

Level of Parental Self-Efficacy when Raising Toddlers

Output 7

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Abstract

This study investigated whether levels of parental self-efficacy (PSE) following noncompliant child behavior were affected similarly by power bouts and single acts of noncompliance. In addition, it was investigated whether this effect was similar for fathers versus mothers. Previous research has found that PSE can depend on parental needs, which is based on the parental roles fathers and mothers tend to fulfill. However, few studies have investigated gender differences in PSE. Even fewer studies have investigated this difference in relation to power bouts and single acts of noncompliance. As gender differences in levels of PSE could lead to gender sensitive intervention strategies, this study is both of social and scientific relevance. It was hypothesized that mothers would experience higher levels of PSE when raising toddlers. In addition, it was hypothesized that fathers' levels of PSE would decrease more significantly during power bouts compared to mothers' levels of PSE. A total of 165 parents (140 mothers; 25 fathers) participated in this study by filling out an online survey. No evidence was found in support of both hypotheses, meaning that fathers and mothers do not significantly differ in their levels and development of PSE. As a result, there seems no need for gender sensitive intervention strategies. However, these results have to be interpreted with caution as this study suffers a number of limitations. Future research should address these limitations in order to extend the scope of this study and increase its reliability regarding implications for gender sensitive intervention strategies.

Keywords: parental self-efficacy, power bouts, single acts of noncompliance

Level of Parental Self-Efficacy of Fathers and Mothers
when Raising Toddlers

When examining literature concerning the upbringing of children, it is striking that most literature is based on mothers. Even though the title of a research article might mention “parents”, the sample often only consists of mothers (Lunkenheimer, Lichtwarck-Aschoff, Hollenstein, Kemp, & Granic, 2016; Ulanova & Vasilenko, 2016). This raises the question whether results concerning mothers can be generalized to fathers. Especially as fathers and mothers have been frequently found to play complementary roles (Craig, 2006; Majdandžić, De Vente, & Bögels, 2016). For example, fathers tend to engage less in caregiving and social activities than mothers do, but usually spend more time at specific play activities (Majdandžić et al., 2016). As fathers and mothers exercise different parental roles, they might experience dissimilar levels of parental self-efficacy [PSE] (Meunier, Roskam, & Browne, 2011). PSE can be defined as an individual’s appraisal of his or her competence in the parental role (Sevigny & Loutzenhiser, 2010). According to Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy (1977), PSE beliefs may be largely determined by one’s experience in parenting tasks (Glatz & Trifan, 2019). Hence, differences that fathers and mothers have in experience with parenting can lead to different levels of PSE (Junttila, Aromaa, Rautava, Piha, & Rähä, 2015). It has been found that mothers are more experienced in parenting as they spend more time with their child (Murdock, 2013). As a result, they could feel more competent (Coleman & Karraker, 2000). Consequently, it seems reasonable to assume that fathers’ feelings of competency are more likely to decline when fathers encounter difficult parenting situations, as they have had less experience in dealing with these situations. Following this, as fathers and mothers tend to play complementary roles, one cannot make the assumption that the experiences and perceptions of fathers and mothers regarding their experienced competence in the parental role are interchangeable (Murdock, 2013; Sevigny & Loutzenhiser, 2010). Therefore, it would be important to further study differences in PSE for fathers and mothers.

It is especially interesting to study parents’ levels of PSE during challenging periods, as challenges may affect parents’ feelings of competency, making individual differences in PSE clearer (Schulz, Leijten, Shaw, & Overbeek, 2019). One of those most challenging periods is toddlerhood, as children of this age become increasingly disruptive (Shaw & Bell, 1993). They are less likely to comply with parental requests and more likely to show disruptive behavior. Although this is a sign of healthy development, it can be difficult for parents to feel competent in these situations, especially when toddlers keep being disruptive. Yet, not all parents are affected equally by disruptive child behavior. Some parents may feel

less competent in these situations and experience higher levels of stress, while other parents may feel they are still in control, manage to stay calm and as a result may even feel more competent (Leerkes, Su, Calkins, Supple, & O'Brien, 2016). However, it remains largely unknown whether fathers and mothers are affected similarly by disruptive child behavior, as many studies do not differentiate between genders (Jones & Prinz, 2005).

