UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

PARENTAL ATTACHMENT AND CYBERBULLYING AMONG MALAYSIAN CHILDREN

SARINA BINTI YUSUP

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**PARENTAL ATTACHMENT AND CYBERBULLYING
AMONG MALAYSIAN CHILDREN**

By

SARINA BINTI YUSUP

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science**

June 2015

بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

This thesis is humbly dedicated to my dearest mother and in the loving memory of my respected father; to my beloved husband and my beautiful toddlers, for without their inspiration, encouragement and invaluable support, none of this would have happened.

DEDICATION

Mom, thank you for giving birth to me, caring for me and raising me with great patience and affection. I can barely find the correct words to express my thanks for all the sacrifices you have made for me, and for which I am truly grateful. I Love You Mom!

Dad, I have always looked up to you: you are my inspiration, and you are my role model. I want to be like you: never giving up, optimistic and very positive. I promise, no matter what happens, I will never give up in life. I love you and miss you immensely. May ALLAH forgive your sins and grant you jannah, Amin.

To my husband, Luqman Hykim, for your unalloyed support and enthusiastic encouragement in the ten wonderful years we have been together. I am so thankful that I have you in my corner pushing me when I am ready to give up. You are my Hero and my BFF! Thank you once again for not only believing in me but also cheering me on into believing that I could finish this, and move forward to achieve more. Love you always and forever!

To my son, Adam Mikhael and my daughter, Eva Medina: Both of you are the best things that have ever happened in my life. Thank you for welcoming me into the wondrous world of motherhood that I had not had any idea of, yet I am so blessed to spend every moment with both of you and I would not change that for the world. Mommy loves you more than you will ever know!

This study examined the relationships between parental attachment towards children and cyberbullying among Malaysian schoolchildren. Despite the increase in the number of cyberbullying cases among children in Malaysia, few empirical studies had been conducted to investigate the effects of the phenomenon, especially on the relationships between cyberbullying and parental attachment. This study adopted the attachment theory perspectives, and it suggests that lack of emotional security by parents towards their children could negatively affect the children's behavior. This implies that the affected children could become vulnerable to cyberbullying incidents. This study also integrated gender in the conceptual framework as a moderator variable since child's gender plays significant roles in parent-child's relationship.

The outcomes of this study revealed that parents and children acknowledged that the frequency of Internet usage among the children was high. However, concerning the level of cyberbullying among the children, the results indicated that majority of them reported having never experienced cyberbullying. Moreover, the hypotheses of the study were tested using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) AMOS software and the results revealed that alienation of parental attachment (β = .231, p = .001) was more reliable predictor for cyberbullying than communication and trust of parental attachment were. In addition, values of the test of the moderating variable (β = .104, p = .009) confirmed the presence of moderating effects. However, those effects were found to affect the female child only (because of her gender).

This study concluded that child-parent relationships could influence the level of cyberbullying experience that might affect a particular child. Therefore, this study recommended that stakeholders should collaborate by pulling resources together to develop comprehensive cyberbullying measurement scales suitable for Malaysian society with the primary aim of controlling if not preventing the phenomenon from becoming worse cyber nightmare to the young persons.

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master of Science

PARENTAL ATTACHMENT AND CYBERBULLYING AMONG MALAYSIAN CHILDREN

By

SARINA BINTI YUSUF
June 2015

Chairperson: **Professor Md. Salleh Hj. Hassan (PhD)**
Faculty: **Modern Languages and Communication**

This study examined the relationships between parental attachment towards children and cyberbullying (an online risky behavior) among Malaysian schoolchildren as moderated by gender. Specifically, this study was conducted with the aim of achieving five objectives namely i) to identify the patterns of Internet usage among Malaysian children; ii) to identify the level of parental attachment (i.e. communication, trust and alienation) between Malaysian children and parents; iii) to identify the level of cyberbullying experience among the children; iv) to determine the relationships between parental attachment (i.e. communication, trust and alienation) and cyberbullying among the children; and v) to test the moderating effects of gender on the relationships between parental attachment (i.e. communication, trust and alienation) and cyberbullying among Malaysian children.

Despite the increase in the number of cyberbullying cases among children in Malaysia, few empirical studies had been conducted to investigate the effects of the phenomenon, especially on the relationships between cyberbullying and parental attachment. Some of those problems prompted this study. Therefore, the researcher designed a structured survey instrument and self-administered it to a sample of 375 schoolchildren and either one of their parents was selected using the stratified sampling method. The ages of the respondents ranged from 9 to 16 years old. Moreover, the schoolchildren's age and school category formed the primary basis (criteria) for drawing the sample of both the subjects of and locations to conduct the study. This study was conducted in two pairs of primary and secondary schools at Sepang and Gombak districts in Selangor state. The data were analyzed using SPSS version 22 and SEM-Amos version 22 softwares.

