Parent–child attachment as a mediator of the relationship between parenting style and gelotophobia among adolescents

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Fear of being laughed at and family interaction are highly related. Parental over-control and over-protection influence children’s excessive anxiety over being laughed at. Conversely, parental attachment is an important index of the parent–child relationship and is closely correlated to children’s gelotophobia. However, is it the style of parenting or the outcome of parenting (i.e. attachment) that influences a child’s gelotophobia? To answer this question, the present study analysed the relationships between gelotophobia, perceived parenting of children and parent–child attachment, as well as the mediating role of attachment between parenting and children’s gelotophobia, using a sample of 373 high-school students. The results show that being highly communicative and close attachment completely weakened the negative correlation between warm, caring parenting and the child’s gelotophobia; moreover, being highly communicative and close attachment, together with over-protective and over-controlling parenting, influence children’s gelotophobia. In sum, this study indicates that parent–child attachment has a direct and indirect influence on perceived parental care and protection and children’s fear of being laughed at.

Keywords: Attachment; Parenting style; Fear of being laughed at (gelotophobia); Mediator.

Laughing is a natural expression for human beings (Ruch & Ekman, 2001). A friendly smile releases people from an embarrassing situation, whereas hostile mocking leads to interpersonal tension. Generally, people can handle the embarrassment of being laughed at; however, gelotophobes have difficulty telling the difference between playful teasing and ridicule, and they consider laughter to be aggressive (Ruch & Proyer, 2008a). Hence, it is worth thinking about the reason why some people fear being laughed at. One reason that people fear being laughed at might be parental influence (Ruch, Hofmann, Platt, & Proyer, 2014). Over-parenting makes offspring worry excessively about being laughed at by others (Proyer, Estoppey, & Ruch, 2012; Proyer & Neukom, 2013). The other reason is that good attachment decreases gelotophobia (Chen, Chan, Ruch, & Proyer, 2011). The manner of parenting affects parent–child attachment (Lau, Beilby, Byrnes, & Hennessey, 2012), and parenting that emphasises emotional bonding is helpful in building positive parent–child attachment. Does parenting have a direct influence on a child’s gelotophobia? Or does the parent–child attachment mediate it? These questions are worth discussing. If we could determine whether and how attachment mediates the relationship between parenting and gelotophobia, we would have more knowledge regarding the link between gelotophobia and the original family. To discuss these questions, the present study aims to investigate the mediating role of attachment between parenting and gelotophobia, as well as family factors that influence gelotophobia.

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Influence of parental care and protect on fear of being laughed at

Gelotophobia involves feeling anxious or scared due to the fear of being laughed at (Ruch & Proyer, 2008a). The GELOPH<15> was developed by Ruch and Proyer (2008b) to evaluate the level of gelotophobia; the total length of the questionnaire is 15 items, and a higher score indicates a higher level of gelotophobia. Later, Chen et al. (2011) translated the GELOPH<15> into a traditional Chinese version, which had acceptable reliability and validity. An empirical study found that gelotophobia and positive humour styles were negatively correlated (Chen et al., 2011). Additionally, studies found that gelotophobia was negatively correlated with personality factors such as extraversion, agreeableness and openness (Chen et al., 2011; Ruch, Proyer, & Popa, 2008).

Gelotophobia has several common features with sociophobia, such as social withdrawal. The main difference between gelotophobia and sociophobia is that gelotophobes are convinced they are ridiculous, and they expect to be mocked and are afraid of it before the situation even occurs; in contrast, while sociophobes also show social withdrawal, they show a strong fear of being mocked only when it occurs. Hence, gelotophobia should be discussed separately.

Many factors influence gelotophobia, including external conditions (e.g. parents, peers, culture, social structure) and internal factors (e.g. genetic factors, personality). Individuals develop interactions with important others at different life stages (e.g. adolescents have a higher possibility of being bullied if they failed to establish good interactions with an important caregiver during their infancy) (Ruch et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2016). Therefore, an individual’s fear of being laughed at and family interaction are closely related (Proyer et al., 2012). In the early stages of development, individuals who fail to feel beloved or appreciated while interacting with parents will also have problems with developing a sense of belonging, which results in a higher tendency to fear being laughed at (Proyer & Neukom, 2013). Parents of gelotophobes usually over-protect and over-control their children; consequently, gelotophobes recall more punishment events, less warmth and higher levels of parental control, which shows that excessive frustration and shame in the family results in fear of being laughed at for gelotophobes. However, whether it is parenting or other possible family factors that affect the level of gelotophobia requires clarification.