When studying disruptive behavior, it is important to differentiate between single acts of noncompliance and power bouts (Ritchie, 1999). Single acts of noncompliance are characterized by a short disciplining episode consisting of only one parental response. Contrary, power bouts refer to cycles of disruptive child and parental disciplining behavior. It seems reasonable to assume that power bouts have a larger impact on parents' feelings of self-efficacy, as the child keeps being disruptive apart from the parental response. This may increase parents' feelings of incompetence. The only study that focuses on power bouts, showed that mothers reported more negative perceptions of the child as well as more aversion during extended power bouts than during single acts of noncompliance (Ritchie, 1999). This confirms that power bouts tend to have a different impact on parental behavior compared to single acts of noncompliance. However, fathers took no part in this study. Therefore, it remains unknown whether fathers and mothers are affected similarly by power bouts compared to single acts of noncompliance. In addition, the study of Ritchie (1999) did not focus specifically on PSE but used broader constructs like maternal behaviors and maternal cognitions. As a result, it remains unknown whether levels of PSE for both fathers and mothers are affected similarly by power bouts compared to single acts of noncompliance.

Combining these topics demonstrates a gap in scientific research. No studies have focused yet on the differences between fathers and mothers in their levels of PSE and the possible divergence of their PSE-adjustment during power bouts. Therefore, the current study will investigate this possible phenomenon by including both fathers and mothers as participants. The research question that will be addressed is: "How do power bouts compared to single acts of noncompliance influence levels of PSE for fathers versus mothers?". The corresponding hypotheses are: "In general, mothers experience higher levels of PSE when raising toddlers." and "During power bouts, fathers' levels of PSE decrease more significantly than mothers' levels of PSE.". These hypotheses are based on the finding that mothers tend to spend more time with their child and therefore have had more experience in dealing with disruptive child behavior, which results in higher levels of PSE (Junttila et al., 2015; Murdock, 2013). In addition, as mothers are more experienced in dealing with disruptive child behavior, their levels of PSE are less likely to decline during a power bout (Junttila et al.,

2015; Ritchie, 1999). As research concerning this subject is very scarce, it is scientifically relevant to conduct broader studies regarding the levels of PSE. In addition, if levels of PSE do indeed change differently for fathers and mothers, it is important to study the underlying causes for this. These findings could eventually lead to new intervention methods that are better adjusted at the different needs of fathers and mothers. This means that interventions for mothers could be based on a different strategy compared to interventions for fathers.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 165 participants (25 fathers and 140 mothers) with their toddlers ($M_{age} = 35.7$ months, $SD = 7.5$, range between 23 and 57 months). Fathers ranged in age from 22 to 48 years old ($M_{age} = 34.4$, $SD = 5.9$) and mothers ranged in age from 21 to 43 ($M_{age} = 31.8$, $SD = 4.6$). The majority of the participants were Dutch (95.8%, Belgian = 1.8%, Brazilian = 0.6%, Turkish = 0.6%, Norwegian = 0.6%) and reported to be married/co-habiting (97%, single = 3%). Most parents had attained a degree at higher education or university level (52.1%, LBO/MAVO/MBO = 29.6%, master/doctor = 17.6%; no degree = 0.6%).

Procedure

The participants were recruited through the researchers' own network and by contacting daycare centers. The participants received an email containing the link to the online survey. In order to establish informed consent, the participants were asked if they had read the information and wanted to participate in the study. By clicking on accept, they agreed to participate. However, participants who decided to quit during the survey were free to do so without having to give a reason. In this case, the answered questions would be deleted from the system. Parents who had more than one child aged 2 to 4 years old, were asked to answer all questions based on the same child. The complete survey took approximately 30 minutes to fill out. As an online survey does not require a specific setting, the research setting of each participant could have been different. However, there were no indications that this has influenced the current study in a negative way. The study was according to all ethical principles and approved by the Faculty Ethics Review Board (FERB) of the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

In the online survey, the participants were presented with hypothetical situations. Each situation was presented by a drawn image depicting the situation and a short, written description (see Appendix A for an example). The survey was based on two conditions. The first condition concerned parental reactions during power bouts, the second condition concerned reactions during single acts of noncompliance. The participants were randomly

assigned to one of these two conditions. The complete survey comprised, besides the questions related to PSE, also of questions related to parental attributions and parenting behaviors. However, as the current study only focuses on PSE, solely this assessment will be discussed in more detail for both conditions.

