of the appropriateness and effectiveness of tactics for dealing with an oppositional son.

In general, we would expect that *fathers' trait verbal aggressiveness is positively related to their perceptions of the appropriateness and effectiveness of tactics that threaten or actually inflict either psychological or physical harm on sons*. Scholars writing about these kinds of tactics have described them as physical and verbal coercion (Stafford & Bayer, 1993, p. 69). Five of the tactics generated by fathers in Beatty et al. (1996) were coercive (spanking, whipping with some object, slapping in the face, yelling, and threats of violence). Conversely, we expect *fathers' trait verbal aggressiveness to be negatively related to perceptions of appropriateness and effectiveness of tactics which support or enhance sons' self-concepts*. For example, some fathers participating in Beatty et al. (1996) advocated doing the homework with sons, talking with sons about school, and negotiating as ways of interacting with an oppositional son.

Based on the preceding rationale, we hypothesized the following:

- Hypothesis 1: Fathers' trait verbal aggressiveness will be positively related to their ratings of the appropriateness of coercive tactics.
- Hypothesis 2: Fathers' trait verbal aggressiveness will be negatively related to their ratings of the appropriateness of supportive tactics.
- Hypothesis 3: Fathers' trait verbal aggressiveness will be positively related to their ratings of the coercive tactics.
- Hypothesis 4: Fathers' trait verbal aggressiveness will be negatively related to their effectiveness ratings of supportive tactics.

Some of the tactics generated by fathers in Beatty et al. (1996) represent neither clearly coercive nor supportive responses to oppositional children, centering instead around the revocation of certain privileges. These tactics center around taking something valued away from children rather than doing something harmful to them. This distinction parallels the conceptual difference between negative reinforcement and punishment made in Skinner's (1969) operant reinforcement model of behavior. Specifically, grounding and threatening to ground, sending son to his room, turning off the television were listed by fathers. While the object of these tactics is to induce concession from children, they are treated as qualitatively distinct from coercive

strategies in the literature. Indeed, they are similar to examples of love withdrawal (Stafford & Bayer, 1993, p. 63). Baumrind (1972) notes that these tactics are sometimes employed to gain children's attention during episodes of extreme misbehavior, setting the stage for more supportive tactics.

Consistent with previous explorations into parenting style (e.g., Baumrind, 1971), some fathers recommended "doing nothing" in response to sons' opposition. While not coercive, the tactic has little instrumental value unless employed as part of an overall strategy. For example, doing nothing can represent permissiveness and neglect or it can represent an index of temporary restraint and flexibility. Although revoking privileges and doing nothing were represented in some fathers' plans, extant research provides little guidance regarding their relationships to trait verbal aggressiveness. Therefore, we formulated two research questions rather than hypotheses.

Research Question 1: Is fathers' trait verbal aggressiveness related to their ratings of the appropriateness of tactics which are neither coercive nor supportive?

Research Question 2: Is fathers' trait verbal aggressiveness related to their ratings of the effectiveness of tactics which are neither coercive nor supportive?

The aforementioned relationships between perceptions of tactics and trait verbal aggressiveness imply a strategic rather than an emotional foundation for tactical choice. Conceptualizing trait verbal aggressiveness as a subset of hostility, Infante (1987) acknowledged the potential emotional underpinnings of aggressive communication. If the hostile behavior of trait verbal aggressives represents unplanned, impulsive outbursts, tactical choices might be unrelated to perceptions of appropriateness or effectiveness. That is, tactics are deployed as a function of anger despite their appropriateness or potential instrumental effectiveness.

Our reasons for viewing fathers' tactical choices as functions of their perceptions of appropriateness and effectiveness are two-fold. First, previous research has indicated that elements of appropriateness and effectiveness are contained in fathers' plans for dealing with oppositional sons (Beatty et al., 1996). Since the plans were generated in response to a hypothetical scenario and participants were given time to think through their responses, it is difficult to conceive of their responses as impulsive manifestations of anger. Second, the appropriateness and effectiveness of those plans, as judged by others, were negatively related to fathers' trait verbal aggressiveness. While the hostility associated with trait verbal aggressiveness fathers might stimulate high levels of anger during interactions with oppositional sons, the evidence, albeit limited, seems to suggest that tactical choices are supported by cognitive structures regarding appropriateness and effectiveness of tactical alternatives.

