Teasing in Hierarchical and Intimate Relations

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Following E. Goffman's (1967) face threat analysis of social interaction, it was hypothesized that the aggressive, playful content of teasing would vary according to social status and relational satisfaction, personality, role as teaser or target, and gender. These 4 hypotheses were tested in analyses of the teasing among fraternity members (Study 1) and romantic couples (Study 2). Consistent with a face threat analysis of teasing, low-status fraternity members and satisfied romantic partners teased in more prosocial ways, defined by reduced face threat and increased redressive action. Some findings indicate that disagreeable individuals teased in less prosocial ways, consistent with studies of bullying. Targets reported more negative emotion than teasers. Although female and male romantic partners teased each other in similar ways, women found being the target of teasing more aversive, consistent with previous speculation.

The joke, in other words, is the art of making fun without raising anger, by means of ritual mockery of insults which are neutralized by their very excess and which, presupposing a great familiarity . . . are in fact tokens of attention or affection, ways of building up while seeming to run down, of accepting while seeming to condemn.

—Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*

The ingredients of many initiation rituals are: (a) attraction, (b) aggression, (c) subordination . . . (d) reconciliation and the euphoria of social acceptance.

—F. B. M. de Waal, "The Integration of Dominance and Social Bonding in Primates"

Teasing is paradoxical. Teasing criticizes yet compliments, attacks yet makes people closer, humiliates yet expresses affection. In teasing, people intentionally embarrass and shame each other (Keltner & Buswell, 1996; Miller, 1992), yet people go to great lengths to avoid these emotions (e.g., B. R. Brown, 1970). The paradoxical nature of teasing is evident in its etymol-

ogy: The word *teasing* derives from the Anglo-Saxon *taesan*, which means to tear apart, and the French *attiser*, which means to stoke furnace fires and make warm (Pawluk, 1989).

Although observed in diverse cultures (E. E. Brown, 1991) and reported to occur frequently in interactions between parents and children (Reddy, 1991), friends (Mooney, Creeser, & Blatchford, 1991), and romantic partners (Alberts, 1992; Baxter, 1992), teasing has received little systematic study in social psychology. In this article we have three aims: First, we present a face threat analysis of teasing to integrate the divided literature on teasing. Second, we test four hypotheses concerning how the content and experience of teasing varies according to social status and relational satisfaction (Hypothesis 1), adult personality (Hypothesis 2), one's role as teaser or target (Hypothesis 3), and gender (Hypothesis 4). Finally, we explore two research questions concerning how teasing focuses on norm violations and relates to increased affiliation.

Previous Studies of Teasing: Opposing Perspectives on a Paradoxical Phenomenon

Teasing is commonly portrayed as a combination of aggressive and playful behavior intentionally directed at a target. Researchers have defined teasing as a mock insult (Eisenberg, 1986), privileged disrespect (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940), playful annoyance (Pawluk, 1989), or ambiguous, playful aggression (Shapiro, Baumeister, & Kessler, 1991). Teasing can involve purely verbal behavior, such as nicknames and innuendoes, or purely physical behavior, such as physical imitation, taunting, and making funny faces (Pawluk, 1989).

One class of researchers, primarily linguists, anthropologists, and relationship researchers, has focused on the positive functions of teasing. These researchers have analyzed the linguistic form and content of teasing that arises spontaneously in adult

conversations (e.g., Drew, 1987; Eder, 1991) and parent–child interactions (e.g., Dunn & Brown, 1994), they have surveyed relationship idiom (e.g., Baxter, 1992), and they have written ethnographies of teasing in different cultures (e.g., Eisenberg, 1986; Schieffelin, 1986). Across methods, these researchers reach similar conclusions about the benefits of teasing. First, teasing offers an indirect way of pointing out others' deviations from social standards and therefore is central to socialization practices between parents and children (Ausubel, 1955; Eisenberg, 1986), friends (Eder, 1991), and romantic partners (Baxter, 1992) across cultures (E. E. Brown, 1991; Schieffelin, 1986). Second, teasing allows individuals to enhance their bonds through the indirect expression of affection, shared laughter, and the message that the act of teasing communicates, namely that the individuals are close enough to tease (Baxter, 1992; Eisenberg, 1986). Finally, qualitative studies of teasing among African American male and female adolescents (Abrahams, 1962; Eder, 1991) indicate that teasing allows individuals to learn about, negotiate, and assume social identities.

In contrast, researchers interested in bullying and victimization have documented pernicious consequences of teasing (e.g., Olweus, 1978, 1993; Roberts & Coursol, 1996). The term *bullying* is defined as the repeated and asymmetrical verbal and physical aggression of a more powerful individual directed at a less powerful individual (Olweus, 1978). Bullying involves a wide array of behaviors, including hitting and kicking, vandalism, and hostile forms of teasing. Respondents report that teasing is the most common manifestation of bullying (e.g., Whitney & Smith, 1993) and studies of bullying therefore shed light on a darker side of teasing.[1] Surveys indicate that bullying is a regular occurrence for young boys and girls (e.g., Olweus, 1978; Whitney & Smith, 1993) and that about 10% of grammar school children are bullied regularly and about 7% are regular bullies. More disturbing, victims of bullying tend to be unpopular outcasts and prone to a variety of negative symptoms, such as anxiety and depression (Olweus, 1993). Similarly, women's reports of being teased about their body correlated with eating problems and anxiety about personal body image (Thompson, Cattarin, Fowler, & Fisher, 1995), and in a longitudinal study they predicted subsequent levels of depression (Cattarin & Thompson, 1994).

These opposing literatures suggest that teasing is both vital to healthy social relationships and yet involved in cruel victimization. Teasing should be heartily encouraged, from one perspective, or eradicated from the playground and workplace. Such opposing conclusions about teasing point to the need for broader theorizing and finer specification, much as the literature on smiling behavior was profoundly contradictory until different kinds of smiles were identified (e.g., Ekman & Friesen, 1982). We believe that Goffman's (1967) face threat analysis of social interaction offers an approach to teasing that illuminates its positive and negative sides and renders its paradoxical nature amenable to empirical study.

A Face Threat Analysis of Teasing

According to Goffman (1967), social interactions, from politeness to gossip to flirtation, revolve around protecting individ-

uals' desired social identity, or "face" (Modigliani, 1971; Sabini & Silver, 1982; Schlenker & Leary, 1982). The term *positive face* refers to individuals' positive social identity and esteem. The term *negative face* refers to the desire to act with freedom from others' impositions (P. Brown & Levinson, 1987). These face concerns, often played out in the seemingly ordinary interactions of public life, stem from the motive to maintain harmonious social relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Goffman, 1967).