This study adopted the attachment theory perspectives, and it suggests that lack of emotional security by parents towards their children could negatively affect the children's behavior. This implies that the affected children could become vulnerable to cyberbullying incidents. Thus, the dependent variable of the study was cyberbullying, and it was measured based on the two sub-scales of the (cyberbullying) variable using 10 items. The two sub-scales were online harassment and sexually based bullying. Furthermore, to evaluate the convergent validity of the perceptual measurements,

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Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) tests were run using AMOS software. The values of regression coefficient (r = .60 to .83) and Goodness-of-fit (GOF) indices showed that each of the item in the cyberbullying construct were related to each other and measured the construct ideally.

Meanwhile, the independent variables of the study consisted of parental attachment constructs, namely communication, trust and alienation (developed by Armsden and Greenberg, 1987), were hypothesized to have significant effects on cyberbullying incidents among the children. Importantly, this study integrated gender in the conceptual framework as a moderator variable because previous studies have suggested that a child's gender plays significant roles in parent-child's relationships, in this case cyberbullying.

The outcomes of this study revealed that parents and children acknowledged that the frequency of Internet usage among the children was high. However, concerning the level of cyberbullying among the children, the results indicated that majority of them reported having never experienced cyberbullying. Moreover, the hypotheses of the study were tested using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) AMOS software and the results revealed that alienation of parental attachment (β = .231, p = .001) was more reliable predictor for cyberbullying than communication and trust of parental attachment were.

In addition, values of the test of the moderating variable (β = .104, p = .009) confirmed the presence of moderating effects. Hence, moderating path results indicated a strong presence of moderating effects by female gender on the relationships between alienation of parental attachment and cyberbullying. Whereas, the moderating effects were not detected in communication and trust of parental attachment constructs. This study also found that insecure attachment that children often experienced because of their parents' alienation towards them usually led to circumstances that culminated in the intensification of the effects of cyberbullying in which they (the children) had been involved. However, those effects were found to affect the female child only (because of her gender).

This study concluded that child-parent relationships could influence the level of cyberbullying experience that might affect a particular child. Therefore, this study recommended that stakeholders should collaborate by pulling resources together to develop comprehensive cyberbullying measurement scales suitable for Malaysian society with the primary aim of controlling if not preventing the phenomenon from becoming worse cyber nightmare to the young persons.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

KEAKRABAN KEIBUBAPAAN DENGAN *CYBERBULLYING* DI KALANGAN KANAK-KANAK MALAYSIA

Oleh

SARINA BINTI YUSUF
June 2015

Pengerusi: **Profesor Md. Salleh Hj. Hassan (PhD)**
Fakulti: **Bahasa Moden dan Komunikasi**

Kajian ini mengkaji hubungan antara keakraban keibubapaan terhadap *cyberbullying* (tingkahlaku berisiko atas talian) dalam kalangan kanak-kanak di Malaysia yang bersekolah dan jantina mereka sebagai pembolehbah penyederhanaan. Secara khususnya, kajian ini dijalankan bagi mencapai lima objektif, iaitu; i) mengenalpasti corak penggunaan Internet dalam kalangan kanak-kanak Malaysia; ii) mengenalpasti tahap keakraban keibubapaan (iaitu komunikasi, kepercayaan dan pengasingan) antara persepsi anak dan ibubapa; iii) mengenalpasti tahap pengalaman *cyberbullying* dalam kalangan kanak-kanak; iv) menentukan hubungan antara keakraban keibubapaan (iaitu komunikasi, kepercayaan dan pengasingan) dan *cyberbullying* dalam kalangan kanak-kanak; dan v) untuk menguji kesan penyerderhanaan jantina ke atas hubungan antara keakraban keibubapaan (iaitu komunikasi, kepercayaan dan pengasingan) dan *cyberbullying* dalam kalangan kanak-kanak di Malaysia.

Walaupun bilangan kes-kes *cyberbullying* dan tingkahlaku berisiko atas talian yang lain dalam kalangan kanak-kanak semakin meningkat di Malaysia, hanya beberapa kajian empirikal telah dijalankan untuk mengenalpasti kesan-kesan daripada fenomena tersebut. Oleh itu, penyelidik telah mereka satu instrumen kajian iaitu borang soal-selidik ke atas 375 sampel kanak-kanak bersekolah dan salah seorang ibu bapa mereka dengan menggunakan kaedah pensampelan berstrata. Responden yang terlibat berumur antara 9 hingga 16 tahun yang terdiri daripada murid sekolah rendah dan pelajar sekolah menengah di daerah Sepang dan Gombak, negeri Selangor. Data dianalisis dengan menggunakan perisian SPSS versi 22 dan perisian SEM-Amos versi 22.

