

# Bullying Among High School Students as Influenced by Parent-Child Attachment and Parenting Styles

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This study explored the nature and extent of bullying among high school students in Baguio City, Philippines. It determined the relations between parent-child attachment, parenting styles, and bullying via a quantitative survey ( $n = 876$ ) and focus group discussions ( $n = 16$ ). Results revealed that verbal bullying/victimization is more frequent than other types. Also, more males were involved in bullying than females. Generally, being a bully, victim, or bully-victim is negatively related with secure parental attachment and positively related with insecure parental attachment. Having a permissive mother and authoritarian father predicted bullying and having an authoritarian father was related to victimization.

*Keywords:* bully, victim, bully-victim, attachment, parenting styles

Olweus (1994) defined bullying as an attempt to inflict injury or discomfort upon another and is characterized by three criteria: (a) it involves aggressive behavior or causes intentional harm, (b) it is carried out repeatedly and over time, and (c) it occurs in the context of an interpersonal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power. The power imbalance may be physical or psychological such that the bully may be physically bigger, more popular, more intelligent, richer, or have a stronger personality than the person being bullied (Phillips & Cornell, 2012). Repeated occurrences of bullying increase the bully's

grandiose sense of power and fill the victim with shame and fantasies of revenge (Thomas, 2003).

The adverse effects of bullying on those involved – bullies, victims, and bully-victims – were reviewed by Smokowski and Kopasz (2005). According to the authors, bullies tend to suffer from mental health difficulties, some associated with conduct and anti-social disorders. They tend to engage in substance abuse (McKenna, Hawk, Mullen, & Hertz, 2011; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005) and have a propensity for aggression. Victimization, on the other hand, has a negative effect on self-esteem and may result in internalizing disorders such as anxiety.

Bullying may be classified into physical, verbal and social forms (Phillips & Cornell, 2012). Physical bullying involves repeated acts of hitting, kicking, or shoving. Verbal bullying involves repeated teasing, putting down, or insulting someone, while social bullying involves getting others to repeatedly ignore or leave someone out. An emerging trend in bullying as a result of advances in electronic and computer technology is aptly termed cyber-bullying. Here, bullies use social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter to blatantly post negative comments about someone and even create “hate pages” against the victims. All these forms of bullying are carried out with the intention to hurt.

The persons involved in bullying are the bullies and the victims, which can be further categorized into passive and provocative victims. These three groups have different psychosocial profiles. Among bullies, common characteristics are aggression, impulsiveness, being hot-tempered, a positive attitude towards violence, low frustration tolerance, and a strong need for power and dominance (Jansen, Veenstra, Ormel, Verhulst, & Reijneveld, 2011; Olweus, 1994; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Olweus also noted that the lack of warmth and involvement of primary caretakers, permissiveness of aggressive behaviors, and power-assertive child-rearing methods such as physical punishment and violent emotional outbursts increase the risk of hostility and aggression. In summary, “too little love and too much freedom in childhood are conditions that contribute strongly to the development of an aggressive reaction pattern” (1994, p. 1182).

Passive or submissive victims are characterized as anxious, insecure, cautious, sensitive, and quiet (Olweus, 1994; Smokowski &

Kopasz, 2005). As perceived by adolescents in a Swedish study, many victims are bullied because of their appearance such as being under- or overweight, unattractive, and because of traits such as being shy and insecure or “strange” (Frisen, Jonsson, & Persson, 2007). Poor motor skills also relate to greater likelihood of victimization (Jansen et al., 2011) and result in a lower sense of competency and lesser chance of success among peer groups. On the other hand, some victims were described as having many positive characteristics that trigger relational aggression. This suggests two groups of victims of relational aggression: (a) those who are socially isolated and perceived as lacking some desirable individual traits; and (b) those who are perceived as threats to the social hierarchy and have very desirable traits (Pronk & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2010).

Provocative victims or bully-victims usually do not withdraw when attacked. Instead, they choose to retaliate with violence that is reactive rather than proactive in nature (Parault, Davis, & Pellegrini, 2007). A significant percentage has aggressive attitudes; hence, they may start a fight and are more likely to carry weapons compared to passive victims. An extreme form of a bully-victim scenario is “a humiliated school shooter who explodes in a burst of violence when he can no longer cope” (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005, p. 105).

Given the abovementioned, this research explores the relationship of bullying with parental attachment and parenting styles. The succeeding sections review earlier concepts and studies related to these parental factors.

### **Associations Between Bullying and Attachment Relationships**

Attachment refers to an affectional tie that one person forms with another specific individual. A person’s first tie is most likely with, but not always, the mother. It tends to last once the attachment is formed, although it does not necessarily imply immaturity or helplessness (Ainsworth, 1969). Attachment theory begins with the idea that during childhood, parents or the primary caregivers are the most important persons with whom a child bonds (Bowlby, 1969). This emotional bond with the attachment figure allows the child to feel comfort when

frightened or hurt (Bowlby, 2007).