Power bout condition. In this condition, parents received two scenarios during which the child showed strings of noncompliant behavior. During the first power bout, the child responded noncompliant to a parent-demand. During the second power bout, the parent refused a child-demand, after which the child responded noncompliant. In both scenarios, parents were asked to imagine their own child being in this situation. In addition, they were asked how confident they were that they could let their child obey them. Subsequently, the parents were asked what disciplinary method they were most likely to exercise as a response to the noncompliant behavior. After this, the note was given that the child would still not obey their request, even after their parental disciplinary response. Once again, the parents were asked how confident they were at this time that they could let their child obey them and what disciplinary response they were most likely to exercise. This was followed by a third and a fourth time. In total, the child responded noncompliant for four times during both scenarios and parents had to rate their levels of competency after each of these times (see Table 1).

Table 1

Exemplary power bout scenario

Scenario	Level of confidence	Parental response
1a. The child does not respond to your request to clean the room.	How confident are you that you can let your child obey you at this point?	How would you respond in this situation?
1b. The child says it is not going to help you.	How confident are you that you can let your child obey you at this point?	How would you respond in this situation?
1c. The child makes an even bigger mess.	How confident are you that you can let your child obey you at this point?	How would you respond in this situation?
1d: The child gets angry.	How confident are you that you can let your child obey you at this point?	How would you respond in this situation?
1e. The child will now help you clean it.		

Single noncompliance condition. In this condition, parents received eight images displaying noncompliant scenarios. Four of these scenarios were based on parent-demands, whereas the other four scenarios were based on child-demands. The parents had to fill out the same questions as in the power bout condition. However, as the single noncompliance condition concerned only one noncompliant response of the child instead of strings of noncompliant behavior, parents had to fill out the questions once per scenario (see Table 2). Eventually, this led to four measurements of PSE following parent-demands and four measurements of PSE following child-demands.

Table 2

Exemplary single noncompliance condition

Scenario	Level of confidence	Parental response
1a. The child does not respond to your request to clean the room.	How confident are you that you can let your child obey you at this point?	How would you respond in this situation?
1b. The child will now help you clean the room.		

Measure

The question regarding perceived competence or PSE originated from the Parenting Cognition Scale [PCS] and needed rating on a 6-point intensity scale (1 = strongly disagree; 6 = strongly agree). A score of 6 indicated high levels of PSE, whereas a score of 1 indicated low levels of PSE. The PCS has demonstrated adequate validity and reliability (Snarr, Slep, & Grande, 2009). However, the study of Snarr and colleagues (2009) was based on children aged 3 to 7 years old. Therefore, it remains unknown whether the PCS is a valid and reliable measure for the assessment of PSE for parents of toddlers.

Analysis

In order to limit the scope of this study, no distinction was made between the parent-demanding and child-demanding scenarios (which the original data of the research project did). Therefore, the results of these scenarios were combined. For the power bout condition, this means that the first parental response of the parent-demanding situation was combined with the first parental response of the child-demanding situation. In addition, the second response of the parent-demanding situation was combined with the second response of the

child-demanding situation. The same goes for the third and fourth responses. This led to four measurements within the power bout condition (within-person factor called Time). In the single noncompliance condition, the first four scenarios concerned parent-demands, whereas the last four concerned child-demands. The result of the first parent-demanding scenario was combined with the first child-demanding scenario. In addition, the results of the second, the third and the fourth scenario were combined. This led to four measurements as well, as displayed in table 3.