Kajian ini mengguna pakai perspektif teori keakraban yang menunjukkan jika berlaku kekurangan perasaan selamat daripada ibu bapa akan memberi kesan negatif kepada tingkah laku kanak-kanak. Ini menyebabkan kanak-kanak yang terjejas akan terdedah kepada insiden *cyberbullying*. Oleh itu, pembolehubah bersandar kajian ini ialah *cyberbullying* yang terdiri daripada dua sub-skala menggunakan 10 item. Sub-skala tersebut ialah gangguan atas talian dan buli berasaskan seksual. Untuk mengesahkan kesahihan sub-skala tersebut, ujian pengesahan analisis faktor (CFA) dijalankan menggunakan perisian Amos. Nilai pekali regresi (r = 0,60-0,83) dan indeks Goodness-

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-of-fit (GOF) menunjukkan setiap item dalam konstruk *cyberbullying* adalah berkaitan dan mengukur konstruk tersebut dengan ideal.

Sementara itu, pembolehubah bebas kajian ini ialah keakraban keibubapaan yang terdiri daripada tiga sub-skala iaitu, komunikasi, kepercayaan dan pengasingan (dibina oleh Armsden dan Greenberg, 1987) yang telah dihipotesis mempunyai kesan yang signifikan ke atas insiden *cyberbullying* dalam kalangan kanak-kanak. Pentingnya, kajian ini mengintergrasikan jantina kanak-kanak sebagai pembolehubah penyederhana di dalam rangka kerja konsep, ini kerana kajian lepas mencadangkan bahawa jantina kanak-kanak memainkan peranan yang penting dalam hubungan ibu bapa-anak-anak dan *cyberbullying*.

Hasil daripada kajian ini mendedahkan bahawa ibu bapa dan anak-anak mengetahui pengunaan Internet dalam kalangan kanak-kanak adalah tinggi. Walaubagaimanapun, tahap *cyberbullying* menunjukkan majoriti daripada kanak-kanak melaporkan tidak pernah mengalami *cyberbullying*. Selanjutnya, hipotesis-hipotesis yang diuji dengan perisian SEM-Amos mendedahkan pengasingan keakraban keibubapaan (β = .231, p = .001) merupakan peramal yang lebih dipercayai berbanding dengan komunikasi dan kepercayaan keakraban keibubapaan.

Disamping itu juga, ujian ke atas pembolehubah penyederhanaan (β = .104, p = .009) mengesahkan kehadiran kesan penyederhanaan yang kuat oleh jantina kanak-kanak perempuan ke atas hubungan antara pengasingan keakraban keibubapaan dan *cyberbullying*. Manakala, kesan penyederhanaan tersebut tidak dapat dikesan dalam konstrak komunikasi dan kepercayaan keakraban keibubapaan. Kajian ini juga mendapati keakraban yang tidak selamat yang dirasai oleh kanak-kanak disebabkan pengasingan daripada ibu bapa kebiasaanya akan lebih menggalakkan mereka terlibat dengan cyberbullying. Walau bagaimanapun, kesan tersebut didapati hanya berlaku ke atas kanak-kanak perempuan (kerana jantinanya).

Kajian ini merumuskan bahawa hubungan ibu bapa dan anak boleh mempengaruhi tahap pengalaman cyberbullying yang mampu memberi kesan kepada kanak-kanak yang terlibat. Oleh itu, kajian ini mencadangkan agar pihak berkepentingan bersama-sama menggunapakai sumber-sumber yang ada di dalam membangunkan satu skala pengukuran cyberbullying yang komprehensif bersesuaian dengan masyarakat di Malaysia, dengan matlamat utama iaitu untuk mencegah daripada mengubati insiden cyberbullying sebelum menjadi igauan buruk remaja dan belia.

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In addition, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to the persons that have taken me to the completely new level in my academic pursuits: Azlina Daud and Misha Teimouri. Both of them have been the sister figures whom anyone could ever ask for, and I am sure I am very lucky that I have been given the opportunity to know them and work with them. Thank you for the relentless efforts in guiding me through the conception, research and writing of this thesis. These were the most precious and valuable moments that I will never forget. Without the both of you, this thesis would not have been possible.

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Last but very far from being the least, to my family and my family in-laws I am forever grateful to you for your understanding, kindness, relentless support and love throughout my academic trajectory. Again, I am blessed to have you all in my life. I believe, this is not the last accomplishment of mine as it is only the beginning.