Theoretic Significance of the Study

The potential theoretical implications of the present study are two-fold. First, the strong relationships between fathers' trait verbal aggressiveness and the appropriateness and effectiveness of interaction plans (Beatty et al., 1996) suggest that verbally aggressive fathers lean toward inappropriateness and ineffectiveness at the strategic level. Because plans represent intentions to behave they are more accurately depicted

as products of fathers' *thoughtful action* rather than *impulsive reaction*. In their study, Beatty et al. (1996) derived social appropriateness and effectiveness ratings from judges, assuming that fathers might be biased toward favorably evaluating tactics they endorsed. Whether fathers high in trait verbal aggressiveness perceive the appropriateness and effectiveness of certain tactics differently than do less aggressive fathers, however, remains open to speculation.

Determining whether fathers' trait verbal aggressiveness is predictive of their perceptions of tactical appropriateness and effectiveness would provide further insight into the processes underlying fathers' tactical choices. In general, communication scholars interested in interpersonal influence contend that tactical choices are shaped by the actor's concerns for effectiveness and appropriateness (e.g., Canary & Spitzberg, 1987, 1989). Accordingly, a relatively strong positive relationship between fathers' trait verbal aggressiveness and the effectiveness and appropriateness perceptions would indicate that tactics seen as socially inappropriate and ineffective are assessed in a more favorable way by verbally aggressive fathers.

In this way, the relationship between tactic selection and concern for attaining interaction goals while upholding social standards for appropriate conduct would be the same regardless of fathers' level of trait verbal aggressiveness. Accordingly, research uncovering the processes and knowledge structures responsible for the differential subjective assessments of the utility of tactics would be warranted.

On the other hand, weak relationships between trait verbal aggressiveness and fathers' assessments of the appropriateness and effectiveness of tactics would suggest that fathers endorse aggressive tactics despite their inappropriateness and ineffectiveness, a finding that uncouples tactical selection and actor's assessments of effectiveness and appropriateness. Clearly, such patterns of results would raise important questions about the impetus for fathers' behavior. One implication would be that purely cognitive models of tactical selection might not account for verbally aggressive fathers' behavior during interactions with oppositional sons. Research and theory focused on alternative models of fathers' behavior would be implicated.

As mentioned, appropriateness and effectiveness are generally intertwined in the formulation of tactic selection. Indeed, sizable positive correlations between appropriateness and effectiveness rating have appeared in published studies (Beatty et al., 1996; Canary & Spitzberg, 1987, 1989; Onyekwere, Rubin, Infante, 1992). However, in some situations appropriateness and effectiveness may appear as mutually unattainable goals (Spitzberg, 1993). Beatty et al. (1996) suggest that continued opposition from sons may present such a dialectic to their fathers, especially when fathers have exhausted their repertoire of effective and appropriate tactics. In light of the connection between authoritarian parenting philosophy and trait verbal aggressiveness (Bayer & Cegala, 1992) it is possible that fathers high in the trait endorse tactics perceived as effective but highly inappropriate.

METHOD

Overview of Method

In the present study, a measure of trait verbal aggressiveness was administered to eighty-eight fathers, who later rated the appropriateness and effectiveness of tactics for dealing with an oppositional son. Fathers rated the tactics after reading one of three versions of the scenario used by Beatty et al. (1996). As in that study, sons' opposition was manipulated by varying the number of interacts between the father and son.

Details of the procedures are presented below.

Trait Verbal Aggressiveness

Infante and Wigley's (1986) twenty-item measure of verbal aggressiveness (VAS) was used in the present study. Although shorter versions have appeared in the verbal aggressiveness literature (Infante, Chandler, & Rudd, 1989; Sabourin, Infante, & Rudd, 1993), we administered the original twenty-item measure to ensure that our findings and those of Beatty et al. (1996) are directly comparable. In the present study, the alpha reliability coefficient for the VAS was .92 ($M = 45.99$, standard deviation 9.49, range = 27 to 70).