Social interactions, however, are fraught with face-threatening potential (P. Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967). Requests, directive statements, constructive suggestions, disagreements, and bearing bad news all risk threatening individuals' negative and positive face. To reduce the potential face threat of social behavior, individuals can avoid the act, or mitigate the face threat of the act, with one of three kinds of redressive action: (a) They can go "off-record," indicating that the act is not serious; (b) they can engage in the act in a "positively polite" way that expresses a positive attitude toward another; or (c) they can act in a "negatively polite," deferential way that avoids imposing on another (P. Brown & Levinson, 1987). For example, if compelled to criticize a friend for some untoward behavior, an individual can avoid stating the criticism, qualify the criticism in ways that render the criticism ambiguous and off-record, accompany the criticism with positive statements that protect the individual's "face," or state the criticism in a deferential way that reduces its imposing demands.

A face threat analysis defines the content of teasing as intentionally face-threatening verbal or nonverbal action directed at another that is accompanied by redressive humor and positive and negative politeness tactics that mitigate the face threat of the tease (see Shapiro et al., 1991, for similar treatment). Teasing is a family of behaviors that vary in the balance of face-threatening aggression and redressive actions. Teasing can range from intimate banter, which involves little face threat and elevated play, to the teasing that is part of bullying, which involves extremely face-threatening taunting and low levels or inappropriate forms of redressive action. Although teasing has not been the focus of laboratory research, qualitative and questionnaire research lend credence to this analysis of teasing.

The first element of teasing is a face-threatening act, typically involving criticism directed at the target about some deviation from a standard of behavior, character, or appearance (Alberts,

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[1] The question concerning the overlap and distinctions between teasing and bullying remains an empirical issue. We considered the bullying literature relevant to our discussion of teasing based largely on empirical criteria. Most bullying scales reference teasing in their definitions (e.g., Whitney & Smith, 1993), and young children consistently report that teasing interactions, such as the use of nicknames, taunting, and name calling, are the most common elements of bullying (e.g., Whitney & Smith, 1993). We believe that bullying-related teasing fits our definition of more antisocial teasing because it involves aggressive criticism and some ineffectual marker that the aggression is not purely hostile (e.g., unusual vocalization pattern or laughter). This kind of teasing is the most hostile kind of teasing and is much different from more playful forms of teasing. Other, less commonly reported forms of bullying, including vandalizing, kicking, and hitting, are better classified as acts of hostility.

1992; Pawluk, 1989). In an ethnography of a Mexican American family, Eisenberg (1986) observed that parents and relatives most typically teased children about unpleasant aspects of their comportment and appearance. In survey studies, grammar school children reported that they tease others about unusual appearance or behavior (Mooney et al., 1991; Shapiro et al., 1991; Whitney & Smith, 1993). Romantic couples' relationship idiom includes teasing insults that criticize each other's unusual preferences, habits, and behavior (Baxter, 1992; Hopper, Knapp, & Scott, 1981).

To reduce the face threat of the tease, teasers accompany the tease with redressive actions, in particular signaling devices (H. H. Clark, 1996) that designate the critical, aggressive component of the tease as off-record, playful, and not to be taken seriously. Fine-grained analyses of conversations between friends (Drew, 1987), parents and children (Eisenberg, 1986), and romantic couples (Alberts, 1992), and qualitative accounts of teasing (Abrahams, 1962), have shown that teasing incorporates off-record markers such as unusual vocalizations, singsong voice, formulaic utterances, elongated vowels, and unusual facial expressions. Analyses of the structure of teasing utterances show that teasers also convey positive politeness by laughing in affiliative fashion just before or after delivering the tease (Drew, 1987).

A face threat analysis of teasing also points to likely sources of variation in the content and outcomes of teasing. In terms of the content of teasing, to the extent that the concern for others' face defines a relationship or an individual's predispositions, teasing should involve less face threat and more redressive action. In terms of outcomes, the face-threatening criticism and playful qualities of the tease are likely to relate to negative and positive outcomes, respectively. Teasing is a malleable practice, whose form and effect depend on the relations of the individuals involved and the individual practitioner. We next review literature that points to hypotheses concerning variations in teasing that we tested in this research.

Variation in Teasing Across Different Relationships

Although believed to serve similar functions across different relationships (e.g., Pawluk, 1989), teasing clearly varies according to the relationship between the teaser and the target. Older children (e.g., eighth grade) are more inclined than younger children (e.g., third or fifth grade) to report in surveys that teasing is a positive experience (e.g., Oliver, Hoover, & Hazler, 1994; Shapiro et al., 1991). Boys report teasing more frequently than young girls (Mooney et al., 1991). Men are assumed to tease to enhance bonds more than are women (Tannen, 1990).

Goffman-inspired politeness theory (Goffman, 1967) points to specific predictions concerning how the content of teasing will vary according to different characteristics of personal relationships (P. Brown & Levinson, 1987). Specifically, individuals are believed to be more concerned about the face-threatening potential of their actions to the extent that they are in lower status positions and have positive bonds with the target of the communication (P. Brown & Levinson, 1987; Slugoski & Turnbull, 1988). The reasoning is straightforward: Individuals concerned about others' evaluations, as in the case of individuals of lower status and those with positive emotional bonds, will take greater care to avoid threatening the face of others. This reasoning led us to hypothesize that individuals in low-status positions and those with positive bonds with the target will tease in more prosocial ways, defined by reduced face threat and increased redressive action.

Variation in Teasing Across Individuals

Teasing is also likely to vary according to the individual doing the teasing. The literature on bullying and victimization indicates that the same children are reported to be bullies across time (e.g., Whitney & Smith, 1993), suggesting that the inclination to tease in overly aggressive ways may be the manifestation of some personality trait. Across cultures, bullies tend to be hostile and prone to negative emotion (Olweus, 1978). Much as hostile children interpret others' ambiguous actions in aggressive terms (e.g., Lemerise & Dodge, 1993), they seem to engage in an ambiguous social practice, teasing, in more aggressive ways.

Although we know of no study that has addressed the relationship between adult personality and teasing, the literature on personality and emotion points to clear predictions. Specifically, the personality trait of agreeableness, defined by warmth, kindness, and friendliness, is negatively correlated with self-reports and facial expressions of negative emotions such as anger (Keltner, 1996; Watson & Clark, 1992). These empirical findings led us to hypothesize that highly disagreeable individuals will tease in less prosocial ways, defined by increased face threat and reduced redressive action.

Differences in the Experience of Teasing and Being Teased

Perhaps the most obvious yet relatively ignored factor that contributes to the experience of teasing is the individual's role as teaser or target. Many teasing relationships are reciprocal in nature (e.g., Radcliffe-Brown, 1940), and many teasing interactions are defined by reciprocal exchanges (e.g., Abrahams, 1962). Teasing and being teased clearly differ, however. Most obviously, although teasing produces mutual amusement (Drew, 1987), it is typically at the expense of the target, whose deviations and flaws are made known. Being the object of face-threatening behavior is certain to produce negative emotion in targets of teasing.

More subtly, survey research indicates that teasers and targets diverge in the intentions they perceive behind the tease. Whereas teasers report many benign intentions behind their tease, such as to express affection or amuse others, recipients of the tease perceive the tease in more negative terms (Shapiro et al., 1991). This latter finding follows from different kinds of information teasers and targets can rely on in interpreting the intention of the tease: Teasers are certain to be more aware of the benign intentions motivating the tease's off-record, redressive actions than targets, who are likely to attend more exclusively to the literal, intentionally aggressive component of the tease.