Attachment in infants was earlier studied by Ainsworth in the Strange Situation experiment (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970) wherein the behavior of the infant is observed in the presence and absence of the mother or another attachment figure. This study of mother-child separation and reunion revealed patterns of attachment in young children, whether secure or insecure. When attachment is secure, it denotes a predictable, safe, and affectionate bond with an attachment figure. On the other hand, insecure attachment indicates a less stable or predictable bond with an attachment figure, as when the infant shows ambivalence by a combination of contact-maintaining and contact-resisting behaviors during reunions (Bowlby, 2007).

Bowlby proposed that internal working models of self and others in relationships are developed from parental attachment relationships, which will guide subsequent interpersonal behavior. This theory is exemplified in Hazan and Shaver's (1987) typology of adult attachment styles in which they differentiated between secure attachment, anxious-ambivalent attachment, and avoidant attachment. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) further added dismissing-avoidant as another kind of avoidant attachment style. These typologies are based on a person's internal model of the self and others, whether positive or negative. Secure individuals are trusting of others. Anxious individuals feel that others are not as ready as they are for a relationship and need constant reassurance. The avoidant types (fearful and dismissing) try to avoid close intimate relationships but differed in their internalized sense of self-worth; the fearful style is associated with social insecurity and lack of assertiveness.

Walden and Beran (2010) found that students with low self-perceived quality of attachment to their primary caregivers report a high frequency of bullying others as well as being victimized by bullying. Moreover, children with poor-quality parental attachment relationships are more likely to bully others than children with high-quality attachments. The experience of having a parent who is unresponsive or inconsistently responsive to a child's needs may lead to feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem (Georgiou & Stavrinides, 2008). This, in turn, creates vulnerability to bullying as perpetrators often perceive children with insecurities and low self-esteem as being

submissive and unlikely to retaliate against attack. Thus, in addition to being at risk for bullying others, these children are likely to be bullied by others. Furthermore, Eliot and Cornell (2009) found that insecure attachment was associated with aggressive attitudes toward peers and with peer bullying in their sample of sixth-grade middle school students.

### **Associations Between Bullying and Parenting Styles**

One of the most widely used conceptions of parenting styles is the one formulated by Diana Baumrind (1966, 1967). Her research initiated the identification of distinct parenting styles. These parenting styles are a function of the levels and patterns of responsiveness and demandingness expressed by parents (Baumrind, 2005). Responsiveness refers to the extent to which parents foster individuality and self-assertion by being attuned, supportive, and acquiescent to children's requests; it includes warmth, autonomy, support, and reasoned communication. Demandingness refers to the claims parents make on children to become integrated into society by behavior regulation, direct confrontation, behavioral control, and monitoring (pp. 61-62).

Permissive parents attempt to behave in a non-punitive, accepting, and affirmative manner towards their children's impulses, desires, and actions. The children regulate their own activities as much as possible, with less exercise of control from their parents, and are not encouraged to obey externally defined standards. Authoritarian parents attempt to shape, control, and evaluate the behavior and attitudes of their children in accordance with a set standard of conduct — usually absolute, theologically motivated, and formulated by higher authority. The parents value obedience and may employ punitive and forceful measures to curb children's behaviors and beliefs that conflict with their own. Order and structure are preserved and children are not encouraged to express themselves. Authoritative parents, on the other hand, attempt to direct their children's activities in a rational, issue-oriented manner. They encourage expression, autonomous self-will, reasoning, and disciplined conformity from their children. The parents enforce their own perspective as an adult, but recognize the

children's individual interests and special ways. They affirm their children's present qualities but also set standards for future conduct.

Studies suggest that children who experience higher levels of authoritarian parenting, are exposed to domestic violence, and observe positive parental attitude toward bullying are more likely to bully other children (Lee, 2011). Conversely, children with less authoritarian parenting and less domestic violence exposure are less likely to get victimized and less likely to have higher levels of tendency for aggression (Lee, 2011). Studies conducted in Europe, Australia and the US linked violent behavior and harsh discipline in parents with bullying behavior, and overprotectiveness in parents with victimization (Smith & Myron-Wilson, 1998).

The foregoing is consistent with the findings of Haynie et al. (2001) where they found associations between parenting styles and some parent characteristics mentioned earlier by Olweus (1994); and that parenting influence bullying outcomes among adolescents. For example, power-assertive parenting practices and a lack of warmth, such as those associated with bullying, are characteristic of an authoritarian parenting style and relates to less than optimal adolescent outcomes. In contrast, an authoritative parenting style, in which parents practice consistent and democratic discipline, vigilant monitoring, and high levels of warmth and support, has been associated with more optimal adolescent outcomes.

The adolescents' family environment and interactions can likewise affect bullying behavior through multiple mechanisms, including low parental warmth and low parental involvement (Spriggs, Iannotti, Nansel, & Haynie, 2007). A study by Flouri and Buchanan (2003) showed that father involvement and mother involvement are independently and significantly associated with less bullying behavior in adolescence. In one study in Lithuania, students who were less open to their parents are more likely to be involved in bullying (Jankauskiene, Kardelis, Sukys, & Kardeliene, 2008). In a research on differences between identical twins (Bowes, Maughan, Caspi, Moffitt, & Arsenaault, 2010), it was observed that the twin who received the most warmth had fewer behavioral problems. It also showed that maternal warmth protected children from the negative outcomes associated with being bullied. The researchers concluded that warm family relationships and

positive home environments help to buffer children from the negative outcomes associated with bullying victimization. In addition, there is lesser relational bullying when mothers have greater concern over granting their children opportunities for autonomy.