Stimulus Material

The scenario used in Beatty et al. (1996) study, depicting an interaction between a father and his son was employed in the present study. Specifically, a booklet containing background information and a strip of interaction in which "Billy," a fifth grader, resists his father's attempts to get him to complete his homework rather than watch television. In their study, Beatty and his colleagues collected data at various points along the interaction, based on the assumption that much of the symbolic meaning of a particular exchange is derived from the preceding exchanges. Previous studies show that in general aggression tends to escalate as participants fail to achieve their interaction goals (deTurk, 1987; Harris, Gergen, & Lannamann, 1986; Infante, et al., 1989; Infante, Sabourin, Rudd, & Shannon, 1990; Infante, Trebling, Sheperd, & Seeds, 1984; Lim, 1990). Research focussed on parent-child interactions documents a similar pattern in which children's opposition to parents tends to instigate parental aggression (Feshback, 1980; Newberger & Cook, 1983; Zigler & Hall, 1993). Consistent with expectations based on the studies just cited, Beatty et al. (1996) noted that judges mean ratings of the effectiveness and appropriateness of fathers plans decreased significantly across the scenario.

Like the judges in the Beatty et al. (1996), fathers' perceptions of the functional utility and social acceptability of specific tactics could also be affected by how persistently sons oppose their fathers' interaction goals. Therefore, similar to Beatty and his colleagues, the amount of son's opposition was manipulated in the present study, making variation in perceptions of appropriateness and effectiveness due to the duration of sons' opposition detectable. Specifically, three versions of the interaction were prepared. All three sets first described the scenario, included general instructions to participants, and provided background information regarding Billy and his father. Participants were informed that although Billy is currently a 'IC' student, his teacher's opinion, which is supported by the results of psychological tests, is that Billy is capable of better work. Like many fifth-graders, however, Billy spends a great deal of time watching television. After consultation with Billy's teacher, Billy's father decides that unless Billy's homework is completed by 5 p.m., Billy will not be permitted to watch television. The scenario presented a series of exchanges between Billy and his father one evening when Billy was violating the new television homework rule.

The three versions differed with respect to the amount of interaction presented, however. Version one presented only the first exchange depicted below, version two presented the first three exchanges, and all five exchanges were presented in version three.

Specifically, the five exchanges were as follows:

- (1) Father: "Billy, time to turn off the T.V. and get to your homework."
Billy: "This show isn't over and it's really good."
- (2) Father: "Billy, turn off the T.V."
Billy: (No reaction)
- (3) Father: "Billy, I'm not going to tell you again!"
Billy: "I said I'm watching this."
- (4) Father: "Turn it off!"
Billy: "No."
- (5) Father: (Stands up and turns off T.V.)
Billy: (Turns it back on)

Following the final exchange of the scenario, the thirteen tactical options, generated by the fathers participating in Beatty et al. (1996), were presented.

Validity of the Scenario

Importantly, the purpose of the present study was not to solicit fathers' reports regarding what they would do in the situation presented in the scenario. Instead, fathers evaluated each of the thirteen tactics generated in the previous study in terms of perceived effectiveness and appropriateness. Even so, research findings involving scenarios are more informative if evidence suggesting that participants' responses to the scenario parallel those expected in naturally occurring contexts can be provided. In this regard, Beatty et al. (1996) found that, (1) the percentage of participants endorsing corporal punishment was in line with estimates of prevalence of physical discipline appearing in the literature (Gelles & Cornell, 1990; Zigler & Hall, 1993), (2) consistent with human tendencies when confronted by unyielding opposition during goal-oriented interaction (e.g., deTurk, 1987; Harris, et al., 1986; Lim, 1990), the percentage of fathers endorsing physical violence increased as the scenario unfolded, and (3) appropriateness of plans as judged by others decreased significantly across the scenario. This pattern of results suggested that fathers' responses to the task presented in the scenario were consistent with expectations based on previous theory and research.