This reasoning suggests that the pleasure and pain of teasing is not so mutual, that targets would be more likely to experience

negative emotion associated with teasing and teasers more positive emotion. One study provides evidence that indirectly supports this claim. In a study of romantic idiom, men reported that they experienced the interactions in which they generated teasing insults about their partners as pleasurable, whereas women found those same interactions to be more insulting and negative (Hopper et al., 1981). More informally, studies that have documented the negative outcomes of teasing, in particular studies of bullying and victimization, have focused primarily on the perceptions of targets of asymmetrical teasing. This analysis led us to hypothesize that targets of teasing will experience more negative emotion and less positive emotion than teasers.

The Current Research

In summary, the empirical research on teasing reaches opposing conclusions about the positive or negative nature of teasing. A face threat analysis of teasing integrates these different perspectives and points to specific hypotheses about how the face-threatening yet redressive content of teasing will vary according to relationship, personality, role, and gender. In this investigation, we examined the following hypotheses and research questions:

Hypothesis 1: Individuals in low-status positions and those with positive bonds with the target of the tease will tease in more prosocial ways, defined by reduced face threat and increased redressive action.

Hypothesis 2: Highly disagreeable individuals will tease in less prosocial ways.

Hypothesis 3: Targets of teasing will experience more negative emotion and less positive emotion than teasers.

Hypothesis 4: Women will experience more negative emotion and less positive emotion than men while teasing and being teased.

In addition to testing these four hypotheses, the last of which was tested only in Study 2, we also examined two research questions:

Research Question 1: Does teasing focus on deviations from social norms?

Research Question 2: How might teasing relate to increased affiliation?

To address these hypotheses and research questions, we asked low- and high-status fraternity members (Study 1) and romantic partners (Study 2) to tease each other by making up nicknames about one another and telling embarrassing stories that justified those nicknames. This procedure was based on survey studies and conceptual analyses that indicate that nicknames are one of the most common forms of teasing (e.g., Mooney et al., 1991; Pawluk, 1989). In Study 2 we also examined romantic partners' teasing that spontaneously occurred during a conflict discussion. These methods improve on previous ethnographies, linguistic analyses, and survey studies of teasing in at least four ways: First, previous researchers have not controlled for the kind of teasing in which individuals engaged or the context in which the teasing took place. This renders conclusions about variation

in teasing problematic (e.g., women and men may respond to teasing differently, or they may actually engage in different kinds of teasing). Second, many researchers have measured only the likelihood of teasing rather than its content. Third, those researchers who have measured the content of teasing have focused either on the negative or positive content of teasing, thus failing to address how the aggressive yet playful elements of teasing work together. Finally, we know of no study that has systematically assessed the relationship between the content of teasing and dimensions of social relationships.

Study 1: Teasing in Hierarchical Relations

In Study 1 members of a fraternity teased one another in randomly assigned groups of two low-status, recently admitted members (pledges) and two high-status, longtime members (actives). A few studies have documented relations between social status and the likelihood of teasing. Observations of hospital staff meetings showed that senior staff members were more likely to make jokes at the expense of junior staff members than vice versa (Coser, 1960). A survey of teasing among third, fifth, and eighth graders indicated that popular children were more likely to tease and that unpopular children were more likely to be teased (Shapiro et al., 1991). An observational study conducted at a summer camp study showed that high-status boys, as nominated by their peers, were more likely to tease than low-status boys (Savin-Williams, 1977). A survey study showed that bullies were typically enrolled in higher grades than their victims, suggesting that status differences may increase bullying-related teasing (Whitney & Smith, 1993). Extending these findings, we predicted that the most prosocial teasing, defined by the least face threat and most redressive action, would occur when low-status teasers teased high-status targets (Hypothesis 1), that highly disagreeable individuals would tease in less prosocial ways (Hypothesis 2), and that targets of teases would experience more negative emotion and less positive emotion than teasers (Hypothesis 3).

Method

Participants

We recruited participants from a fraternity at the University of Wisconsin—Madison. The fraternity system is a long-standing institution in American colleges and universities. Fraternities are all-male organizations, typically highly selective in whom they admit, and they develop a coherent group identity revolving around norms related to social life, academics, athletics, and community-based charities. Fraternity members typically share living arrangements in a separate living unit or "house" and refer to each other as "brothers." Forty-eight members of a fraternity (24 low status and 24 high status) volunteered to participate in the study 1 month after the beginning of the fall semester. The 48 participants represented 74% of the members of the fraternity. To reduce fraternity-related pressure on the low-status members to participate, participation schedules were distributed individually to each fraternity member. If a member decided to participate, he indicated the hours that he would be available to participate and returned the schedule to one of the investigators. Thus, to our knowledge, participants' decisions whether to participate remained relatively unknown to the other fraternity members until the study was conducted. Participants first completed a packet

of questionnaires, including measures of social status, personality, and popularity and 3–7 days later visited the laboratory in groups of 4 to complete the teasing session. The fraternity received $850 for being involved in the study, which was not conditional on the ultimate number of participants in the study.

Determination of Status

We defined "pledges," who joined the fraternity 1 month before the study, as low-status members, and "actives" involved in the fraternity for at least 2 years as high-status members.

Sociometric and Personality Measures

One week before the laboratory visit, participants rated how well they knew each of the 47 fraternity members in the study (1 = not at all, 4 = extremely well) and whether they would vote for each member for fraternity president (yes or no). Each participant also filled out Costa and McCrae's (1992) NEO Personality Inventory.

Procedure

Two low- and two high-status participants were randomly assigned to 1 of 12 groups and brought to the laboratory in groups of four. To make status salient, one low- and one high-status participant were assigned seats by an assistant on each side of a rectangular table facing a member of the other status. Participants were told that the teasing session would be recorded by partially concealed video cameras. Before the study, to encourage spontaneous interactions one of us presented his research to the fraternity members on one visit to their house (without disclosing the nature of the study), dined with them on another visit, and before each teasing interaction discussed the fraternity's homecoming for 5 min.

Teasing exercise. Participants were told that the experiment was a study of teasing and encouraged to tease each other as they ordinarily would, to say whatever they liked, and not to worry about profanities or lewdness. The experimenter then assigned each of the participants one of four randomly generated pairs of initials (A. D., H. F., L. I., and T. J.) and explained that the participants were to generate a nickname about each of the other participants based on the initials and a brief story that justified each nickname based on actual or hypothetical events. The participants were then given 10 min to generate nicknames and stories for the other 3 participants, during which time the experimenter remained outside the room. The actual teasing was directed by the experimenter, who requested that participants tell their nickname and story in about 1 min. Beginning with the participant to the left of the experimenter and moving in subsequent teases in clockwise fashion, each participant was the target of the successive teasing of the other 3 participants. Thus, if the first high-status participant was seated to the left of the experimenter, he was teased by the first low-status participant, the second high-status participant, and finally by the second low-status participant. The first low-status participant would then be the target and teased by the other 3 participants. Each participant teased and was teased by each other participant. In half the groups, a low-status participant was the first to be teased, whereas in the other half of the groups a high-status participant was the first to be teased. An assistant who videotaped the interactions from another room determined the seating positions of the low- and high-status participants, thus allowing the experimenter to remain unaware throughout the study of the participants' status in the fraternity. The experimenter remained unobtrusive and avoided eye contact with the participants during the teasing interactions.