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 19 June 2015 to conduct the final examination of Sarina binti Yusup on her thesis entitled "Parental Attachment and Cyberbullying among Malaysian Children" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the degree of Master of Science.

Members of the Thesis Examination Committee were as follows:

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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Declaration by Graduate Student

I hereby confirm that:

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Declaration by Members of Supervisory Committee

This is to confirm that:

- the research conducted and the writing of this thesis was under our supervision;
- supervision responsibilities as stated in the Universiti Putra Malaysia (Graduate Studies) Rules 2003 (Revision 2012-2013) are adhered to.

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Committee: _____   Committee: _____

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABA	Anti-Bullying Alliance
AMOS	Analysis of Moment Structures
ALP	American Life Project
AGFI	Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index
AFI	Absolute Fit Index
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CDC	Center for Disease Control and Prevention
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CMC	Computer-Mediated Communication
CMIN	Value of Chi-Square
CR	Construct Reliability
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
Df	Degree of Freedom
DNA	Digital News Asia
EDA	Exploratory Data Analysis
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EUKids	European Union Kids
GFI	Goodness of Fit Index
GOF	Goodness Of Fit
IAT	Internet Addiction Test
IFI	Incremental Fit Index
IPPA	Inventory of Parents and Peers Attachment
ICT	Internet and Communication Technology
MCMC	Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission
MSN	Microsoft System Network
NFI	Normed Fit Index
NGO	Non-Government Organization
OCR	Office for Civil Rights
OFCOM	Office of Communication
PI	Pew Internet
PMR	*Penilaian Menengah Rendah* (Lower Secondary Assesment)
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
S.E	Standard Error
SD	Standard Deviation
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SES	Social-Economic Status
SK	*Sekolah Kebangsaan* (National Primary School)
SMK	*Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan* (National Secondary School)
SPM	*Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (Malaysia Education Certificate)
SPSS	Social Package for Social Science
STPM	*Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia* (Malaysia Highest-Edu Cert)
TLI	Tucker-Lewis Index
TV	Television
UK	United Kingdom
UNICEFF	The United Nations Children's Fund

UPSR	*Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah* (Lower Assessment Test)
USA	United States of America
WHO	World Health Organization
WIFI	Wireless Fidelity
YISS	Youth Internet Safety Survey

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Ever since the evolution of the Internet technology in the mid-1990s, people have believed that the Internet is the most influential technological development in this era compared the traditional media. According to Dholakia, Dholakia, and Kshetri, (2004), the Internet took only three years to reach 50 million users around the world compared to the 13 years taken by the radio and 38 years by the television. As a result, the Internet has experienced exceptional changes in terms of its scapacity and number of users over those years. Approximately 2.9 billion people all over the world have access to the Internet, representing around 41% of the world population, and this number continues to increase (Kenda, 2014).

Since the Internet is rapidly becoming a medium for people to facilitate their day-to-day activities like searching for information, communicating and entertainment (University Southern California, Annenberg School Center for the Digital Future, 2008), it has certainly provided enormous benefits and advantages to the people (Lenhart, Madden & Hitlin, 2005). A meta-analysis study by Guan and Subrahmanyam (2009) has verified that the Internet is a useful tool for promoting youth cognitive, social and physical development.

Results of many previous studies also have highlighted that the Internet offers various online opportunities to users, for example children, and that the Internet possesses great potential to assist their education process, improving their personal life and providing health information. In addition, scholars have emphasized the great utility of the Internet in successfully raising awareness regarding health issues, enhancing social relationships, maintaining community links among the young people, and numerous other benefits (Barak & Sadovsky, 2008; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Flicker, Maley & Ridgley, 2008).

Despite the positive effects brought by the Internet, it is undeniable that negative effects accompany it as well. In today's world, children are increasingly using the Internet at younger ages, through diverse platforms and devices (Livingstone, 2012). According to Pew Internet and American Life Project (PI & ALP, 2013), 95% of young adults aged 18 to 29 have easy access almost anywhere to the Internet via high-speed broadband and smartphones (Zickuhr & Smith, 2013). According to them, this scenario has led us to the harsh reality of the Internet norms these days that not all of this access is benign or positive, particularly for children below the age of 18 years old.

A recent survey on the Internet indicates that more than 90% of children in a range of the ages 12 to 14 years old make intensive use of the communication functions of the Internet (World Internet Project, 2013). Another study in the Netherlands has found that children within that age range were using the Internet as their most popular leisure-time

activities, spending about 15 hours per week on their online media consumption (Van den Eijnden, Spijkerman, Vermulst, Van Rooij & Engels, 2010).