Table 3

Within-person factor called Time based on parent-demands [PD] and child-demands [CD]

Time	Power bout condition	Single noncompliance condition
1	Response 1 of the PD scenario + response 1 of the CD scenario	Response of the first PD scenario + response of the first CD scenario
2	Response 2 of the PD scenario + response 2 of the CD scenario	Response of the second PD scenario + response of the second CD scenario
3	Response 3 of the PD scenario + response 3 of the CD scenario	Response of the third PD scenario + response of the third CD scenario
4	Response 4 of the PD scenario + response 4 of the CD scenario	Response of the fourth PD scenario + response of the fourth CD scenario

The analysis consisted of two steps following the hypotheses. First, an ANOVA was conducted in order to test the effect of Gender on PSE. In this analysis, Gender (fathers versus mothers) was the independent variable and PSE was the dependent variable. As this hypothesis did not differentiate yet between Time (1-4) nor Condition (power bout versus single noncompliance), all PSE-measurements were combined. If the hypothesis is correct, a significant effect should be found for Gender on levels of PSE in favor of mothers. Following the second hypothesis, an ANOVA was conducted in order to test the effect of both Gender and Condition on PSE. However, as this hypothesis did differentiate between the within-person factor called Time, a repeated measures ANOVA was chosen. It was expected that the different measurements of PSE within the single noncompliance condition would remain rather stable over time, whereas PSE within the power bout condition would decrease over time. If the hypothesis is correct, a significant interaction effect should be found for Gender*Condition*Time, showing that fathers' levels of PSE tend to decline more significantly during power bouts than mothers' levels of PSE.

Results

A two-way repeated measures ANOVA was used to investigate whether levels of PSE develop differently during power bouts compared to single acts of noncompliance, and whether this development is similar for fathers and mothers. The Shapiro-Wilk statistic and the F_{max} were used to test the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance. The results indicated that both assumptions had been violated. However, a repeated measures ANOVA is robust to these kinds of violations. In addition, Mauchly's test of sphericity was used to test the assumption of sphericity. Results indicated that this assumption had been violated as well, $\chi^2(5) = 28.98, p < .001$. Therefore, the degrees of freedom were corrected using Greenhouse-Geisser estimates of sphericity ($\epsilon = .89$ for main effect of Time). In the current study, 106 parents were asked to rate their levels of PSE during power bouts and 59 parents were asked to rate their levels of PSE during single acts of noncompliance. The results are displayed in table 1.

Table 1

Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) for PSE-levels during Single Episodes (SE), Power Bouts (PB) and in Total for Fathers and Mothers

Time	Fathers ($n = 25$)						Mothers ($n = 140$)					
	SE		PB		Total		SE		PB		Total	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	4.69	1.19	5.18	.56	4.93	.17	5.11	.93	4.98	.71	5.05	.07
2	4.75	1.28	4.88	.52	4.82	.16	5.27	.81	4.79	.69	5.03	.07
3	4.56	1.47	4.91	.40	4.74	.17	5.11	.95	4.78	.69	4.94	.07
4	4.94	1.12	4.65	.77	4.79	.19	5.20	1.04	4.69	.73	4.94	.08

The first hypothesis stated that mothers would experience higher levels of PSE when raising toddlers. However, no significant main effect was found for Gender, $F(1, 161) = 1.14, p = .288$, partial $\eta^2 = .007$. Overall, the mean level of PSE for fathers ($M = 4.82, SD = .15$) did not significantly differ from that of mothers ($M = 4.99, SD = .06$).

The second hypothesis stated that fathers' levels of PSE would decrease more significantly during power bouts compared to mothers' levels of PSE. However, no significant interaction effect was found between Time*Condition*Gender, $F(2.66, 428.83) = .90, p = .43$, partial $\eta^2 = .006$. This means that fathers' levels of PSE over time did not significantly differ from that of mothers, as displayed in figure 1.