Self-report questionnaires. After the teasing session, participants were seated in corners of the room to fill out a questionnaire. First, participants rated how much amusement, discomfort, embarrassment,

and sympathy they felt during each tease (0 = none of the emotion, 8 = the most of the emotion ever felt). Second, participants rated each of the 47 participants for their levels of the five traits of the five-factor model of personality (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991) on the following 7-point scales: Extraversion (1 = shy, likes to be alone, keeps thoughts to self, 7 = energetic, talkative, full of life); Agreeableness (1 = stubborn, hard to get along with, uncooperative, 7 = considerate, thoughtful, eager to please); Conscientiousness (1 = doesn't plan ahead, unreliable, gives up easily, 7 = has high standards, is neat, orderly, determined, reliable); Neuroticism (1 = emotionally stable, calm under stress, sure of himself, 7 = nervous and fearful, worries a lot, rattles under stress); and Openness to Experience (1 = doesn't care for fantasy/imagination, not eager to explore new things, 7 = curious and exploring, rich fantasy life, creative). Participants were asked to rate the other members even if they only knew them by name or sight.

Coding of content of teasing. All coding in Study 1 and Study 2 was done from videotapes of the teasing interactions by pairs of coders who did not know the participants' identities. The pairs of coders coded half the teases and overlapped on 24 teases to assess reliability. For the following categories, the coding was done, unless specified, on 7-point scales (1 = not at all, 7 = extremely). Coders rated the *dominance* in each tease by coding the extent to which the teaser referred to his strength, elevated status, control over the target, and the weakness and devalued status of the target. Coders rated the *humiliation* in each tease by coding the level of aggression, sarcasm, nastiness, and criticism, and references to the target's failures, nudity, animal nature, loss of control over body functions, and lack of physical size. Coders rated the *flattery* in the tease by coding how much the teaser praised and referred to the accomplishments of the target. Coders rated the *deference* in the tease by coding the teaser's references to his own submissiveness and weakness. On the basis of a review of the teases, coders categorized the teases into 1 of the following 12 thematic categories: negative personality trait, positive personality trait, excessive drinking or drug taking, unpleasant appearance, pleasant appearance, sexual abnormality, sexual prowess, athleticism, lack of athleticism, inappropriate behavior, homosexuality, and weakness with women (κ = .63). The correlations between coders' ratings of the items related to flattery, deference, dominance, and humiliation ranged from .72 to .83.

Coding of playful, off-record markers. Two coders coded the *general playful quality* of the teases (1 = low, 7 = high) according to how well the tease was told and the *specific playful quality* of the teases by noting the presence or absence of a well-set-up joke; voice changes; impressions; vivid, concrete detail; and engaging denouement of the story. The coders overlapped in their global (r = .76) and specific quality judgments (κ = .60).

Coding of nonverbal dominance and submissiveness. The coding of postural and facial behavior was limited to the behavior observed during the 10 s before and 10 s after the punchline of the tease (identified by two coders with 92.3% agreement) to hold the duration of each tease constant. On the basis of the literature (Ellyson & Dovidio, 1985), coders coded three kinds of status-relevant behavior: the onset and offset time of each face touch (κ = .62); five dominant behaviors, including arms akimbo (hands clasped behind head, elbows pointed to side), body expansion, pointing, raising of arms, and pumping the fist (κ = .68); and submissive postural constriction (κ = .54).

Coding of facial behavior. Participants' facial behavior was coded using the Facial Action Coding System (FACS; Ekman & Friesen, 1978), an anatomically based system that allows for the coding of visible facial, head, and gaze movements. Facial muscle and head movements were scored on a 5-point scale (1 = minimal intensity, 3 = moderate intensity, 5 = extreme intensity). One coder coded the facial behavior observed during all the teases. Another coder who had passed the FACS reliability test coded all four participants' behavior observed during 24 randomly

selected teases. Intercoder reliability was evaluated using a ratio in which the number of action units on which the two coders agreed was multiplied by 2 and then divided by the total number of action units scored by the two persons (Keltner, 1995).[2] This agreement ratio was calculated for each event observed by one or both coders. The mean ratio of agreement was .86. Coders were within one FACS intensity level in 92% of their codes. Theoretically derived criteria (Ekman, 1984) were used to identify facial expressions of anger, contempt, fear, pain, and Duchenne smiles, which involve the actions of the zygomatic major muscle that pulls the lip corners up and the orbicularis oculi muscle that raises the upper cheeks and is associated with positive emotion. A measure of embarrassment was derived according to the sum of the standardized measures of gaze down, smile controls, head movements down, and face touching (Keltner, 1995).

Results

Derivation of Measures and Data-Analytic Approaches

We calculated measures of four components of each tease. The face threat of the tease was equal to the mean of the standardized verbal hostility (i.e., the mean of verbal dominance and humiliation scores) and nonverbal dominance scores. The playful, off-record nature of the tease was equal to the mean of the standardized specific and global playful quality scores. The positive politeness of the tease was equal to the standardized flattery score. Finally, the negative politeness of the tease was equal to the mean of the standardized verbal deference and nonverbal submissiveness scores. We calculated an overall prosocial teasing index by subtracting the face threat score from the mean of the three redressive action scores (playful markers and positive and negative politeness tactics).[3]

Our data analysis is divided into the following sections. First, we test our hypotheses concerning relations between the content and experience of teasing and participants' social status (Hypothesis 1), agreeableness (Hypothesis 2), and role as teaser or target (Hypothesis 3). Second, we address whether the teasing focused on deviations from social norms (Research Question 1). Third, we examine the correlations between the face threat and playful markers of the tease and targets' responses to address how teasing might increase affiliation (Research Question 2). Because of the intercorrelations among group members' behavior, we treated the teasing group as the unit of analysis. We tested Hypotheses 1 and 3 in a repeated measures design with teaser and target status (high vs. low) as repeated measures and the group as the unit of analysis.[4] Within-groups means for the relevant measures were calculated for each of the four pairings of low- and high-status teasers and targets. We refer to this analysis as the two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Hypothesis 1: Social Status and the Content of Teasing