### **Gender Differences**

Males seem more predisposed to bullying than females. Olweus (1994) described that such is especially true for direct bullying with open attacks. Bullying by physical means was more common among boys. Boys were often victims and perpetrators of direct bullying. Harassment through non-physical means (e.g., words, gestures, etc.) was also commonly employed among boys. In contrast, girls often used more subtle and indirect ways of harassment (e.g., slander, rumors, and manipulation of friendship relationships). In terms of victimization, girls were more exposed to indirect and more subtle forms of bullying than to bullying with open attacks. The percentage of boys who were bullied in an indirect way, however, was approximately the same as that for girls. In addition, boys carried out a large part of the bullying to which girls were subjected.

In a study on aggressive behavior of children from nine countries, including the Philippines, Lansford et al. (2012) found that across these countries, physical aggression, such as shoving, hitting, and throwing things at someone, and relational aggression, like excluding someone from a group and saying mean things about another, were found to be present in children ages 7 to 10 years old. In the Philippines, specifically, it was found that boys engage in physical aggression more than girls. No gender differences were found for relational aggression (Lansford et al., 2012).

In another study, Williams and Kennedy (2012) found gender differences in the association of parent-child attachment and bullying. Female participants were more likely to be physically aggressive when they had higher levels of attachment avoidance with their mothers and higher levels of attachment anxiety with their fathers. They were also more likely to engage in relational aggression when they experienced higher levels of attachment anxiety with their mothers. Males, on one hand, were more likely to engage in relational aggression when they

experienced higher levels of attachment anxiety with their fathers. With regard to peer victimization, females reported higher levels of anxiety about their maternal relationships. In a study among male offenders (Ireland & Power, 2004), avoidant attachment was found to be more likely among bully-victims.

The abovementioned studies provide evidence that parent-child relations play an important role in the children's involvement with bullying. This study explored this phenomenon using a Filipino sample. A high school group was chosen as the study sample because the adolescent stage is a critical period where an individual needs to adjust to drastic changes experienced physically, cognitively, and emotionally. If bullying is experienced at this stage of identity formation, following Erik Erikson's psychosocial stages, the researchers contend that it could affect a person's view of oneself and the world. It can lower one's self-esteem and influence negatively one's sense of control and efficacy in carrying current and future life tasks.

### **Problems and Hypotheses**

This study determined the nature and extent of bullying among high school students and their associations with parent-child attachment and parenting styles. The first problem explored the nature and extent of bullying among high school students in Baguio City. The second problem centers on how parent-child relations are related to bullying, focusing on parent-child attachment and parenting styles. It is hypothesized that secure attachment and authoritative parenting styles will negatively relate to bullying and victimization, whereas insecure attachments and authoritarian/permissive parenting will be positively associated with bullying and victimization. In terms of gender, it is hypothesized that males will be more involved in bullying than females.

## **METHOD**

### **Sample**

The study's sample consisted of 876 high school students from



Baguio City, Philippines. Three hundred ninety-eight (45.4%) were males and 478 (54.6%) were females. Three high schools were selected to represent a private sectarian (294 respondents; 33.6%), private non-sectarian (234 respondents; 26.7%), and a national public high school (348 respondents; 39.7%). Of these, 278 (31.7%) were first year students, 203 (23.2%) second year students, 215 (24.5%) third year students and 180 (20.5%) fourth year students.

Participants for the focus group discussions consisted of 16 third year male and female students from the participating private sectarian high school. Two separate focus groups were facilitated consisting of 8 students, 4 males and 4 females in each group.

### **Procedures**

This study made use of both quantitative and qualitative methods. For the quantitative method, questionnaires were administered to and completed by the participants. The researchers facilitated the focus group discussions by posing semi-structured interview questions about the participants' perceptions, experiences and observations of bullying, parental involvement and parental influences on bullying, and their ideas on how bullying can be prevented.

The questionnaire was pretested with 60 first year students in another national high school in Baguio City to observe their responses towards the items. They were instructed to encircle words, phrases, or statements that they do not understand. The authors revised some of the test items based on their observations from the pretest by translating some terms into Filipino to ensure that the target sample could comprehend the questions.

The students in the focus groups were selected by the guidance counselors of their school. During the group discussion, questions were posed regarding (a) how the students experience bullying/victimization, (b) their perceptions of the influence of parental factors on the bullying phenomenon, (c) gender differences in bullying/victimization, and (d) general insights on the prevention of bullying. For each group discussion, the facilitator is accompanied by a documentor. The notes were independently reviewed and analyzed for themes by one of the authors and three other raters. Themes were then

validated and confirmed during a meeting of these four co-raters.