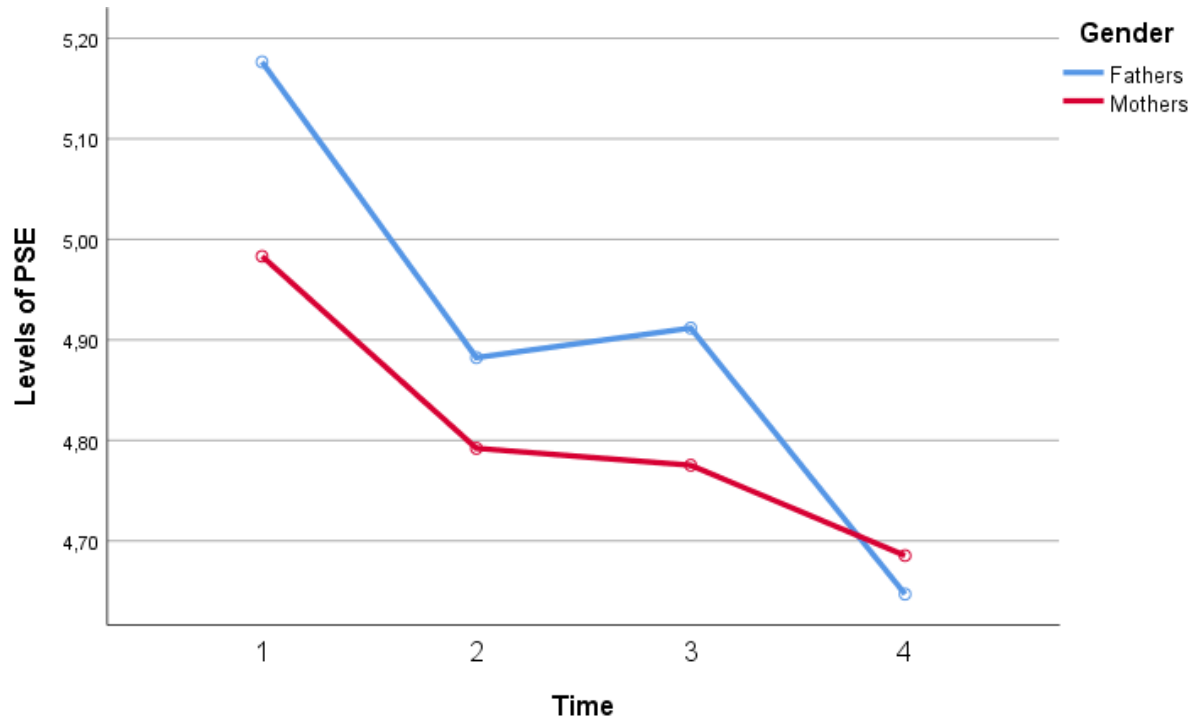


Figure 1. Line graph demonstrating levels of PSE for gender over time in the power bout condition.

A significant interaction effect was found between Time and Condition, $F(2.66, 428.83) = 5.08, p = .003, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .031$. This effect size can be considered small to medium. The interaction effect suggests that parents' levels of PSE decline more strongly during power bouts than during single acts of non-compliance, as displayed in figure 2.