We expected low-status teasers to tease in more prosocial ways than high-status teasers, especially when teasing high-status targets. Figure 1 shows the levels of the overall index of prosocial teasing observed in the four kinds of teasing interactions. The two-way ANOVA indicated that low-status teasers teased in more prosocial ways ($Ms = 0.50$ vs. -0.50), $F(1, 11) = 12.32$, $p < .01$, and that more prosocial teasing was directed at high- than low-status targets ($Ms = 0.42$ vs. -0.42),
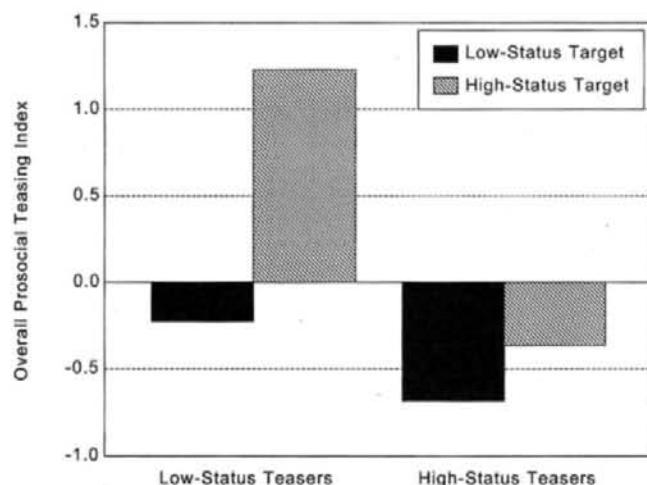

Figure 1. Levels of low- and high-status fraternity members' prosocial teasing.

$F(1, 11) = 6.48$, $p < .05$. This analysis also yielded the expected interaction indicating that low-status teasers were more prosocial when teasing high- than low-status targets ($Ms = 1.21$ vs. -0.21), whereas high-status teasers teased both high- and low-status targets in a less prosocial fashion ($Ms = -0.37$ and -0.62), $F(1, 11) = 7.70$, $p < .05$.

To test the status-related hypotheses across participants, we examined the correlations between the overall prosocial teasing index and each participant's popularity in the fraternity, which was equal to the sum of the standardized measures of how well-known he was and the number of presidential nominations he received from his peers. This measure of popularity was highly correlated with the participant's status as a pledge or active ($r = .68$). Across the 48 participants, more popular targets were the recipients of more prosocial teasing ($r = .34$).

Hypothesis 2: Personality and the Content of Teasing

To test Hypothesis 2, we examined the correlations between the level of agreeableness of each group (i.e., the mean of the 4

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[2] FACS-based coding is not assessed with the traditional kappa reliability estimate for the following reason: Whereas the calculation of kappa reliability estimates requires each coder's response to the same discrete units of time, in using FACS coders may record any combination of dozens of facial actions at any point in time. Therefore, there are a potentially infinite number of FACS possible coding units, so kappa coefficients typically are not used.

[3] The intercorrelations among the measures that contributed to the four component measures of each tease were low, and the corresponding alphas for each composite measure and the overall prosocial teasing index were likewise low. These findings were not unexpected, given that the composite measures captured different facets of teasing (Bollen & Lennox, 1991).

[4] This analysis originally included order as a between-subjects factor (high or low status first as target) to determine whether this factor would influence the content of teasing. No significant influences of order on the content of teasing were observed, so the two-way analysis of variance collapsed across the two orders. We likewise did not find any order effects in Study 2 and therefore did not consider it in the main analyses.

Table 1
Participants' Emotional Responses to Teasing in Study 1

| | Low-status members (LS) | | | | High-status members (HS) | | | |
| | As teasers | | As targets | | As teasers | | As targets | |
Response	Teasing LS	Teasing HS	Teased by LS	Teased by HS	Teasing LS	Teasing HS	Teased by LS	Teased by HS
Negative emotion								
Reported embarrassment	1.50	1.17	2.29	2.10	1.63	1.42	1.63	2.63
Facial embarrassment	0.11	1.40	0.87	2.29	−1.95	−1.50	−0.83	−0.65
Facial hostility	0.08	0.00	0.08	0.00	0.06	0.00	0.21	0.00
Facial fear	0.13	0.10	0.08	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.04
Facial pain	0.00	0.04	0.08	0.13	0.02	0.00	0.02	0.00
Positive emotion								
Reported amusement	5.04	4.88	5.46	5.42	5.54	6.08	5.19	5.88
Duchenne smiles	1.29	0.82	1.79	1.71	1.35	1.71	1.69	1.92

Note. Self-reports of embarrassment and amusement were made on 9-point scales (0 = *no emotion*, 8 = *extreme emotion*). Measures of embarrassment are equal to the sum of the standardized measures of gaze aversion, smile controls, face touches, and head movements down. Measures of facial hostility, fear, and pain are equal to the proportion of participants who showed each emotion. Measures of Duchenne smiles are frequency counts of that behavior.

members' self-reports of agreeableness) and the group's overall prosocial teasing index. Although agreeableness did not correlate significantly with the overall prosocial teasing index, it did correlate positively with the levels of negative politeness in the tease ($r = .70, p = .01$).

Hypothesis 3: Differences in the Experiences of Teasing and Being Teased

We expected targets to experience and express more negative emotion than teasers (see Table 1 for relevant means). On each measure, we conducted a 2 × 2 × 2 repeated measures ANOVA with role (teaser or target), participant status, and partner status as repeated measures and the group as the unit of analysis. Targets reported more embarrassment than teasers ($Ms = 2.16$ vs. 1.43), $F(1, 11) = 7.87, p < .05$, and showed more facial embarrassment ($Ms = 0.42$ vs. −0.49), $F(1, 11) = 7.25, p < .05$, and pain ($Ms = 0.06$ vs. 0.02), $F(1, 11) = 4.63, p = .053$. Contrary to prediction, targets displayed more Duchenne smiles than teasers ($Ms = 1.78$ vs. 1.29), $F(1, 11) = 25.90, p < .001$.

In terms of participant status effects, across interactions low-status participants displayed more facial embarrassment ($Ms = 1.17$ vs. −1.23), $F(1, 11) = 14.01, p < .01$, and pain ($Ms = 0.06$ vs. 0.01), $F(1, 11) = 5.19, p < .05$, and tended to show more fear ($Ms = 0.09$ vs. 0.02), $F(1, 11) = 4.31, p = .06$, and fewer Duchenne smiles ($Ms = 1.40$ vs. 1.67), $F(1, 11) = 3.98, p = .07$. In terms of partner status effects, when teasing or being teased by low- as opposed to high-status individuals, participants displayed more facial hostility ($Ms = 0.11$ vs. 0.00), $F(1, 11) = 13.36, p < .01$, and tended to display less embarrassment ($Ms = -0.45$ vs. 0.39), $F(1, 11) = 4.12, p = .07$. A significant interaction between participant status and role indicated that low-status participants reported more amusement as targets than teasers ($Ms = 4.96$ vs. 5.44), whereas the opposite was true for high-status participants ($Ms = 5.82$ vs. 5.54), $F(1, 11) = 4.79, p = .05$. A Participant Status × Partner Status

interaction indicated that low-status participants showed more Duchenne smiles when teasing or being teased by low- than high-status participants ($Ms = 1.54$ vs. 1.27), whereas the opposite was true of high-status participants ($Ms = 1.82$ vs. 1.52), $F(1, 11) = 7.02, p < .05$. No other main effects or interactions were significant.