Furthermore, different (international) studies conducted in the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Canada have found that children in those countries use the Internet extensively, spending more than 20 hours per week online (USC ASCDF, 2005; Livingstone, et al., 2005; Zamaria & Fletcher, 2007). Meanwhile in Malaysia, according to Norton Family Report (2010), 90% of children spend an average of 19 hours per week online. According to the report, the rising popularity of the new media and the increasing amount of time that children spend online poses great challenges to parents or guardians who want to protect their children from the threats and harms of the Internet.

Parents all over the world consider these development as worrying and sometimes even disturbing. As children have noticeably poor impulse control, once they become deeply engrossed with the Internet, most of the time they are incapable of controlling their obsessions (Sorbring, 2012; Van der, et al., 2010; Livingstone & Bober, 2004). Incidents of the formidable negative consequences of the Internet have raised concerns and among societies - new technological developments offer the possibility of new dangers and threats (Byun, Ruffini, Mills, Douglas, Niang, Stepchenkova, Lee, Loutfi, Lee, Atallah & Blanton, 2009).

A study conducted in Malaysia on the Internet addiction of Malaysian children has reported that the drastic increase of Internet usage is associated with an increase of incidents related to online risks, leading to threats such as academic failure, depression, pornography, Internet addiction, as well as suicide (Soh, 2010). In addition, Ktoridou, Eteokleous and Zahariadou (2012) have reported that some of the most infamous and frequently occurring Internet threats inimical to children are pornography, cyberbullying, exposure to sexual predators, grooming, money laundering, phishing, unsafe downloads and viruses. However, the study has specifically singled out online harassment as the online threat most likely to occur among children. Lenhart (2009) statistically showed that one in three teenagers aged 12 to 17 years old have experienced online harassment, while girls are more likely to be victims of cyberbullying (38 % of girls and 26% of boys).

Since children can develop overly strong attachments to the Internet, to the extent of distressing their parents most of the time, (Van den Eijnden, Spijkerman, Vermulst, Van Rooij, & Engels, 2010), numerous studies have been conducted to tackle those issues, proposing and examining various factors and indicators. However, most of the studies have focused on teenage online activities, examining their preferences for entertainment and social networking (Neging, Musa & Abdul Wahab, 2013), the risks and opportunities (Guan & Subrahmanyam, 2009) as well as the parental mediation (Livingstone, 2005). The current study seeks to understand the role played by parents in relation to their children's risky behaviors online. Consequently, it is necessary to have a systematic study for a better understanding of online threats among children, particularly in Malaysian cultures. The findings of this study can be a useful tool to mitigate the negative effects of the Internet.

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Statement of the Research Problem

Undoubtedly, technology has been integral to the lives of young people all around the world (Guan & Subrahmanyam, 2009). A World Internet Project (2013) survey has revealed that more than 90% of children aged 12 to 14 years old in South Africa, United States, Canada, Sweden and Taiwan have used the Internet excessively. As reported by the latest PI and ALP (2013) children are using the Internet extensively for online media communication, which are Facebook (95%) and other social network (81%).

According to a recent study by EU Kids Online, children are going online at a tender age of 0 to 8 years old, and as they are severely lacking in technical, critical and social skills, they would certainly be vulnerable to the darker side of the Internet and easily exploited by its greater threats (Holloway, Green & Livingstone, 2013). There are many contributing reasons and factors involved. It is easy to bear in mind the role of parent in gift giving. Parents today frequently present their children with tablets and smartphones as gift; equivalent to how previous generations gave their children toys as present. This has naturally resulted in early Internet usage.

As they develop, children easily grow extremely attached to what they play with, just like any other toy. 'Unfortunately' many of those electronic mobile devices given to the children as gift are the 'inevitable' avenues to accessing the Internet. Consequently, it can be argued that it is inevitable that children become extremely attached to the Internet (Findhal, 2013). To make things worse for them, high speed Wi-Fi can be found almost anywhere; electronic devices are easily accessible with a variety of choices at affordable costs. The whole situation is exacerbated by the borderless Internet, permitting children to get online access almost anywhere, any time and at a tender age (Wong, 2011).

As reported by the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC, 2012), 64% (18.6 million) of inhabitants in Malaysia use the Internet almost every day. More than 1.3 billion websites were visited, with an average of 1.7 website per day (Bernama, 2012). Therefore, according to Soh (2011), most Malaysians depend on the new media technology for various online activities, such as e-mailing, online shopping, online gaming, online chatting and many more. These facts have shown that most of the Internet users in Malaysia are technologically savvy, both comparable and consistent with the global trends (Bernama, 2011).