### Measures

**Bully-victimization scale.** This consists of 39 items adapted from the Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument by Parada (2011), the Cyber-bullying and Online Aggression Survey by Hinduja and Patchin (2011), and the Illinois Bully Scale by Espelage and Holt (2011). Eighteen items were worded in two ways: as perpetrator (bully scale) and as victim (victim scale). Sample items for each scale include “I intentionally pushed a student” (physical), “I made rude remarks at a student” (verbal), “I got my friends to turn against a student (social),” and “I posted on Facebook/Twitter to make someone upset or uncomfortable” (cyber). For the victim scale, the items were reworded as being experienced by the respondent; for example, “Someone intentionally pushed me” or “A student made rude remarks at me.” Three items were specific to the bully-victim scale; for example, “I hit back when someone hit me first.” The respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they have experienced the statement in the last 12 months using a 6-point scale qualified as: 1 - never, 2 - rare (1-4 times), 3 - sometimes (5-9 times), 4 - once/twice a month, 5 - once a week, and 6 - frequent/several times a week. The computed reliability coefficients are  $\alpha = .93$  for the full scale,  $\alpha = .87$  for the bully scale,  $\alpha = .89$  for the victim scale, and  $\alpha = .56$  for the bully-victim scale.

**Parent attachment scale.** The second tool is based on the classification system of adult attachment style by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991). The 9 items measured attachment to mother and father separately, hence has a total of 18 items. The computed reliabilities are  $\alpha = .65$  for the full scale,  $\alpha = .74$  for secure,  $\alpha = .70$  for preoccupied,  $\alpha = .75$  for avoidant-dismissing, and  $\alpha = .79$  for avoidant-fearful. Sample items include “It is easy for me to have a close relationship with my parent” for secure, “I want to have a close relationship with my parent, but I often find that she/he does not like to be close to me” for preoccupied, “It is very important for me to feel independent (*na kaya ko ang mag-isa*) and not to ask help from my parent or her/him to ask help from me” for avoidant-dismissing, and “I want to have a close relationship with my parent, but I find it difficult

to trust her/him completely” for avoidant-fearful.

Parenting styles questionnaire. The 15 items are a modified version of the Parenting Style Questionnaire based on Robinson, Mandleco, Olsen, and Hart (1995). Students were asked to rate their mother and father on various parent behaviors, with a total of 30 items. The computed reliabilities are  $\alpha = .75$  for the full scale,  $\alpha = .83$  for authoritative,  $\alpha = .79$  for authoritarian, and  $\alpha = .70$  for permissive. Sample items include “My parent encourages me to express my feelings and problems and has respect for my ideas and opinions” for authoritative, “My parent reminds me that he/she is my parent and I have to follow without question” for authoritarian, and “My parent finds it difficult to discipline me” for permissive.

The Parent Attachment Scale and Parenting Styles Questionnaire are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The presented alpha coefficients measuring the reliability of the scales are computed based on the sample used in this research.

## RESULTS

### The Nature and Extent of Bullying

To determine the nature and extent of bullying among high school students, a 6-point rating scale was used. The researchers interpreted the range of mean values as follows: 1.00-1.83 - *never*; 1.84-2.67 - *rare (1-4 times a year)*; 2.68-3.50 - *sometimes (5-9 times a year)*; 3.51-4.33 - *once/twice a month*; 4.34-5.17 - *once a week*; and 5.18-6.00 - *frequent*.

**On bullying.** In general, experiences of perpetrating the different types of bullying range from never to rare. A repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to determine mean differences across types of bullying and the obtained result was significant,  $F(3, 2625) = 358.42, p < .001$ . Based on Bonferroni pairwise comparisons, verbal bullying ( $M = 2.35, SD = 0.94$ ) happens more often, followed by cyber-bullying ( $M = 1.74, SD = 0.77$ ). Social bullying ( $M = 1.67, SD = 0.66$ ) and physical bullying ( $M = 1.64, SD = .73$ ) happen the least and do not significantly differ in frequency.

On victimization. In general, experiences of victimization ranged from never to rare. To measure differences across types of bullying experienced, a repeated measures ANOVA was conducted with significant results,  $F(3, 2625) = 243.26, p < .001$ . Verbal victimization is experienced more often ( $M = 2.50, SD = 0.96$ ), followed by social victimization ( $M = 2.01, SD = 0.87$ ). Cyber-victimization ( $M = 1.90, SD = 0.84$ ) and physical victimization ( $M = 1.88, SD = 0.76$ ) are least experienced and did not differ significantly from each other.

When scores of bullying and victimization are compared, all  $t$ -values are significant. Across all comparisons, victimization scores were higher in frequency compared to bullying scores.

Categorical groups were also derived by classifying high scorers and low scorers in both bully scores and victim scores, where high scorers score 1 SD above the mean, while low scorers scored 1 SD below the mean. Of the 876 respondents, 418 (47.7%) can be clearly categorized and classified as follows: (a) Bully - high bully and low victim scorers ( $n = 155; 17.7%$ ); (b) Victim - low bully and high victim scorers ( $n = 59; 6.7%$ ); (c) Bully-victim - high bully and high victim scorers ( $n = 104; 11.9%$ ); and (d) Uninvolved - low bully and low victim scorers ( $n = 100; 11.4%$ ). The rest of the sample ( $n = 458; 52.3%$ ) may be involved in the bullying phenomenon but do not purely belong in any of the categories.