Does attachment mediate the relationship between parenting style and gelotophobia?

The present study aimed to examine the mediating role of attachment between parenting style and gelotophobia. First, we will define attachment and then review related studies of relationship among attachment, parenting style and gelotophobia to establish the theoretical idea that attachment mediates the relationship between parenting style and gelotophobia.

First, parent–child attachment is defined as the affectional tie or emotional bond between child and major caregiver in early stage of childhood (Bowlby, 1977). In both childhood and adulthood, individuals’ attachment to parents or caregivers does not change due to time or circumstances, even when the caregiver no longer exists (Ainsworth, 1989). Armsden and Greenberg (1987) proposed three major factors of attachment quality based on bonding intensity: trust (the person felt secure when care was perceived, felt respected, felt that his or her individual affectional needs were accepted and gave feedback), communication (the person perceived content and quality when communicating with the caregiver) and alienation (the person felt anger towards the caregiver and developed emotional detachment, which resulted in an insecure attachment). Accordingly, Armsden and Greenberg developed the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA), and many subsequent studies have discussed the influence of family function on aggressive behaviours and gelotophobia using the IPPA (Chen et al., 2011; Dou et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2015).

Then, parent–child attachment and parenting styles are diverse but related concepts (Lau et al., 2012). Attachment refers to the quality of affectional bonding between the individual and important others, whereas parenting style refers to the attitudes, concepts and manner of caring for a child. Generally, parenting style involves two dimensions: the care dimension and the protection dimension. The former focuses on the affectional tie between the parents and the child. The latter emphasises the control and restraint of the child’s behaviour. It is called negative discipline when the child feels as though the parents are too demanding (Carlo, McGinley, Hayes, Batenhorst, & Wilkinson, 2007). An empirical study invited adolescents and analysed the relationship between parenting style and quality of attachment with a self-report questionnaire, and the results indicated that showing warm care for children, such as emotional support, enhanced parental attachment whether it was from father or from mother; however, over-protection or over-control from parents lowered the quality of attachment (Gallarin & Alonso-Arbiol, 2012). Therefore, parent–child attachment is deeply influenced by parent’s attitudes of parenting.

In addition, the attachment with important others in early stages of development also influences fear of being laughed at for people with gelotophobia (Chen et al., 2011). If a person lacks a positive attachment in childhood or adolescence, it results in social withdrawal and gelotophobia (Ruch, 2004). Among members of the Chinese community, Wu et al. (2015) collected responses to the IPPA and GELOPH<15> from high-school students. They found that if the parent–child attachment was
better, the tendency to fear being laughed at was lower. That is, a satisfactory relationship between the parents and the child reduced the level of fear of being laughed at.

Overall, parent–child attachment indicates the quality of the affectional bond and interactions between the parent and the child. This attachment is deeply affected by parenting style and influences tendency to fear being laughed at. Therefore, parent–child attachment is a factor that potentially mediates the relationship between parenting style and gelotophobia.

The present study

Interaction between family members is critical to fear of being laughed at for individuals (Proyer et al., 2012; Proyer & Neukom, 2013; Ruch et al., 2014). Currently, there is no empirical study yet to support whether the cause is the manner of parenting or results of parenting, such as attachment. To address the family factors related to (or that lead to) fear of being laughed at, the present study examined the mediating role of attachment between parenting style and children’s fear of being laughed at. In general, past research already indicated that parental over-protection leads to a child’s fear of being laughed at (Proyer et al., 2012; Proyer & Neukom, 2013). More parental loving care facilitated attachment between the parent and the child, but parental over-control decreased the quality of attachment (Gallarin & Alonso-Arbiol, 2012). Past studies also identified that attachment was related to parenting style and gelotophobia separately (Gallarin & Alonso-Arbiol, 2012; Wu et al., 2015), and attachment was also an important indicator of parent–child emotional bonding (Bowlby, 1977; Matsuoka et al., 2006). Furthermore, attachment was already taken as a key variable for investigating the mediators between parenting and psychological characteristics of child in an empirical study (Muller, Thornback, & Bedi, 2012). Therefore, the present study hypothesised that attachment mediates the relationship between children’s fear of being laughed at and parenting styles, especially the parenting styles of caregiving or over-protection/over-control.