However, the Norton Online Family Report (2010) has released quite disturbing statistics on the pattern of Malaysian children's Internet usage. Nine out of ten children have spent an average of 19 hours per week online, and 65% of those children think they are spending too much time on the Internet. Further aggravating the situation, those children have reported that while surfing online, they were frequently exposed to harmful online experiences, including being approached by strangers, being bullied online (cyberbullying) and being exposed to unwanted sexual solicitations.

Furthermore, according to a report by the Ministry of Health Malaysia, children who were affected by negative experiences while online suffered a high level of depression, anxiety and trauma, in addition they tend to spend too much time using the Internet (The

Sun, 2012). This is in line with international findings from Taiwan, Spain and Netherlands. Researchers from these countries have found that due to the long hours spent online, children might suffer from psychopathology disorder (Hwang, 2007), or a significant decrease in their academic performance (Munoz-Rivas, Fernandez & Gamez-Guadix, 2010), and the general development and encouragement of aggressive behaviour (Lemmens, Valkenburg & Peter, 2011).

The primary threat of online risk behavior among children in Malaysia nowadays is online harassment (Bernama, 2012). Wolak, Mitchell and Finkelhor (2006) have defined online harassment as "threats or other offensive behavior sent online to the youth or posted online about the youth for others to see". According to Patchin and Hinduja (2006), the most common forms of online harassment are cyberbullying, defined as "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text".

Over the past half a decade, several cyberbullying incidents have occurred in Malaysia, which were reported in the international and local news. According to DNA (Digital News Asia, 2012), a survey conducted by Microsoft Malaysia has reported that 1 in 3 Malaysian children are victims of cyberbullying. McKenna (2010) in the Reader's Digest magazine has stated that in Malaysia, 60 cases of cyberbullying were reported to CyberSecurity Malaysia at the end of 2007. There were 2,123 cases of cyber-crime including cyberbullying in 2008. By 2010, the figures had gone up to 8,090 cases reported to Cybersecurity Malaysia. In another one year, they had increased to 15,218 reports (New Straits Times, 2012). Thus, it is crucial for parents these days to get involved, to understand what their children do online, and to engage them in many ways to keep their children safe from online harm.

Despite the risks and the consequences, Malaysian parents have a range of different reactions to their children's online activities and behaviors, and only four out of 10 parents know what their children are doing and what they are accessing during online (Ismail, 2011). Although parents in Malaysia think that they are aware of the online activities of their children, and the dangers that they might encounter, still there is a gap between what they think they know their children are doing while online and what actually their children are doing (Norton, 2010).

Likewise, the same survey by Norton (2010) has found that 92% of parents have said that they have established rules for their children's online activity. In contrast, 34% of children say their parents have not set any rules. Additionally, the survey has found that while 25% of children think their parents have no idea what they do online, only 3% of parents admit to being unaware of their children's online activities. It clearly shows that children and parents in Malaysia were not on the same page regarding the Internet usage activities.

Furthermore, empirical evidence has shown that children with close ties to their parents will be more independent, confident and unlikely to be engaged in aggressive behaviors (Steinberg, 2001; Claes, Lacourse, Ercolani, Pierro, Leone, & Presaghi, 2005). Besides the close relationship, Ainsworth (1989) has stressed that it is very important for parents

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to provide a secure foundation for the behavioral development of their children so they can moderate any extreme online traits. Sharing the same thoughts, Livingstone (2008) has revealed that a positive parent-child attachment can reduce children's exposure to the risky Internet content and reduce children's online exposure to risks. According to Buchner, Kruger, and du Bois (1994), even though children nowadays have become more individualized, they are also very much in need of parental guidance in order to shape their everyday life (Hood, Kelley & Mayall, 1996). A recent study indicates that a secure attachment between parents and children will also buffer the risk factors that could have effects on children later internalizing disorders (Jakobsen, Horwood & Ferguson, 2012).

However, parents these days may face an uncertain stance when it comes to their children's Internet usage. According to the scholars (Livingstone & Bober, 2004; Lenhart, et. al, 2005), the majority of parents perceive that the Internet can be a positive tool to facilitate the learning process, self-empowerment and self-discovery of their children. Yet at the same time, the majority of parents also feel that the Internet is not good for their children's well-being, being aware of the dangers of the Internet to children and adolescents (Finkelhor, Mitchell & Wolak, 2001; Livingstone & Bober, 2004).

Generally, parents have some level of awareness about both the advantages and the disadvantages, but not in a very systematic way and are often uncertain about the details. It is self-evident to caring parents that children in Malaysia need to be safe online, based on what knowledge they may have about the Internet's negative effects. The situation is improved to some extent by children being willing to do the right thing by permitting parental involvement in their online lives. Such parental involvement already exists, but it could be increased (Norton, 2010).