**Qualitative results.** From the focus group discussions, the participants claimed that they have experienced the different types of bullying either as perpetrators or victims. Name-calling and teasing were most frequent which validate the greater occurrence of verbal bullying and victimization. Cyber-bullying also happened through texting, chat, and social networking sites where threats and insults are expressed. Some of these posts are intended to isolate or pick fights with someone. Experiences of social bullying were in the forms of isolating someone and bossing someone around. For physical bullying, hitting or slapping a person for no reason were cited. They also experienced being made to feel out of place in a group and being made fun of behind their backs. The respondents were also able to relate to the negative effects of bullying such as having lowered self-confidence or self-esteem and being paranoid or cautious. However, they also stated “positive” effects of bullying like becoming stronger

and braver to fight back and not allowing such treatment to ensue.

### Associations Between Parent-Child Attachment and Bullying

Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to determine the relationship of attachment styles with bullying and victimization as shown in Table 1.

Generally, a secure attachment to both parents is significantly negatively associated with bullying – whether as perpetrator, victim or bully-victim – with coefficients ranging from  $-.08$  to  $-.20$ , except for victimization and secure attachment to fathers.

Insecure attachments to both parents have generally positive relations to the bullying phenomenon, with significant coefficients

Table 1. Correlations Between Parental Attachment, Bullying, and Victimization

| Parental Attachment  | Bullying    | Victimization | Bully-victimization |
|----------------------|-------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Attachment to Father |             |               |                     |
| Secure               | $-.11^{**}$ | $-.05$        | $-.14^{**}$         |
| Avoidant-dismissing  | $.12^{**}$  | $.06$         | $.06$               |
| Preoccupied/Anxious  | $.13^{**}$  | $.12^{**}$    | $.11^{**}$          |
| Avoidant-fearful     | $.12^{**}$  | $.10^{**}$    | $.13^{**}$          |
| Attachment to Mother |             |               |                     |
| Secure               | $-.13^{**}$ | $-.08^*$      | $-.20^{**}$         |
| Avoidant-dismissing  | $.15^{**}$  | $.08^*$       | $.10^{**}$          |
| Preoccupied/Anxious  | $.13^{**}$  | $.11^{**}$    | $.11^{**}$          |
| Avoidant-fearful     | $.16^{**}$  | $.12^{**}$    | $.16^{**}$          |

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

ranging from .08 to .16. However, the relation of avoidant-dismissing attachment to father with victim and bully-victim scores were not significant.

**Predicting perpetration of bullying from parent attachment.** Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted by first entering maternal attachment scores followed by paternal attachment scores as predictors of bully, victim, and bully-victim scores. Attachment scores with nonsignificant zero-order correlations with the criterion measures were not entered into the regression equations.

The resulting model indicates a significant relationship between parent attachment and bullying  $F(8, 835) = 4.98, p < .001$ . Parent attachment accounts for a modest 4.5% of the variation in bullying scores. Maternal attachment scores accounted for 4.2% of the variation in bully scores. The addition of paternal attachment measures did not significantly contribute to the variance in bullying ( $\Delta F = 0.794, p > .05$ ) after entry of maternal attachment. Analyzing all entered variables, only avoidant-fearful attachment with mothers made a statistically significant contribution ( $\beta = .125, p < .05$ ) to the variance in bully scores.

**Predicting victimization from parent attachment.** The obtained  $F(6, 837) = 3.208, p < .01$  indicates a significant relationship between parent attachment and victimization. Parent attachment accounts for 2.2% of the variation in victim scores. Maternal attachment accounts for 2% of the variation in victim scores. The addition of paternal attachment measures did not significantly contribute to the variance after the maternal attachment scores had been entered ( $\Delta F = .910, p > .05$ ). Analyzing all entered variables, however, not one significantly predicted victimization scores.

**Predicting bullying-victimization from parent attachment.** A significant relationship between parental attachment styles and bully-victim scores was found,  $F(7, 836) = 6.373, p < .001$ . Parent attachment accounts for 5.1% of the variation in bully-victim scores. Maternal attachment already accounts for 4.9% of the variance, and the addition of paternal attachment measures did not significantly contribute to the variance ( $\Delta F = .463, p > .05$ ). Analyzing all entered variables, only secure attachment to mothers made a statistically

significant contribution ( $\beta = -.129, p < .01$ ) to the variation in bully-victim scores.

**Qualitative results.** The participants of the focus group discussion agreed that parent-child attachment influences bullying behavior. They inferred that children who have secure attachment with their parents are able to have healthy communication and support, inspiring them to behave appropriately. Insecure attachment, on the other hand, relates to lack of affection and attention. According to the students, this may lead to bullying as children will strive to gain attention through exerting power over others. An insecure parent-child attachment may also cause victimization since they would not have anyone to run to or talk to about their experiences. As opined by the respondents, this increases feelings of helplessness.

### **Associations Between Parenting Styles and Bullying**

In general, bullying is negatively related to authoritative parenting and positively related to authoritarian and permissive parenting. Being victims and bully-victims are not related to authoritative parenting but positively related to both authoritarian and permissive parenting. Correlations between parenting styles and bullying are summarized in Table 2.