The present study focused on investigating how the dimensions of parent–child attachment mediate the relation between parenting styles and child’s fear of being laughed at. The study was implemented in two steps. First, the present study collected data on gelotophobia and perceived parenting attitude and attachment styles from high-school students and then analysed the data with regression analysis in order to understand the influence of parenting styles on the child’s fear of being laughed at, the correlation between attachment and parenting, and the correlation between attachment and gelotophobia. The results of the regression analysis are not only for replicating past studies (Gallarin & Alonso-Arbiol, 2012; Wu et al., 2015) but also to examine the theoretical base of mediation analysis. Second, according to the results of the first step, the present study investigated the influence of the mediating role of attachment between the parenting styles and gelotophobia to identify whether gelotophobia is affected directly by parenting styles or indirectly by quality of parent–child interaction.

METHODS

Participants

The sample included 373 high-school students in Taiwan. Specifically, there were 172 males and 201 females, ranging in age from 13 to 15 years, with an average age of 13.79 years (SD = .81). Moreover, in order to discuss the parenting styles of participants, the major caregiver of the participants was either the father or the mother in the present study. Specifically, 37 participants had fathers as primary caregivers, 167 participants had mothers as primary caregivers and 169 participants had fathers and mothers who jointly cared for them. The aforementioned information was collected to ensure their main caregiver was either their father or mother, but the marital status of the parents was not taken into consideration. All participants volunteered after being invited to participate by teachers and fully understood and provided informed consent prior to the experiment. All participants received stationery sets to thank them after finishing the questionnaire.

Materials

The research tools were the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI), the Pho-Phi-Kat-TC (Pho-Phi-Kat; traditional Chinese version) and the IPPA.

The PBI (Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979; Shu, Lo, & Lung, 1999) investigates two dimensions of parenting style: the care dimension and the protect dimension. The PBI has 25 items: 12 for care and 13 for protect. Participants rate each item on a 4-point scale from 0 to 3. Regarding care ratings, a higher score indicates that the child feels more warmth and love from his or her parents. A lower score indicates that the child feels more coldness and alienation from his or her parents. An example of an item is, “Speaking to me with a friendly and tender voice”. Regarding the protect ratings, a higher score means that the child is over-protected, over-controlled and has an excessive affectional tie with his or her parents. A lower score indicates that the child is authorised or encouraged to be independent and to engage in self-management. An example of an item is, “Did not provide me with adequate assistance.” The internal consistency coefficients range from .69 to .73. The test–retest reliability coefficients range from .66 to
.85. According to a factor analysis, the factor loadings range from .49 to .78. These values are satisfactory and acceptable. The internal consistency reliabilities from the sample in the present study were father’s care (.91), father’s protection (.78), mother’s care (.78) and mother’s protection (.78), and the reliabilities are acceptable.

The Pho-Phi-Kat-TC (traditional Chinese version) (Chen et al., 2011; Ruch & Proyer, 2009) evaluates three dimensions: gelotophobia, the fear of being laughed at; gelotophilia, joy in being laughed at; and katagelasticism, joy in laughing at others. The present study used the gelotophobia subscale (GELOPH-TC) to evaluate the tendency to fear being laughed at. A higher score represents a greater tendency to experience such fear. An example item is, “When strangers laugh in my presence I often relate it to me personally.” The GELOPH-TC has 15 items. Participants rate each item on a 4-point scale. The internal consistency coefficient is .85, and the test–retest reliability coefficients range from .87 to .92. Taking the tendency for aggressive behaviour as a criterion, the criterion-related validities ranged from .16 to .26. The internal consistency reliability for the sample in the present study was .83.

The IPPA (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Huang, 2007) measures three aspects of attachment: to father, to mother and to peers. The present study used the first two subscales. Each subscale is composed of three factors: trust, communication and alienation. Each subscale has 25 items. An example item on the trust subscale is, “My daddy/mommy trusts my judgement”. An example item for communication is, “Daddy/Mommy care about what I said when we were discussing something”. An example item for alienation is, “My daddy/mommy does not know my recent situation”. Participants rate each item on a 5-point scale. The internal consistency coefficient was .93. According to a factor analysis, the factor loadings ranged from .45 to .74. The internal consistency reliabilities for the sample in the present study were father trust (.89), father communication (.89), father alienation (.80), mother trust (.88), mother communication (.88) and mother alienation (.75).