Fathers' Ratings of Appropriateness and Effectiveness

After reading one of the three versions of the stimulus materials, fathers rated the appropriateness and effectiveness of each of the thirteen tactics using the same measures employed by Beatty et al. (1996). The *appropriateness* measure, initially developed by Burleson, Wilson, Waltman, Goering, Ely and Whaley (1988), consists of four, seven-point bipolar items: polite-impolite, considerate-inconsiderate, socially appropriate-socially inappropriate, and follows social expectations-violates social expectations).

Effectiveness was measured using the same seven-point Semantic differential scale employed by Beatty et al. (1996), which is similar to that employed by Berger and Bell (1988) in their coding of plan effectiveness. As in Beatty et al. (1996), the scale was anchored by "extremely effective" at one end and "extremely ineffective (likely to backfire)" at the other. Fathers were instructed to indicate how effective each tactic was regarding the likelihood that its deployment would get Billy to do his homework.

Data Collection Procedures and Sample

Participants in the present study were eighty-eight fathers, some of whom were enrolled in undergraduate interpersonal communication courses ($n = 20$) and some of whom were fathers of men enrolled in the courses ($n = 68$). Sons delivered research protocols, which consisted of the verbal aggressiveness instrument and the scenario, to their fathers, who participated voluntarily. Students, however, received extra-credit for their involvement. Furthermore, sons provided telephone numbers of fathers to permit verification of data collection procedures. When completed, sons returned all materials in sealed envelopes. Upon receipt, phone numbers and all identifying data were destroyed. Student fathers completed the material in class for the same credit. Alternative activities for gaining extra-credit were made available to students who did not qualify for participation in the present study.

These procedures yielded a sample (1) ranging in age from 20 to 70 ($M = 43.44$, $sd = 11.56$), (2) ranging in annual income from less than \$10,000 to over \$60,000, and (3) ranging from high school to graduate level education (64% not holding college degrees). Furthermore, seventy-percent of the fathers were Caucasian and eighteen percent were African-American, with the remaining twelve percent distributed across Hispanic, Asian, and Native American categories.

RESULTS

Pearson product-moment correlations between fathers' trait Verbal aggressiveness and their ratings of the appropriateness and effectiveness of tactics are presented in Table 1. Although bivariate correlations provide some insight into the hypotheses

TABLE 1
Correlations Between Trait Verbal Aggressiveness and Appropriateness and Effectiveness Ratings of Tactics.

| | Appropriateness | Effectiveness |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| <u>Coercive Tactics</u> | | |
| Whip | 25* | 20* |
| Slap | 32* | 37* |
| Spank | 40* | 38* |
| Threaten to Spank | 31* | 28* |
| Yell | -05 | 21* |
| <u>Supportive Tactics</u> | | |
| Do Homework with Son | -18* | -29* |
| Talk About Importance of School | -16 | -12 |
| Negotiate | -05 | -11 |
| <u>Others</u> | | |
| Turn off T.V. | -19* | -07 |
| Send son to Room | 08 | 12 |
| Ground | -02 | 10 |
| Threaten to Ground | 06 | 09 |
| Do Nothing | 05 | 22* |

Note: Coefficients are rounded and decimals omitted. Asterisk indicates $p < .05$, one-tailed.

and questions advanced in the present study, multivariate analyses can uncover complex relationships among variables, such as suppression, which would otherwise go undiscovered (Cohen & Cohen, 1983, p. 94). Canonical correlation permitted us to examine the hypotheses and questions within the context of an unfolding interaction by entering trait verbal aggressiveness and amount of interaction as variables in one set and fathers' ratings of tactics as different sets. Furthermore, this analysis made possible the detection of meaningful relationships between trait verbal aggressiveness and tactic ratings that appear unrelated in the bivariate analyses due to suppression.

Regarding appropriateness, the results indicated that only one of the five coercive tactics (yell) and one of the three self-concept maintenance tactics (negotiate) failed to relate to trait verbal aggressiveness in either the bivariate or multivariate analyses. With respect to effectiveness, all of the coercive and self-concept maintenance tactics related to trait verbal aggressiveness in at least one of the analyses. Effectiveness ratings for most of the tactics which were neither coercive nor supportive of sons' self-concepts were related to fathers' trait verbal aggressiveness.