Research Question 1: Does Teasing Communicate Norm Deviations?

Fraternity members teased each other with humiliating nicknames (e.g., "Anal Duck," "Human Fly," "Little Impotent," "Turkey Jerk"). A dependent means *t* test indicated that across all interactions teasers articulated greater hostility than flattery in their teases ($Ms = 2.66$ vs. 1.59), $t(141) = 7.10, p < .01$. As can be seen in Table 2, participants teased each other more about negative than positive characteristics and actions (83.7% vs. 16.3% of teases), consistent with the idea that teasing points out flaws and norm violations (Pawluk, 1989). Consistent with previous results supporting Hypothesis 1, low-status teasers were more likely to refer to positive attributes when teasing high-status targets ($M = 29.6\%$) than low-status targets ($M = 9.6\%$, $z = 2.56, p < .05$) or when high-status teasers teased low-status targets ($M = 6.5\%$, $z = 3.07, p < .05$).

Research Question 2: How Might Teasing Relate to Increased Affiliation?

Finally, we took two approaches to address how teasing might relate to increased affiliation. First, we examined the correlations between the face-threatening and playful components of the tease and target's response, treating the group as the unit of analysis in each correlation. Both the face threat and the playful humor of the tease correlated with the target's smiling behavior ($rs = .60$ and .63, respectively, $ps < .05$). Second, we compared participants' overall favorability rating (the negative trait, Neu-

Table 2

Content of Teases Organized According to Status of Teaser and Target in Study 1

Characteristic	Low teases low	Low teases high	High teases low	High teases high	Across four teases
Negative					
Negative personality trait	23.8	15.9	34.8	29.2	25.9
Excessive drugs or drinking	23.8	15.9	13.0	16.7	16.3
Unpleasant appearance	9.5	15.9	10.9	8.3	11.9
Odd behavior	14.3	6.8	10.9	8.3	9.6
Sexual abnormality	9.5	9.1	6.5	12.5	8.9
Homosexuality	0.0	4.5	6.5	8.3	5.2
Weakness with women	9.5	2.3	8.7	0.0	5.2
Lack of athleticism	0.0	0.0	2.2	0.0	0.7
Positive					
Positive personality trait	4.8	18.2	4.3	8.3	9.6
Sexual prowess	4.8	6.8	0.0	4.2	3.7
Pleasant appearance	0.0	2.3	0.0	4.2	1.5
Athleticism	4.8	2.3	2.2	0.0	1.5

Note. Numbers are percentages of participants who teased about the theme.

roticism, subtracted from the average of the positive traits, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience) of the fraternity members *in* their teasing group with their mean evaluation of the members in the *other* teasing groups. Dependent means *t* tests indicated that participants evaluated the high-status participants in their teasing group more favorably than the high-status participants in the other teasing groups ($Ms = 1.41$ vs. 1.12), $t(47) = 2.85, p < .05$, and tended to evaluate the low-status participants in their teasing group more favorably than the low-status participants in other groups ($Ms = 1.11$ vs. 1.00), $t(47) = 1.72, p = .09$.

Discussion

Results of ethnographic, linguistic, and survey studies suggest that teasing allows group members to communicate norm violations and enhance social bonds. The results generated by our two research questions support these general claims about teasing. Fraternity members' teasing centered on status differences and norm violations related to personality, sex, and drugs, providing information to the new members about the group hierarchy and norms (Research Question 1). The teasing, although humiliating, generated laughter and smiling, and, in the end, teasing partners evaluated each other more favorably than fraternity members whom they did not tease in the study, suggesting that teasing may enhance bonds (Research Question 2).

Tests of our more specific hypotheses revealed important sources of variation in the content and experience of teasing. Our first hypothesis concerned how teasing would vary according to social status. Consistent with Hypothesis 1 and a broader literature linking status to politeness tactics (P. Brown & Levinson, 1987), the most prosocial teasing, defined by lower levels of face threat and increased redressive action, was evident when low-status members teased their high-status members. Although one might argue that low-status teasers teased in more prosocial ways because they simply assumed that their teasing would be taken less seriously, two patterns of results contradict this

interpretation. First, low-status teasers were not prosocial when teasing low-status targets (see Figure 1). Second, low-status teasers showed more negative emotion than high-status teasers, and targets of low-status teasing showed more facial hostility, suggesting that all participants took the low-status teasers' teasing seriously.

Our second hypothesis predicted that just as hostile children are prone to victimize and bully, more disagreeable fraternity members would tease in less prosocial ways. This hypothesis received weak support. At the group level of analysis, levels of disagreeableness were correlated with the increased use of negative politeness tactics to temper the threat of their tease, extending findings from the literature on bullying. This finding is especially striking because the social context—status-based interactions—was such a strong situation.

Our third aim was to follow up on suggestive findings that indicate that targets tend to perceive the tease in more negative terms than teasers (e.g., Shapiro et al., 1991). Our gathering of self-report and facial measures of emotion allowed for a more systematic examination of this property of teasing interactions. Certain findings supported our third hypothesis that targets of teasing would find the teasing more aversive than teasers: As objects of the teaser's derision, targets reported more embarrassment and showed more negative facial emotion than teasers.

Other findings, however, contradicted Hypothesis 3 and pointed to other social variables that influence teasing-related emotion. Targets actually showed more Duchenne smiles than teasers, which may have been appeasement gestures (Keltner & Buswell, 1997) or attempts to dissociate from the distress of being teased (Keltner & Bonanno, 1997). Low-status participants displayed more embarrassment, fear, and pain across interactions, consistent with claims about status differences in emotion (e.g., C. Clark, 1990). The same status teasing interactions were the most playful and evocative of positive emotion, suggesting that familiarity, or the lack of status-related concerns, enhances the pleasure of teasing. Low- and high-status partici-

pants also reported more amusement in the respective roles of target and teaser, suggesting that the pleasure of teasing relates to the extent to which the teasing fits norms about who teases whom. The influences of familiarity and role appropriateness on the characteristics and consequences of teasing warrant further study.

Before turning to Study 2, several limitations of Study 1 must be mentioned. The inference that teasing enhanced fraternity members' bonds is problematic because personality ratings are indirect measures of social bonds, and any group activity, not just teasing, might plausibly elevate members' ratings of each other. The correlations between teasing content and participants' emotions are open to multiple interpretations (e.g., the tease's playful markers may have produced smiling in the target or the target's smiling may have encouraged the teaser to be more playful). Finally, a fraternity is a male hierarchical group, which raises the question of whether a face threat analysis would generalize to teasing in other relationships.