### Procedure

The present study was implemented as a paper-and-pencil questionnaire completed in groups. Before it began, the examiner introduced the research purpose and task schedule and invited participants to agree to informed consent. The three research tools were implemented in a counter-balanced way. One third of participants completed the questionnaires in the following order: PBI, Pho-TC and IPPA. The second third of participants completed the questionnaires in the following order: Pho-TC, IPPA and PBI. The final third of participants completed the questionnaires in the following order: IPPA, PBI and Pho-TC. At the end, the examiner collected the questionnaires and gave gifts to participants in thanks for their participation. The total time was 20 minutes.

### RESULTS

#### Descriptive statistics of measures

Table 1 lists the means and standard deviations for parent–child attachment and parenting style as reported by the high-school students. We used the three levels of gelotophobia, slight, marked and extreme, proposed by Ruch and Proyer (2008b). Among 373 high-school students, 272 of them (72.90%) were non-gelotophobes, 90 (24.10%) had slight gelotophobia, 9 (2.40%) had marked gelotophobia and only 2 (0.6%) had extreme gelotophobia.

As shown in the table, the high-school students reported differences in relation to their father and mother regarding parenting style and attachment. Regarding parenting style, individuals perceived higher levels of care and protection from their mother than from their father ($t(372) = -7.50, \ p < .001; \ d = -0.31, -0.08$), which reveals that mothers give emotional support but also excessively control their child’s feelings. However, regarding attachment, the high-school students have greater trust and better communication with their mother than with their father ($t(372) = -6.03, -8.81; \ ps = .001, .042; \ ds = -.31, -.26$) and experience less alienation from their mother ($t(372) = -3.50, p < .001, d = -.10$), which shows that high-school students have higher-quality attachment with their mothers.

### Relationship between parenting styles, attachment and fear of being laughed at

To examine the correlations among parenting, attachment and gelotophobia, we used product–moment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gelotophobia</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting styles</td>
<td>Care (Dad)</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protect (Dad)</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>0.00–2.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care (Mom)</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>0.18–3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protect (Mom)</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>0.00–2.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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analysis, and the result is listed in Table 2. First, open and solicitous parenting is negatively correlated with children’s gelotophobia \((r = -0.21, -0.19; ps = .001, .001)\), whereas over-controlling and over-protective parenting is positively correlated with children’s gelotophobia \((r = 0.24, 0.26; ps = .001, .001)\). In addition, caring parenting is significantly related to trust \((r = 0.82, 0.82; ps = .001, .001)\), communication \((r = 0.79, 0.78; ps = .001, .001)\) and alienation \((r = -0.74, -0.73; ps = .001, .001)\) in parent–child attachment. Moreover, parents’ over-protection is also significantly related to trust \((r = -0.55, -0.58; ps = .001, .001)\), communication \((r = -0.39, -0.39; ps = .001, .001)\) and alienation \((r = -0.46, -0.50; ps = .001, .001)\) in parent–child attachment. Lastly, trust \((r = -0.19, -0.18; ps = .001, .001)\) and alienation \((r = 0.30, 0.30; ps = .001, .001)\) in parent–child attachment are significantly related to children’s gelotophobia, but there was no correlation between communication \((r = -0.10, -0.08; ps = .067, .16)\) and gelotophobia. Therefore, there were close relationships between high-school students’ gelotophobia, parenting and parent–child attachment.

**Mediation analyses**

Regarding the mediating effect of parent–child attachment in the relationship between parenting and gelotophobia, the present study examined it using hierarchical regression analysis and bootstrapping (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). In particular, the three dimensions of parent–child attachment, which are trust, communication and alienation, were examined for their influence.

First, we used hierarchical regression analysis to examine how attachment mediates the relationship between gelotophobia and the care dimension, as well as the relationship between gelotophobia and the protect dimension, among high-school students (see Table 3). The result of the mediation analysis of attachment shows that the predictive power of the care dimension on gelotophobia decreased, which indicates that parent–child attachment mediates the relationship between the father’s or mother’s care and the child’s tendency to fear being laughed at. While the correlation between the scores on the protect dimension and gelotophobia decreased, it remained significant after the mediation of attachment, which indicates that parent–child attachment partially mediates the relationship between the father’s or mother’s protection and the child’s tendency to fear being laughed at.