**Predicting perpetration of bullying from parenting styles.** Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were computed by first entering maternal parenting style scores, followed by paternal parenting styles as predictors of bully, victim, and bully-victim scores. Parenting scores with nonsignificant zero-order correlations to the criterion measures were not entered into the regression equations.

A significant relationship was found between parenting styles and bullying,  $F(6, 835) = 13.546, p < .001$ . Parenting styles account for 8.9% of the variation in bullying scores. The mothers' parenting styles already account for 7.9% of the variation in bully scores. The addition of the fathers' parenting style still significantly contributed to the variance of bully scores ( $\Delta F = 3.069, p < .05$ ).

Analyzing all entered variables, two variables significantly predicted perpetration of bullying scores: a permissive mother ( $\beta = .115, p < .05$ ) as well as an authoritarian father ( $\beta = .099, p < .05$ ).

Table 2. Correlations of Parenting Styles With Bullying and Victimization

| Parenting Styles | Bully Scores | Victim Scores | Bully-victim Scores |
|------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Father           |              |               |                     |
| Authoritative    | -.08*        | -.03          | -.05                |
| Authoritarian    | .19**        | .19**         | .16**               |
| Permissive       | .22**        | .10**         | .18**               |
| Mother           |              |               |                     |
| Authoritative    | -.09*        | -.05          | -.06                |
| Authoritarian    | .20**        | .19**         | .16**               |
| Permissive       | .23**        | .11**         | .15**               |

Notes.  $N = 800+$ . \*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Predicting victimization from parenting styles.** A significant relationship between parenting styles and victimization scores was found  $F(4, 837) = 10.318, p < .001$ . Parenting styles account for 4.7% of the variation in victim scores. Mothers' parenting styles account for 4% of the variation in victim scores. The addition of the fathers' parenting style also significantly contributed to the variance of victim scores ( $\Delta F = 3.226, p < .05$ ). Analyzing all entered variables, having an authoritarian father ( $\beta = .117, p < .05$ ) significantly predicted victimization.

**Predicting bullying-victimization from parenting styles.** A significant relationship between parenting styles and bully-victim scores was found,  $F(4, 837) = 11.858, p < .001$ . Parenting styles account for 5.4% of the variation in bully-victim scores. Mothers' parenting styles already account for 4.2% of the variation in bully-victim scores. The addition of the fathers' parenting still significantly contributed to the variance in the outcome ( $\Delta F = 5.343, p < .01$ ). Analyzing all entered



variables, having a permissive father ( $\beta = .142, p < .01$ ) significantly predicted bully-victim scores.

**Qualitative results.** The perceptions of the focus group participants were noted and they believed that parenting influences bullying and victimization. According to them, overprotective parents who are too caring and pampering may turn their children into victims because they are not trained to be independent. When bullied, they may be unable to defend themselves. Permissive parents, on the other hand, may raise children who become bullies because they do not mind the behaviors of their children. These parents fail to provide the needed guidance and rules; hence, children are unaware of their wrong behavior. The participants also mentioned that fathers who tend to encourage masculinity in their sons (*maggakalalaki ka*) by telling them to fight back or to vindicate bullying behavior. Also, mothers who tend to nag may cause children to express their frustrations on other people through bullying.

### **Gender Differences**

All mean differences in bullying, victimization, and bully-victimization in terms of gender are significant. Males are more involved as bullies ( $t = 4.166, p < .001$ ), victims ( $t = 2.805, p < .01$ ), and bully-victims ( $t = 6.002, p < .001$ ), compared to females. Specifically, males more often perpetrate bullying physically ( $t = 5.813, p < .001$ ) and verbally ( $t = 5.342, p < .001$ ) compared to females. They also report higher physical ( $t = 6.976, p < .001$ ) and verbal victimization ( $t = 4.317, p < .001$ ) than females. No difference between gender was found for social bullying ( $t = 1.030, p > .05$ ), cyber-bullying ( $t = 0.883, p > .05$ ), and cyber-victimization ( $t = -0.442, p > .05$ ).

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The Nature of the Bullying Phenomenon**

Although the majority of high school students in Baguio City have experienced being bullied and/or victimized at one time or another, these are generally rarely experienced. When they do

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of Males and Females on Bully, Victim, and Bully-victim Scores

| Scales                        | Gender  | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|-------------------------------|---------|----------|-----------|
| Bullying Scores - Full Scale* | Males   | 1.96     | .70       |
|                               | Females | 1.78     | .56       |
| Verbal*                       | Males   | 2.53     | .99       |
|                               | Females | 2.20     | .86       |
| Physical*                     | Males   | 1.80     | .80       |
|                               | Females | 1.52     | .63       |
| Social                        | Males   | 1.70     | .73       |
|                               | Females | 1.65     | .60       |
| Cyber-bullying                | Males   | 1.76     | .81       |
|                               | Females | 1.71     | .73       |
| Victim Scores – Full Scale*   | Males   | 2.17     | .77       |
|                               | Females | 2.04     | .69       |
| Verbal*                       | Males   | 2.65     | 1.02      |
|                               | Females | 2.38     | .90       |
| Physical*                     | Males   | 2.07     | .87       |
|                               | Females | 1.72     | .62       |
| Social                        | Males   | 1.99     | .86       |
|                               | Females | 2.03     | .89       |
| Cyber-victimization           | Males   | 1.89     | .88       |
|                               | Females | 1.91     | .80       |
| Bully-Victim Scores*          | Males   | 1.92     | .94       |
|                               | Females | 1.59     | .70       |