In addition, previous studies have found that there is a significant gender difference between parent-child relationships and children's risky behaviours. According to Del Giudice (2009), male children tend to engage with the delinquency behaviour if they experienced insecure attachments from their parents. On the other hand, Lenhart (2009) stated that female children are more likely to get involved with the online risky behaviour if parents are showing negative behavior towards them in general. Despite these contradictary findings between different researchers, it is obvious that gender differences between male and female children do play a role in the relationship between parental attachment and online risky behaviours. Therefore, this study has choosen gender as the moderating variable to determine which gender contributes more to the relationship between parent-child attachment and the experience of cyberbullying.

Research Questions

As mentioned above, the degree of parent and child attachment is a very important factor in identifying children who may be involved in cyberbullying. Therefore, this research study examined the effects of parent-child attachment towards the cyberbullying. For that reason, the current study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the patterns of Internet usage among Malaysian children?

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2. What is the level of parental attachment (i.e. communication, trust and
3. What is the level of cyberbullying experience among Malaysian children?
4. What is the relationship between parental attachment (i.e. communication, trust and alienation) and cyberbullying among Malaysian children?
5. Does gender moderates the relationship between parental attachments (i.e. communication, trust, and alienation) and cyberbullying among Malaysian children?

Research Objectives

The general objective of this study is to identify the relationship between parental attachment and cyberbullying among children in Malaysia as moderated by gender. Specifically, the research objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the patterns of Internet usage among Malaysian children
2. To identify the level of parental attachments (i.e. communication, trust and alienation) between Malaysian children and parents
3. To identify the level of cyberbullying experience among Malaysian children
4. To determine the relationship between parental attachment (i.e. communication, trust and alienation) and cyberbullying among Malaysian children
5. To test the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between parental attachment (i.e. communication, trust and alienation) and cyberbullying among Malaysian children

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study can be viewed from three perspectives namely, knowledge (theoretically), practice and policymaking. From the perspective of knowledge, this study is significant in three different ways as follows, extension of the theory, contributions to communication knowledge and contributions to the research methodology.

First, theoretically, this study suggests that parent-child bond or attachment will greatly influence the personality and character of the child (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1976). While other studies on cyberbullying were applying the criminology theory such as the social control theory (Hirschi, 1969) and general strain theory (Agnew, 1992), this study rather used the attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1970) to understand parental influences on normal children. In contrast, the criminology-based theories are mostly focus on delinquent children. Thus, it is necessary for future studies regarding children and new media to include the viewpoints of both parents and peers in order to evaluate cyberbullying comprehensively among children.

The significance of this study towards knowledge is contribution to the field of communication. Attachment theory predicts the relationship that exists between early childhood experiences in the family and interpersonal experiences throughout life based on communication that takes place inside the family system. Therefore, communication

with affective and cognitive components plays an important role in attachment theory and its application in family relationships.

The attachment theory enhances our understanding of family communication towards the connection between child development, individual differences, and relational functioning. As the research in this area expands, many studies in the fields of psychology and sociology, guided by attachment theory have begun to emerge. Therefore, the remaining questions concerning attachment and communication present an opportunity for family communication scholars to contribute to the ongoing development of attachment theory.

In terms of methodology, this study significantly contributes to the literature related to cyberbullying. Whereas most of the available literature tends to be qualitative and descriptive, this study used quantitative approach, which gives the ability to generalize data. Specifically the use of inferential statistics, which is the most appropriate analysis method for hypothesis testing, can provide useful explanations of the child-parental attachment relationships (Savaya, Elsworth & Rogers, 2009).

Furthermore, the use of structural equation modelling (SEM) in the data analysis has clearly explained the intricacies of the relationships between the predictors and cyberbullying. Thus, from the explicit SEM results, this study further identifies the critical factors that can be addressed in future cyberbullying studies. Moreover, since cyberbullying study is still in the state of infancy in Malaysia (Abu Bakar, 2012), the current study may make a useful contribution to the literature gap that exists between the dependent and independent variables by integrating gender as the moderating effect in the relationship.

Secondly, from the practical perspectives this study provides a deeper understanding of the impacts of online threats among children these days, especially with a menace as dangerous as cyberbullying. It is important for all concerned parties to tackle this problem to ensure future generations do not use the Internet with complacency, inattentively ignoring its negative aspects. Therefore, parents and children should be extensively oriented about exposure to the effects of online risk, online safety, and for parents to be aware of their involvement in monitoring their children's online activities frequently. In addition, stakeholders such as MCMC, Cybersecurity and the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development should actively evolve means of addressing this phenomenon. Findings of this study are expected to provide insight into the ways of improving parent-child relationships at home on how to mitigate the risks and at the same time fully utilize the opportunities offered by the Internet.