The present study further examined the indirect effect of the three dimensions of attachment (trust, communication and alienation) on the relationship between parenting style and gelotophobia using the Sobel test (see Figure 1). First, the results of the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) show that both communication quality and alienation...
mediated the relationship between the parent's care and the child's gelotophobia ($Z_s = 2.64, 3.38, 4.46, -4.57; ps = .008, .001, <.001, <.001$), as well as the relationship between the parent's protection and the child's gelotophobia ($Z_s = 2.43, 2.98, 4.56, -4.91, ps = .015, .003, <.001, <.001$). The level of trust had no significant mediating effect on the relationship between parenting style and gelotophobia ($Z_s = .12, .34, .66, .80; ps = .907, .734, .512, .421$).

The bootstrapping method is a statistical method involving resampling and re-examining the mediation effect using interval estimation. We randomly resampled raw data from the 373 high-school students to generate a simulation sample and calculated the path coefficients and the estimated values of the indirect effect by randomly resampling 5000 times. When we had 5000 estimated values, we calculated the mean. Table 3 lists the 95% confidence intervals (CIs) of the indirect effects of the dimensions of parenting style on gelotophobia through the dimensions of attachment (see Table 4). The results indicate that communication quality mediated the correlation between parenting style and the child's tendency to fear being laughed at. However, in terms of the mediating effect of trust on this relationship, the CI of gelotophobia included 0; therefore, the indirect effect was not significant.

The aforementioned two statistical tests have consistent findings. Both communication and alienation mediated the influence of parenting style on gelotophobia. In particular, communication and alienation completely mediated the correlation between the parent’s care and the child’s gelotophobia and partially mediated the relationship between the parent’s protection and the child’s gelotophobia.

**DISCUSSION**

Individuals’ fear of being laughed at is relevant to parenting styles (Proyer et al., 2012; Proyer & Neukom, 2013). The present study investigated the reason for gelotophobia by investigating the manner of parenting or result of parenting and the mediating effect of parent–child attachment in parenting styles and children’s gelotophobia. The results support some of our hypotheses. Specifically, the parent’s emotional support was positively correlated with the child’s tendency to fear being laughed at and parent–child attachment, whereas the parent’s excessive control was negatively correlated with the child’s tendency to fear being laughed at and parent–child attachment. These findings are partially consistent with the findings of past research (Proyer et al., 2012; Wu et al., 2015). However, our results also support the statement that parenting style and attachment have a significant connection (Gallarín & Alonso-Arbíol, 2012). We found that emotional support increased trust and communication but decreased alienation between parents and
and these two parenting style dimensions. The results showed that attachment and the protection dimension had only a moderate correlation. Over-protection was not the only reason for alienated attachment.

In conclusion, it is the style of parenting that influences whether a child’s gelotophobia is influenced by manner of parenting or result of parenting. Open parenting builds good parent–child relationships, and in certain situations, the result of parenting completely replaces the influence of manner of parenting on the child’s gelotophobia. In contrast, over-protective or over-controlling parenting decreases the communication and intimacy between parent and child, and in this situation, both manner of parenting and result of parenting influence the child’s gelotophobia.

Furthermore, the present study found that trust and alienation were related to tendency to fear being laughed at in children, but there was no significant result for communication. When parents and children understand, respect and recognise the demands of feelings for each other or have a close affectional tie, children’s fear of being laughed at decreases. This finding supports the results of past research (Wu et al., 2015). We also investigated the relationship between the quality of the parent–child relationship and the child’s tendency to fear being laughed at in three dimensions, and we performed a more precise review of the connection between parent–child attachment and the fear of being laughed at. Additionally, our results indirectly support the finding presented by Chen et al. (2011), suggesting that gelotophobia was negatively correlated with secure attachment but positively correlated with avoidant attachment and anxious attachment. Among our findings, after including the three dimensions of attachment in the mediation models, it is noteworthy that communication played a mediating role in the relationship between parenting style and children’s gelotophobia, even though communication and gelotophobia had no significant correlation. However, trust, which had significant correlations with other variables, had no mediation effect in the model. One possible explanation is the multicollinearity between predictor variables, which means that trust and communication had a high correlation. Nevertheless, after

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attachment (total effect)</th>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Alienation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sobel’s Z</td>
<td>Boot, 95% CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dad care</td>
<td></td>
<td>−.07 [−.20, .06]</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dad protect</td>
<td></td>
<td>.10 [.02, .17]</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mom care</td>
<td></td>
<td>−.12 [−.29, .06]</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mom protect</td>
<td></td>
<td>.09 [.01, .17]</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: CI = confidence interval; dependent variable = gelotophobia.