Notes. Males  $n = 398$ ; females  $n = 478$ . \*Male scores are significantly higher than female scores,  $p < .05$ .

happen, however, verbal bullying and verbal victimization are most frequently experienced, while the physical type is least experienced. Teasing, ridiculing, cursing, and calling people names may be easily uttered and becomes a habitual or normal way of talking. Among high school students, it may become a part of their regular jesting, which they consider as fun. Students may claim that they were just joking or *nagbibiruan lang*.

Responses obtained from the focus group discussions are consistent with quantitative findings, where verbal bullying is most frequently experienced. Physical bullying is very rarely engaged in as one could be punished when caught. Verbal bullying is the easiest and “safest” way to attack someone. One of the most common ways to exhibit verbal bullying is through teasing. According to Kowalski (2000), perpetrators found the incident to be more humorous and did not perceive the teasing encounters to be particularly annoying; however, victims reported to being very annoyed by them. While some people enjoy a good laugh when they are teased, others feel humiliated, rejected, and excluded. Similarly, verbal bullying, with teasing as prevalent, has been reported as common in other researches (Healey, Dowson, & Nelson, n.d.; Sarazen, 2002). Patchin and Hinduja (2011) believed that such forms of bullying provide a sense of power and superiority. Adolescents who wish to ameliorate certain negative feelings might engage in this behavior to improve the way they feel about themselves. This resonates as well to the thoughts of the focus group participants of this research. They attribute jealousy, attention-seeking, insecurity and entertainment as motives for bullying.

There is greater awareness on being a victim as compared to being a bully. High school students tend to immediately feel the impact of victimization than to acknowledge that they might have bullied someone. It is possible that those who bully are unaware that their behaviors are hurtful because they regard their actions as normal or *just for fun*. On the other hand, being a victim can undermine self-esteem and the negative impact and hurtful experience could not easily be ignored.

A discrepancy was observed between cyber- and social bullying in terms of bullying and victimization. Cyber-bullying is reportedly perpetrated more frequently than social bullying. The trend is reversed

for victimization, where social victimization is experienced more frequently than cyber-victimization. Possibly, those who commit cyber-bullying may be more aware of their actions and have greater intention to hurt. For social bullying, on the other hand, perpetrators may not be conscious that their actions are making others feel isolated. In contrast, victims feel the impact of being socially bullied more frequently than being cyber-bullied. Among young teenagers, feeling integrated in their peer groups is an important life task. As such, the emotional hurt caused by social bullying has a personal and immediate impact. This is in line with the findings of Juvonen, Graham, and Schuster (2003) that groups of teens who report elevated psychological distress are the same ones whom others report as having trouble fitting in or being accepted by their peers. To address this, high school students could protect themselves from the pain of cyber-bullying by changing one's contacts, blocking others, or deleting hurting messages.

### **Parent-Child Relations and the Bullying Phenomenon**

**Parent-child attachment.** Parent attachment significantly relates to the bullying phenomenon, although relations are generally low or weak. Its contribution to the variation in bully and bully-victim scores is relatively higher compared to victim scores. Generally, secure parental attachments are associated with lower involvement in this phenomenon either as bully, victim, or bully-victim. Conversely, insecure attachments to parents are associated with higher involvement in the bullying phenomenon.

More specifically, having an avoidant-fearful attachment with mothers is predictive of bullying behavior. In this study, the relational dynamics of likely bullies towards their mothers is one in which they tend to avoid emotional closeness with their mothers because they fear that they would get hurt. There seems to be mistrust on the dependability of mothers. On the other hand, the extent of secure attachment to mothers is linked to being a bully-victim where bully-victims are less likely to feel emotionally close to their mothers. This study supports the findings presented earlier (Eliot & Cornell, 2009; Walden & Beran, 2010) linking parent-attachment quality with bullying and victimization. Considering Bowlby's theory, an internal

working model developed from an insecure parental attachment would subsequently influence future relationships. In this research, the processes involved in bullying and bully-victimization may be still be attributed to those mentioned as related to insecure attachment in earlier findings, including feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem (Georgiou & Stavriniades, 2008), and aggressive attitudes (Eliot & Cornell, 2009). The qualitative results also point to attention-seeking behaviors as a result of lack of affection and attention. It appears that insecure attachment patterns tend to engender these negative feelings and thoughts, increasing the risk of being bullies or victims.

**Parenting styles.** Permissive mothers allow their children much freedom but lack behavioral monitoring, control, and discipline. The focus group participants raised this observation that permissiveness may raise children who become bullies. The researchers infer that when permissive parents fail to provide the needed guidance and rules, children become unaware of their wrong behavior. Because they are not encouraged to obey externally defined standards, they may not be able to acknowledge the rights of others. Authoritarian fathers, who display punitive disciplinary sanctions, may also model aggressive behaviors that children could identify with, increasing the risk of bullying behaviors.