Verbal Aggressiveness and Appropriateness

As shown in Table 1, correlations between fathers' trait verbal aggressiveness and appropriateness ratings for whipping, slapping, spanking, threatening to spank, and doing homework with the son were statistically significant and in the predicted direction. The canonical analyses, however, revealed the complex nature of the relationships among variables. Results of canonical correlation, with trait verbal aggressiveness scores and the amount of interaction entered as one set and appropriateness scores for the thirteen tactics entered as the second set, produced a significant canonical root ($R_c = .89$, Wilks' $\lambda = .214$, $F = 19.76$, $df = 13/70$, $p < .001$). Structure coefficients and standardized function coefficients are reported in Table 2. As structure coefficients indicate, trait verbal aggressiveness dominated in the definition of the first set. The second set was principally defined by talking about school, doing homework with the son, and turning off the television. Furthermore, some of the variables demonstrating little bivariate association with trait verbal aggressiveness emerged as important contributors in the canonical analysis, owing to statistical suppression. In a similar vein, multicollinearity reduced the contribution of other variables that were significantly correlated with trait verbal aggressiveness in the bivariate analysis. Interpreting only function coefficients of .30 or greater, the canonical analysis for appropriateness indicated that the higher a father's level of trait verbal aggressiveness, the lower his ratings of appropriateness for talking about the importance of school and doing nothing, and the higher his ratings for threatening to spank. Overall, this pattern of results tend to support hypotheses one and two.

Verbal Aggressiveness and Effectiveness

Table 1 indicates that the correlations between trait verbal aggressiveness and effectiveness ratings for whipping, slapping, spanking, threatening to spank, yelling, and doing homework with the son were statistically significant and in the expected direction. In addition, the correlation between effectiveness ratings and trait verbal aggressiveness was statistically significant and positive. Similar to the results for appropriateness, the canonical correlation analysis produced a significant canonical root ($R_c = .85$, Wilk's $\Lambda = .272$, $F = 13.58$, $df = 13/70$, $p < .001$). Structural and standardized function coefficients also appear in Table 2. As with appropriateness,

TABLE 2
Function (Fc) and Structure (SC) Coefficients for Canonical Analyses.

| | Appropriateness | | Effectiveness | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-----|---------------|-----|
| | Fc | SC | Fc | SC |
| Set 1 Variables | | | | |
| Trait Verbal | 99 | 99 | 95 | 96 |
| Aggressiveness | | | | |
| Amount of Interaction | -12 | -01 | 27 | 32 |
| Set 2 Variables | | | | |
| Whip | -01 | 00 | -57 | -01 |
| Slap | -26 | 02 | 31 | 12 |
| Spank | 35 | -06 | 25 | 08 |
| Threaten to Spank | 07 | -01 | 23 | 02 |
| Yell | -16 | -25 | 09 | -11 |
| Do Homework with Son | -23 | -58 | -68 | -65 |
| Talk About School | -84 | -85 | -56 | -53 |
| Negotiate | 05 | -28 | -25 | -30 |
| Turn off T.V. | -11 | -42 | -31 | -37 |
| Send to Room | -23 | -24 | -37 | -21 |
| Ground | 05 | -28 | 22 | -21 |
| Threaten to Ground | -12 | -17 | 10 | -14 |
| Do Nothing | -32 | -15 | -03 | 03 |

fathers' trait verbal aggressiveness dominated the first set. However, as Table 2 indicates, the amount of interaction did contribute to the definition of the variate for effectiveness. The second set was principally defined by doing the homework with son, talking about school, turning off the television, and negotiation. Inspection of the standardized function coefficients indicates that the higher a father's level of trait verbal aggressiveness the lower his effectiveness ratings for doing homework with the son, talking about school, sending to room, and turning off the television and the higher his effectiveness ratings for slapping.

The negative coefficient for whipping with some object represents a suppression effect attributable to slapping. In the bivariate analyses, the correlation between trait verbal aggressiveness and whipping effectiveness was positive (Table 1).