*5*p < .01.

children. However, excessive protection had the opposite effect. Last, according to the results of the hierarchical regression, communication quality and alienation completely mediated the negative influence of parenting with care on the child’s gelotophobia and partially mediated the positive influence of over-protective parenting on the child’s gelotophobia. Parent–child attachment plays not only an influential role but also a mediating role in the relationship between parenting style and children’s gelotophobia. In particular, attachment had a different mediating effect depending on the parenting style.

For both the father and the mother, communication and alienation in parent–child attachment were mediators of the influence of parenting style on children’s fear of being laughed at. Our findings are consistent with previous research on gelotophobia (Ruch, 2004; Wu et al., 2015). Children are less afraid of being laughed at if their affectional bonding with their parents is strong. In particular, communication quality and alienation completely mediated the influence of the parent’s care on the child’s gelotophobia. Between parents and children, smooth communication and affectional bonding had the same influence as open and supportive parenting on gelotophobia, which could directly decrease the tendency of children to fear being laughed at. The reason might be the high correlation between parenting care and parent–child attachment ($r_s > .70$). Parents’ attitudes about parenting and emotional support were closely related to the quality of the parent–child relationship (Gallarin & Alonso-Arbiol, 2012). Attachment could completely replace the influence of parental care.

However, between parents and children, communication and closeness partially mediated the influence of parental over-protection on children’s fear of being laughed at, which shows that the influence of over-protective parenting on children’s gelotophobia could not be completely replaced with the quality of communication. A demanding parenting style affects children’s fear of being laughed at. To conclude, attachment has a different mediating effect on the influence of the care and protection dimensions on children’s tendency to fear being laughed at, which indicates the existence of different connections between attachment
eliminating the influence of trust and alienation, we found that communication quality between parents and children had better predictive power in terms of tendency to fear being laughed at among children.

It is worthwhile to note the cultural difference in the relationship between parenting styles and fear of being laughed at. The present study analysed the correlation between PBI and GELOPH-TC scores in a sample of 373 Taiwanese high-school students and found that fear of being laughed at was significantly related to parenting styles, including care and protection styles. However, the study by Proyer et al. (2012) found a different result with a sample of 121 adults (age from 18 to 76). They found that gelotophobes recalled more about negative parenting (e.g. punishment) and control from the mother and that both parents used less positive parenting (e.g. warmth). The major difference between the results of two studies is that for children in Taiwanese culture, both mother’s parenting styles and father’s negative parenting style influenced fear of being laughed at. The gaps between these two study results may be due to the specific groups (e.g. Chinese culture), which suggests that a further study should empirically compare the relationships between fear of being laughed at and parenting styles in different cultures.

However, the present study still has limitations. First, it used purposive sampling. The generalisability of our results is limited. Second, the present study used only a self-report questionnaire as a research tool and did not collect data about parents’ attitude towards parenting, which limits the possibility for comprehensive understanding about the current relationships among children’s gelotophobia, parenting and parent–child attachment. Future studies should collect more information with a comparison between parents’ self-report of parenting styles and the child’s perceptions of parenting. Additionally, future studies should use longitudinal research with a quasi-experimental design to discuss the causal relationship between parenting attitudes, attachment and fear of being laughed at. Furthermore, random sampling is recommended to allow for re-examination and generalisation of the results. In addition, it is also recommended that future researchers increase the sample size and clarify the relationships by grouping the father, mother, son and daughter, even listing them by birth order. Last, the present study only collected the information on the primary caregiver but did not consider the parents’ marital status. A future study should investigate parents’ marital status in order to understand the relationships between the parenting attitudes of each parent and fear of being laughed at among children. This study also indicates a further study should consider the aforementioned information as well as to increase the sample size to use structural equation modelling as the method of analysis in order to understand the influence of different parenting styles on gelotophobia between the father and the mother.

Generally, the present study indicates that communication and alienation could mediate the positive influence of the parent’s care on the child’s gelotophobia and could partially mediate the negative influence of the parent’s over-protection on the child’s gelotophobia. It revealed that parent–child attachment had different mediating roles in the relation between parenting style and children’s tendency to fear being laughed at. Especially in the Chinese community, parental discipline and parent–child attachment have a significant influence on children’s fear of being laughed at. The study further revealed the direct and indirect effects of parenting style and parent–child interaction on tendency to fear being laughed at among children during family interaction. Finally, the findings of the present study indicate that coping with the negative effects of gelotophobia more efficiently is an important issue to discuss with high-school students and requires counselling with a focus on parenting style to promote parent–child relationship quality or discipline patterns.

References