The quantitative and qualitative results on what accounts for victimization are contrasting. Whereas the focus group participants believe that parents who are overprotective and too caring may cause their children to become victims of bullying as they end up being unable to defend themselves and lacking independence, the quantitative results relate victimization to having authoritarian fathers. In either case, it may be that children who have not been given opportunities for autonomy, either because parents did everything for them or because parents discouraged self-expression by demanding absolute obedience, may end up being unable to stand up for themselves.

The tendency for bully-victimization is related to having permissive fathers. Olweus (1994) described this group as one where anxious and aggressive patterns combine. Also referred to as provocative victims, they do not withdraw when attacked. Instead, they usually choose to retaliate with violence that is reactive rather than proactive in nature (Parault et al., 2007). Exposure to extreme parenting styles may make

children unable to cope with the negative feelings associated with being victimized, hence, opting for vengeance. Bullying, as a way of getting back, may also be a form of restoring a sense of power that was diminished as a result of victimization. Among the focus group participants, it was mentioned several times that students bully because “it is better to bully than to be victimized.”

The benefit of a warm connection to both parents, free from anxiety or fear, and receiving positive or authoritative parenting, may protect young people from engaging in bullying or bully-victimization. However, it was observed in this study that even positive conditions such as secure attachment to fathers and authoritative parenting do not necessarily guarantee protection from victimization.

**Gender differences.** The results show that males are more involved in bullying as bullies, victims, and bully-victims compared to females. Consistent with the findings of Olweus (1994) that bullying by physical means was more common among boys, this study found that boys are often victims and perpetrators of direct bullying in verbal and physical forms. However, boys and girls reported experiencing social and cyber-bullying equally. Both genders would equally engage in these more subtle and indirect forms of bullying and victimization. This validates the study of Lansford and colleagues (2012) in the Philippines that boys engage in physical aggression more than girls but are not significantly different from girls in relational aggression.

Girls have stronger orientation to interpersonal affiliation and affection (e.g., feeling included in the friendship group) than boys (Kowalski, 2000; Pronk & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2010). In contrast, boys are described as more oriented toward social hierarchy factors (e.g., being admired by the broader peer group) than girls. As such, this tendency of females to value social relationships may explain why they are less involved in bullying compared to males. However, when they do get involved as bullies or victims, more likely it will be indirect and more social in nature.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study primarily used regression analysis and focus group discussions; thus, variables may only be discussed in terms of relations

and not causation. Because of low correlation values, the influence of attachment and parenting styles on bullying cannot be overestimated. However, the researchers cannot also discount the involvement of these parental factors on bullying due to the significant, albeit weak, findings, as well as the information gathered from earlier studies and the qualitative data. For future studies in this area, it would be good to consider a phenomenological approach using case studies with a more purposive sample of students identified as bullies, victims, and bully-victims. A longitudinal approach is also ideal where the impact of attachment and parenting styles on subsequent bullying and victimization can be determined. If the same measures will be applied, it is recommended to obtain parent reports separately from child reports or to conduct structural equation modeling to control for shared method variance.

This study provides evidence for the association between parenting and the development of individual behaviors. Having a secure emotional relationship with parents is associated with lower likelihood of being involved in the bullying phenomenon. It is therefore important for parents to develop such a secure emotional bond with their children. A loving and secure connection with parents would likely engender positive internal working models in children, reducing their risk of involvement in bullying. Concretely, it is recommended that when relating to their children, parents should listen to them, allow them to express their viewpoints, and stay emotionally connected to them.

The participants of the focus group discussion also shared their ideas on preventing bullying. Most of these pertain to the role of parents and may serve as practical guide. These are: a) avoiding favoritism among children; b) having healthy and open communication; c) setting rules and providing reasonable guidelines for children's behavior; d) providing support and guidance that goes beyond material provisions; e) attaining balance by not being too strict nor too permissive; f) having family bonding time; and g) being supportive especially in times of distress.

It is also vital to teach children to solve relational conflicts proactively and the importance of knowing their limits as a prerequisite for respecting others' rights. An analysis made on

different studies of bullying (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005) presented maladaptive family backgrounds among those involved in bullying. In the analysis, favorable outcomes result from having consistent discipline, modeling effective conflict resolution skills and effective parental practices involving monitoring, recognition, and punishment of deviant behaviors. Overall, parenting practices are hypothesized to have a significant effect on an individual's self-control (Moon, Hwang, & McCluskey, 2008).

In this study, even the positive conditions of secure attachment and authoritative parenting do not necessarily protect from victimization. As such, assertiveness training can be suggested to victims and bully-victims so that they can cope and defend themselves from bullies in a proactive manner. Student-oriented programs, especially those that can be offered by the school guidance counselors, may include parents' orientation on effective parenting, assertiveness training among the students, and a strong anti-bullying policy campaign. It is recommended that the campaign on anti-bullying would include information to increase personal awareness of one's behavior towards others, the behaviors that comprise bullying, and more specific strategies of seeking help when victimized.

#### AUTHORS NOTES

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