Study 2: Teasing in Intimate Heterosexual Relationships

In Study 2 we examined the teasing of romantic partners to extend the findings from the fraternity study and test hypotheses about the teasing of women and in intimate relationships. The claims about gender and teasing are widespread (e.g., Tannen, 1990), yet the relevant laboratory evidence is nonexistent. Certain studies imply that men may be more likely to tease than women. Young boys report being more likely to bully than young girls (e.g., Whitney & Smith, 1993). Surveys of romantic idiom suggest that men are more likely than women to generate teasing insults (Hopper et al., 1981). Men reported that they were more likely to tease children than women (Alberts, 1992). Men may also enjoy teasing more than do women. For example, men rate the experience of teasing insults contained within romantic idiom as being more positive than women (Hopper et al., 1981). We know of no study, however, that has directly compared the styles and experiences of teasing of women and men in a study that controlled the nature and context of the teasing.

In Study 2 we tested four hypotheses. We predicted that satisfied romantic partners would tease each other in more prosocial ways, defined by reduced face threat and increased redressive action, than less satisfied partners (Hypothesis 1); that disagreeable individuals would tease in less prosocial ways (Hypothesis 2); and that targets of teasing would report more negative emotion and less positive emotion than teasers (Hypothesis 3). Our fourth hypothesis pertained to gender-related differences in teasing and led us to make two predictions. First, we predicted that women would experience more negative emotion and less positive emotion than men, following the literature, albeit limited, that we just reviewed. Second, we predicted that the face threat of the tease would have more negative consequences for women than men, based on studies indicating that men find playful aggression less disturbing than women (Tannen, 1993). As in Study 1, we also addressed how teasing would relate to norm violations (Research Question 1) and increased affiliation (Research Question 2).

In Study 2 we varied the methods of Study 1. The experimenter left the room during the interactions to allow for more

spontaneous teasing. We gathered more extensive self-report measures of participants' emotions. Finally, we also studied the spontaneous teasing that arose during a more negative interaction, a conflict discussion, for two reasons: First, the nickname paradigm might underrepresent the more negative side of teasing because of its lighthearted format and explicit framing as a teasing interaction (which reduces the potentially dangerous ambiguity of teasing). Second, several theorists have argued that teasing allows individuals to manage interpersonal conflicts (Alberts, 1992; Drew, 1987; Eder, 1991; Radcliffe-Brown, 1940). According to this view, teasing represents a lighthearted way of complaining and negotiating conflicts in goals and opinions. Conflict-related teasing should therefore relate to increased relationship satisfaction. The evidence for this claim, however, is equivocal. Although one study indicated that satisfied couples tease more than unsatisfied couples (Ting-Toomey, 1983), other studies have documented no relation between the amount of teasing and relational satisfaction (Baxter, 1992; Bell, Buerkel-Rothfuss, & Gore, 1987).

Method

Participants

Sixty heterosexual couples involved in a romantic relationship for at least 6 months at the University of Wisconsin—Madison were recruited by advertisements placed in college newspapers and fliers posted in dormitories. In October, participants filled out measures of relationship satisfaction, conflict, and personality and visited the laboratory as couples 2 weeks later to engage in the teasing task and conflict discussion, for which they received $20. At the follow-up in April, participants completed the same questionnaires and tasks in the same order. By April, 10 of the 60 couples had broken up. The current study focused on the teasing observed in the October teasing and conflict interactions and how that teasing related to the satisfaction measures gathered in October and April.

Measures of Personality, Relationship Satisfaction, and Conflict

Two weeks before each laboratory visit, participants completed a 44-item measure of the five-factor model of personality (the Big Five Inventory; John et al., 1991) and a measure of relationship satisfaction (Locke & Wallace, 1959) tailored to dating relationships ($\alpha = .80$). They also rated their level of conflict on a 7-point scale ($1 = no\ disagreement$, $7 = extreme\ disagreement$) on the following issues: future plans, communication, sex, religion, alcohol and drug use, jealousy, time together, schedules, friends, faithfulness, money, and commitment ($\alpha = .86$).

Procedure

The laboratory sessions were conducted by one of three female experimenters, each of whom did not know the study's hypotheses, from a room in which they could view participants on a video monitor and communicate over an intercom. The experimenter first seated participants across from one another at a table, gave instructions about videotaping and acting spontaneously, and then engaged in a casual discussion about the participants' majors. The experimenter then left the room and directed the couple via the intercom in discussions about their first meeting, the events of the day, the teasing interaction, a conflict discussion, a present

concern, and a recent success. Self-report and 1-min rest periods followed each task. Each laboratory session lasted 1 hr.

Teasing exercise and conflict discussion. The instructions for the teasing exercise were the same as in Study 1, except that the experimenter assigned the initials A. D. and L. I. to one participant and H. F. and T. J. to the other, alternating across couples which pair was assigned to women and men. In half the teasing exercises, the woman went first; in the other half, the man went first. The conflict discussion task was based on a task used by Levenson and Gottman (1983). Two weeks before each laboratory visit, participants privately rated the severity of a number of common problems in their relationship (e.g., problems sharing work, spending quality time, maintaining a satisfying sex life; the openness of communication). The experimenter selected one problem that both participants had indicated as being significant; in the conflict discussion, the experimenter directed the participants over the intercom to discuss a single, unresolved issue related to the problem for 10 min. Couples' conflict discussions tended to revolve around the following issues: jealousy (15.5% of couples); time spent together (12.1% of couples); alcohol (12.1% of couples); communication (6.9% of couples); and fidelity, sex, and money (5.2% of couples each). Issues such as religion, friends, commitment, gender roles, housework, and disorganization were the topics for 2 couples or fewer. The remaining couples (25.9%) talked about the general problems in their relationship.

Self-reports of emotion. After each task, participants rated how much amusement, anger, arousal, concern, contempt, desire, discomfort, disgust, embarrassment, fear, guilt, happiness, love, pride, sadness, shame, shyness, sympathy, and tension they felt, and they estimated their partner's emotions on the same items (0 = *no emotion*, 8 = *extreme emotion*). We created composite measures of teasers' and targets' own negative emotion (the mean of the anger, contempt, discomfort, disgust, embarrassment, shame, and shyness ratings), positive emotion (the mean of the amusement, arousal, desire, happiness, love, and pride ratings), and overall emotion (the negative composite subtracted from the positive composite), as well as their estimates of their partner's negative, positive, and overall emotion when teasing and being teased. The alpha coefficients for these scales ranged from .71 to .82.

Evaluations of partner's conflict behavior. After the conflict discussion, participants rated how fair, open, trustworthy, cooperative, competitive, and honest their partner was during the conflict discussion (0 = *not at all*, 8 = *extremely*). We averaged participants' ratings of their partner's fairness, cooperativeness, and competitiveness to create a fairness composite (α = .62) and their ratings of their partner's openness, trustworthiness, and honesty to create a trustworthiness composite (α = .73).