Thirdly, in terms of policy, this study is important because it is expected to provide some insights for policymaking and legislation such as the formulation of a Cyberbullying Act in order to protect the rights of children who have experienced severe cyberbullying. Taking decisive action against any individual who is found guilty on perpetrating cyberbullying among children that may adversely affect their well-being (i. e. health, psychology and mental) should also be considered by the policymakers. Furthermore,

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rules and regulations concerning online ethics involving children, parents, peers, schools and community should be implemented to provide a guide on the use of Internet-related technologies.

Scope of the Study

The main aim of this study is to determine the relationship between parental attachment as the factor predictors and cyberbullying. Therefore, this study only investigated the relationship between the three independent variables of parental attachment, i.e., communication, trust, and alienation; cyberbullying is the dependent variable and gender is the moderating factor. While there could be many possible factors influencing the incidence of cyberbullying, the subject of interest in the current study focused on the effects of parental attachment towards cyberbullying among children in Malaysia and gender as the moderator variable.

This study involved children and adolescents aged 9 to 16 years old, whose sample was exclusively drawn from pupils who attended government (public) schools. To be specific, there were two age groups of respondents that were split into primary and secondary school groups. The primary school group consisted of pupils between the ages 9, 10 and 11 years old. While the secondary school group consisted of students between the ages of 13, 14 and 16 years old. Meanwhile, respondents aged 12 and 15 year old were excluded from the study upon request from the Ministry of Education to not include them due to their sitting the public examinations, Primary School Evaluation Test (UPSR) for 12 years old pupils and Lower Secondary Assessment (PMR) for 15 years old students.

This research was conducted in the state of Selangor, which, according to MCMC reports (2010; 2011; 2012; 2013) is the state with the highest number of Internet users in Malaysia. However, this study cannot be generalized in Malaysia as it involved only one state. In addition, this study only focuses on those children who attended public schools at rural and urban areas in Selangor.

The scope of this study was also restricted to the victims of cyberbullying only. Other parties involved in cyberbullying activity such as the bully, the bully / victim and the bystander were not included in this study. Besides, only children served as respondent for the cyberbullying questions, while parents participated only in the first (frequency of Internet usage) and second (parent-child attachment) sections of the survey.

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Definition of Key Terms

In order to get a clear picture of this research, it is important to establish a common understanding for the specific terms that were used in this study. Thus, the following key terms were defined.

Internet Usage - In this study, Internet usage is defined as children's ability to use or access online technologies that may later influence their online behavior.

1. **Online Risk -** Online risk is defined as adverse experiences that can affect children who use online technologies; and whether intentionally or unintentionally experienced, that might compromise the well-being of the children in any way, including online safety.

2. **Cyberbullying –** Repetitive aggressive and intentional acts (i.e. online harassment and sex-based bully) carried by a person or a group of persons deliberately to harm someone emotionally (e.g. humiliate, harass, threaten and torment) by sending or posting cruel text and/or graphics messages using any electronic technologies (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Smith, et al., 2008).

3. **Parental Attachment -** Current study defines parental attachment as an emotional and affectional bond of love with a great intensity between a child and its parents in order to sustain a sense of security and support for the child. There are three forms of attachment security, which are communication, trust and alienation (Bowlby, 1970; Ainsworth & Bell, 1978; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987).

4. **Communication -** In this study, communication is defined as an effective two-way social interaction between children and their parents, which helps to create strong emotional bonds (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987).

5. **Trust –** This term is defined as the secure feelings that children have toward their parents, with a strong belief that their parents will be reliably and consistently there for them to fulfill their emotional needs (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987).

6. **Alienation -** Alienation is defined in this study as a feeling of rejection or avoidance that children have toward their parents that might significantly influence their behaviour and attitude (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987).

7. **Children -** The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has defined children broadly as every human being below the age of 18 years old (World Health Organization, 1999). This study defines children as school-going persons aged 9 to 16 years.

Chapter Summary

This thesis was organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 began with the introductory notes on how this research initiated. Chapter 2 described all the study variables in details including online threats, cyberbullying, parent-child attachment and children's gender as well as the relationships between the variables. The methodology parts in Chapter 3 are explained the methods and procedures that were adopted to develop the research instrument and collection and analyzing of data. All the findings and results were elaborated in Chapter 4 with the details of statistical analyses. Chapter 5 is the final part, and it discussed the research summary in details, the contributions, limitations, implications and recommendations of this study.

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