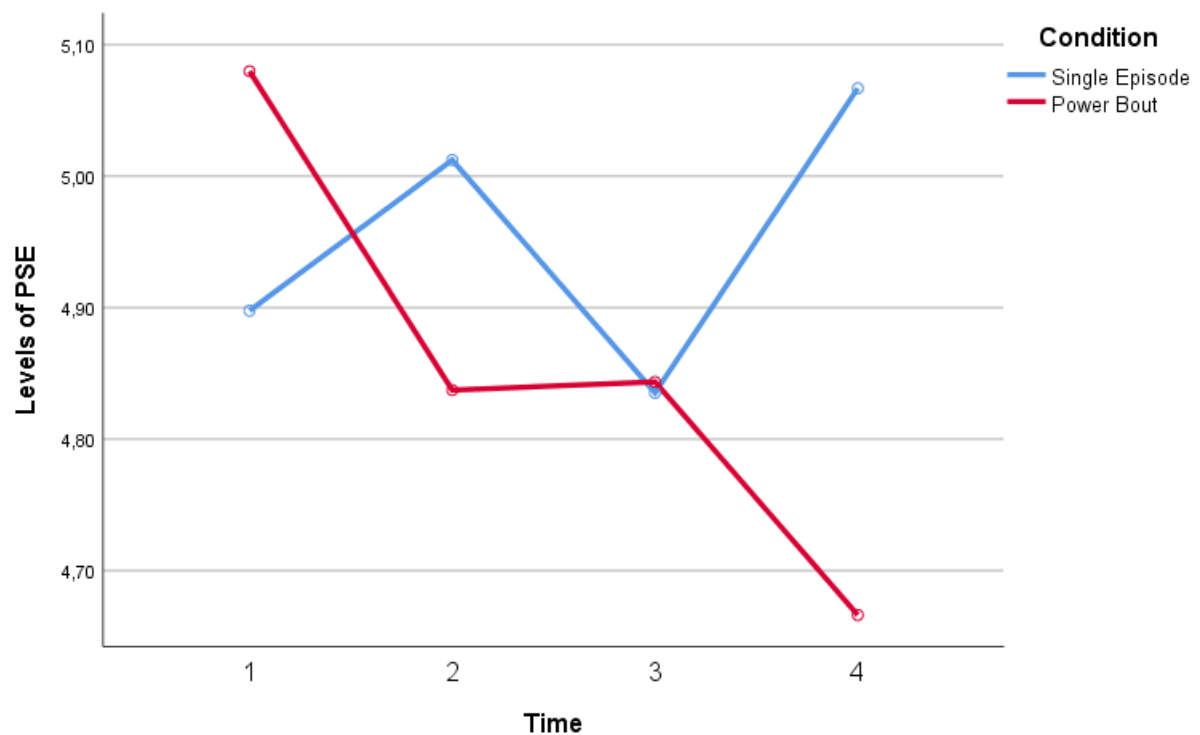


Figure 2. Line graph demonstrating levels of PSE for condition over time.

Discussion

The primary purpose of the present study was to investigate whether levels of parental self-efficacy following noncompliant child behavior were affected similarly by power bouts compared to single acts of noncompliance. In addition, it was investigated whether this effect was similar for fathers versus mothers, as no research has covered this subject yet. It was hypothesized that mothers would experience higher levels of PSE when raising toddlers. In addition, it was hypothesized that fathers' levels of PSE would decrease more significantly during power bouts compared to mothers' levels of PSE.

General Levels of PSE

Contrary to the first hypothesis, no significant differences were found between fathers' and mothers' levels of PSE. This means that mothers experience similar levels of PSE as fathers do. However, this finding does not mean that significant differences between parents do not actually exist. Previous studies have found that paternal and maternal levels of PSE depend on the nature of the situation (Meunier & Roskam, 2009; Murdock, 2013). Mothers tend to feel more competent during situations related to emotional support and nurturance (Craig, 2006; Meunier & Roskam, 2009), whereas fathers tend to feel more competent during situations related to interactive play (Paquette, 2004). This is based on the parental role fathers and mother fulfill and as a result what parents feel most comfortable doing (Majdandžić et al., 2016; Meunier et al., 2011). The current study did not differentiate between the nature of the situations, which may have caused the absence of a significant effect of gender on PSE.

Levels of PSE during Power Bouts

A significant interaction effect was found for Time and Condition, meaning that levels of PSE decrease more significantly during power bouts compared to single acts of noncompliance. This is in accordance with the study of Ritchie (1999), who found that mothers reported higher levels of negative maternal cognitions during power bouts. One of these cognitions concerned PSE. This indicates that mothers experienced lower levels of PSE during power bouts compared to single acts of noncompliance (Ritchie, 1999). However, contrary to the second hypothesis, no significant interaction effect was found for Gender, Condition and Time. This means that fathers' levels of PSE do not decrease more significantly during power bouts than mothers' levels of PSE. As no research has yet been conducted on this topic, no studies can confirm nor deny these findings. This means one could simply assume that differences between fathers and mothers in the development of PSE-levels over time do not exist. However, as general levels of PSE might have been influenced by the absence of discrimination between the nature of the situation, the current results might have

been influenced by this as well. This could implicate that fathers' levels of PSE tend to decline more significantly during situations related to emotional support and nurturance, whereas mothers' levels of PSE tend to decline more significantly during situations related to interactive play. Future research should indicate whether this is indeed the case.