The removal of slapping from the equation results in a positive coefficient for whipping effectiveness. In other words, trait verbal aggressiveness and perceptions of the effectiveness of whipping are generally positively related but fathers who consider slapping the son in the face an effective strategy, tend to view whipping as ineffective. Again, this pattern of results generally supports hypotheses three and four.

DISCUSSION

Previous research indicated that the appropriateness and effectiveness of fathers' plans for dealing with an oppositional son, determined by judges who were not parents, were significantly and negatively correlated with fathers' self-reported trait verbal aggressiveness (Beatty et al., 1996). In the present study, fathers rated the appropriateness and effectiveness of thirteen tactics, generated by the fathers in the earlier study. Consistent with the Infante's (1987) trait conceptualization of trait

verbal aggressiveness, fathers' ratings of the appropriateness and effectiveness of tactical options were related to their level of trait verbal aggressiveness. Regardless of the amount of opposition from sons, perceptions about tactical appropriateness and effectiveness were primarily functions of the fathers' trait level of verbal aggressiveness. Specifically, the higher the trait verbally aggressiveness, the lower the ratings of tactics related to establishing dialogue and working relationships with sons and the higher the ratings of coercive tactics. In addition, some of the tactics focusing on the deprivation of privileges (send to room and turn off television) were negatively associated with trait verbal aggressiveness, especially in terms of effectiveness.

These findings have three main implications for theory and research. First, the present findings underscore the intentional, strategic nature of fathers' responses to oppositional sons. Beatty et al. (1996) detected inappropriateness and ineffectiveness at the planning level. Since plans represent intentions to behave, this finding implicated thoughtful action rather than impulsive reactions or loss of control during interactions with sons. Moreover, the plans of verbally aggressive fathers were judged as less appropriate and less effective than other fathers plans. In terms of Infante's (1980) definition of plans, verbally aggressive fathers' intentionally send messages to sons that are seen by others as inappropriate ways of interacting within the context of the scenario. Beatty et al. (1996) raised the question as to whether fathers know that these types of messages are inappropriate and likely ineffective. The results of the present study suggest that verbally aggressive fathers do not seem to understand the inappropriate and ineffective nature of certain tactics in the same way nonparents, therapists (Beatty, et al., 1996) and fathers who are not verbally aggressive do. This particular observation is consistent with research indicating that highly aggressive people underestimate the hurtful potential of aggressive messages (Infante, Riddle, Horvath, & Tumlin, 1992). Further research is needed to explain the processes and experiences responsible for the differential perceptions of effectiveness and appropriateness among fathers differing in trait verbal aggressiveness. Clearly, awareness of the consequences of aggressive messages is important to our full understanding of father-son relationships in particular, and parent-child relationships in general.

Second, the comparatively weak impact of opposition is noteworthy. Despite the number of oppositional responses or their nature, fathers' ratings of appropriateness and effectiveness were substantially more related to trait verbal aggressiveness than to opposition. Overall, the results of the present study indicate that sons' responses were far less influential than fathers' trait verbal aggressiveness in the formulation of fathers' perceptions of tactics. Clearly, we should be cautious about generalizing findings beyond the particular scenario employed in any study. An important implication, however, in need of further research is that fathers demonstrated little adaptability (Duran, 1983, 1992) to sons' messages, with assessments of tactics being governed more by their trait verbal aggressiveness than features of the interaction.

Third, from a developmental perspective, the pattern of results obtained in the present study has implications for the socialization of men. In relationships involving verbally aggressive fathers, opportunities to learn valuable social skills through competent interaction are bypassed in favor of increasingly aggressive responses to sons' expressions of resistance. The fathers' conscious assessment of tactics observed in the present study is important because we might suspect that in addition to modeling aggressive behavior and dismissing dialogic approaches to conflict, verbally aggressive fathers might also verbalize their beliefs about these two antithetical forms of

social action. We might speculate regarding the long-term effect of these aggressive responses to assertion. Certainly, questions arise regarding sons' subsequent attitudes about achieving effectiveness through interaction and the legitimacy of their own children's assertiveness. Although considerably more research is needed, the present study further underscores the significant contribution of fathers' characteristics to the process through which their sons become men.

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