Clinical Implication

At the beginning of this paper, it was implicated that differences in levels of PSE between fathers and mothers following noncompliant child behavior could lead to gender sensitive intervention strategies. However, no significant gender differences were found. This could mean that fathers and mothers do not significantly differ in their needs, even though they tend to fulfill different parental roles. Therefore, as fathers and mothers may have negligible differences in their needs, there seems no necessity to develop gender sensitive intervention strategies. This is a positive implication, as making intervention strategies gender sensitive would require extensive research. However, the necessity of gender sensitive intervention strategies should remain something to investigate, as other researchers have found gender differences in the impact of parent training on levels of PSE (Gross, Fogg, & Tucker, 1995). They argue that these differences could have been caused by the absence of gender sensitivity of the parent training, meaning that fathers and mothers received the same support even though they actually had different needs (Gross et al., 1995). These divergent findings confirm the necessity of more research regarding the importance of gender sensitive interventions strategies in order to increase the impact of intervention strategies for both fathers and mothers.

Limitations and Strengths

Several cautions should be noted in interpreting the present data. This study was solely based on information retrieved from self-reported questionnaires. As questionnaires have been identified as an appropriate measure to assess PSE (Wittkowski, Garrett, Calam, & Weisberg, 2017), one should notice that in the current study parents answered how they thought they would feel during the ambiguous situation and not how they felt during power bouts in real life. This means that parents could rate their levels of PSE higher during these ambiguous scenarios than during real life situations, as people often have a tendency to present themselves in a more favorable way (Paulhus, 1991). In addition, it is possible that parents got used to the scenarios and rated their levels of PSE higher during the last scenarios compared to the first. Therefore, future research should include another measure to compare the answers on the online questionnaire with. For example, observing real life situations could confirm or deny whether parents act and feel how they said they would during the questionnaire. This could confirm whether the answers on the questionnaire are valid and

reliable. Another caution to be made concerns the disproportionate distribution of gender across the sample. In the current study, mothers were overly represented compared to fathers (5.6:1). In addition, the parents were unequally divided among the different conditions, as more parents were assigned to the power bout condition than to the single noncompliance condition (1.8:1). This disproportionate distribution could have negatively influenced the results of the current study. This means that the results have to be interpreted with caution and no definitive conclusions can be drawn until further research is done.

Still, there are also several strengths to the current study, including the use of both fathers and mothers. So far, only a hand full of studies has focused on fathers in relation to PSE (Craig, 2006; Junttila et al., 2015; Murdock, 2013; Paquette, 2004; Sevigny & Loutzenhiser, 2010). In addition, the investigation of power bouts has also been very scarce until today. The study of Ritchie (1999) might be the only one so far that investigated the influence of power bouts on maternal cognitions and parenting. Therefore, the focus on power bouts is another strength of the current study. Yet, the combination of these strengths might display an even bigger strength, as gender differences in levels of PSE during power bouts have not been investigated before. Therefore, it is of great scientific interest that future research will focus on this gap in science and will improve the limitations of the current study.

Future Directions

This study can be concluded with the note that fathers and mothers experience similar levels of PSE. In addition, their levels of PSE decline similarly during power bouts. Future researchers should replicate and extend present findings in a number of ways. First, the sample should be larger and more equally proportionated in order to identify potential differences between maternal and paternal levels of PSE. This may eventually provide further information for the development of gender sensitive and therefore more effective parenting interventions. Second, researchers should include other measures in addition to the survey to increase the reliability and validity of the study. Third, the survey should contain more power bout scenarios to allow for comparison between the various situations. In addition, these power bouts should be based on tasks that mothers feel more competent in doing (e.g. nurturance and emotional support) and tasks that fathers feel more competent in doing (e.g. interactive play). This distinction could increase the chance of finding gender-based differences in PSE.

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Appendix A
Exemplary Ambiguous Situation



Wanneer u in de kamer komt blijkt het een enorme rommel te zijn.
U vraagt uw kind om te helpen met opruimen.

*

Kies het toepasselijke antwoord voor elk onderdeel:

	sterk mee oneens	mee oneens	beetje mee oneens	beetje mee eens	mee eens	sterk mee eens
Ik zou van deze situatie gefrustreerd en of geïrriteerd raken.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben er zeker van dat mijn kind gaat helpen opruimen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[]

Kies het toepasselijke antwoord voor elk onderdeel:

	bijna nooit	wekelijks	meerdere keren per week	dagelijks	meerdere keren per dag
Hoe vaak komt een vergelijkbare situatie bij u voor?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>