Coding of the teasing from the teasing exercise. Following procedures described in Study 1, two coders coded the levels of *verbal hostility* (lack of physical size was not considered a humiliation code when men teased women) and *dominance, flattery,* and *deference.* The correlations between coders' overlapping ratings of the verbal themes ranged from .67 to .95. Coders noted the presence of one, or in some cases several, of the following themes: excessive drinking or drug taking, unpleasant appearance, pleasant appearance, sexual abnormality, sexual prowess, negative personality trait, positive personality trait, inappropriate body functions, ineffectiveness with people, physical prowess, commitment, lack of commitment, flirtatiousness, unusual shared experience, personal preference, negative interaction, positive interaction, physical characteristics, jealousy, and unusual habits (κ = 85). Coders coded the presence or absence of the following playful, off-record markers: explicit recognition that the statement is a tease, fantastical paralinguistic cues (sticking out one's tongue, bizarre facial expression), fantastical elements in story, unusual voice inflection, joking contradictions of the tease's criticism, apologies, playful physical contact, and teasers' criticisms of the tease (κ = .76). Coders coded the presence or absence of submissive, constricted

posture (κ = .88) and the following dominance displays: expansive posture, jaw thrust with head up, eyebrows lowered, bodily disinhibition, and arms akimbo (κ = .89).

Coding of flirtatious behavior. On the basis of studies of flirtation (Grammer, 1990), coders coded the presence or absence of coy smiles; sideways head tilts; adjustment to clothes, jewelry, and makeup; lip puckers; lip wipes and tongue protrusions; and hair grooming (κ = .64).

Coding of the teasing during the conflict discussion. After the data collection, we reviewed the interactions of 20 couples to ascertain whether we could study teasing in any of the other interactions. This review indicated that spontaneous teasing, as defined by criticism accompanied by redressive actions, did occur in the conflict discussion. Spontaneous teasing did not occur with enough frequency for meaningful analysis in the other tasks (i.e., events of the day, a present concern, a present success), so we coded only the spontaneous teasing that occurred during the 10-min conflict discussion. Our definition of teasing as face-threatening criticism or aggression accompanied by redressive action guided the coding of the teasing during the conflict discussion. Specifically, we identified all instances in which a partner criticized the other partner in a way that involved some redressive action. Following criteria defined in the Specific Affect Coding System (Gottman, 1995), one set of coders first identified all occurrences when a participant criticized his or her partner. These coders overlapped on 20 couples' conflict discussions (κ = .88). A second set of coders coded each criticism on 7-point Likert scales (1 = *none*, 7 = *extreme levels*) for levels of (a) face threat (verbal, nonverbal hostility); (b) playful, off-record markers (unusual verbal behavior [imitations, change in voice], unusual facial expressions and laughter); (c) positive politeness tactics (flattery and praise); and (d) negative politeness tactics (verbal deference and nonverbal submissiveness). Coders overlapped in their coding of 20 couples' behavior. Correlations between the coders' judgments ranged from .77 to .90.

Results

Data-Analytic Approaches

First, we present evidence relevant to the hypothesized relations between the content and experience of teasing and relationship satisfaction (Hypothesis 1), personality (Hypothesis 2), role as teaser or target (Hypothesis 3), and gender (Hypothesis 4). Second, we address whether the paradigm produced teasing-like behavior that focused on norm violations (Research Question 1). Third, we again examine the correlations between the overall prosocial teasing index and targets' response to address how teasing might increase affiliation (Research Question 2). We use the same overall prosocial teasing index as in Study 1 and treat the couple as the unit of analysis.

Hypothesis 1: Relationship Satisfaction and the Content of Teasing

To test Hypothesis 1, we first classified couples according to whether their composite satisfaction score (i.e., the sum of the standardized measures of the partners' reports of conflict subtracted from the sum of the standardized measures of the partners' reports of relationship satisfaction) was above (satisfied) or below (less satisfied) the sample median. Figure 2 shows the overall prosocial teasing index in the teasing and conflict tasks for satisfied and less satisfied couples. A three-way ANOVA with satisfaction (low, high) as a between-subjects variable and
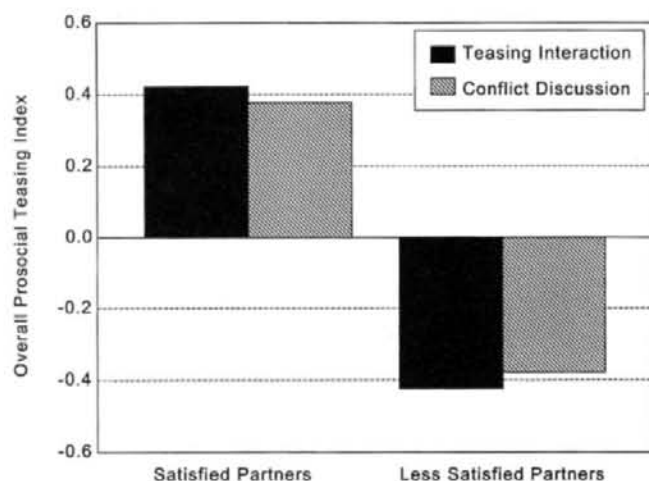
Figure 2. Levels of satisfied and less satisfied partners' prosocial teasing.

gender (female, male) and context (teasing interaction, conflict discussion) as repeated measures indicated that satisfied partners ($M = 0.40$) teased in more prosocial ways than less satisfied partners ($M = -0.40$), $F(1, 58) = 6.58$, $p = .01$. The main effects for gender and task were not significant, nor were any interactions among the three variables.

To address the relation between relationship satisfaction and teasing content across couples, we examined the correlations between the measures of couples' overall satisfaction and the overall prosocial teasing index averaged across the teasing and conflict discussion. Consistent with previous findings, couples' overall satisfaction was correlated with the overall prosocial teasing index ($r = .25$, $p = .05$). The overall prosocial teasing index correlated with partners' reported satisfaction gathered 7 months later ($r = .32$, $p < .01$), although this correlation did not remain significant when partners' reported satisfaction at Time 1 was partialed out ($r = .17$). Interestingly, the overall prosocial teasing index was higher for the 10 couples who broke up than those who remained together ($Ms = 1.07$ vs. -0.21), $t(58) = 2.36$, $p < .05$.

Hypothesis 2: Personality and the Content of Teasing

Because of the dependence of female and male partners' data, we examined the correlations between personality and teasing separately for women and men. Our hypothesis that disagreeable individuals would tease in less prosocial ways proved to be significant only for men. Specifically, men's self-rated agreeableness was positively correlated with the overall prosocial teasing index from the teasing exercise ($r = .34$, $p < .05$) and conflict discussion ($r = .36$, $p < .05$). Women's agreeableness did not significantly correlate with the overall prosocial teasing index.

Hypothesis 3: Differences in the Experience of Teasing and Being Teased

We hypothesized that targets would experience the teasing as more negative and less positive than teasers. We tested this

hypothesis (and one of the gender-related predictions reported below) by conducting $2 \times 2 \times 2$ ANOVAs with gender, role, and estimate (self-report or partner's estimate) as repeated measures on the indexes of positive, negative, and overall emotion (positive minus negative) associated with the teasing interactions (for relevant means, see Table 3). In testing Hypotheses 3 and 4, we focused only on the responses to the teasing interaction because our hypotheses focused on the experience of teasing per se, not teasing within a complex conflict interaction. Consistent with Hypothesis 3, targets reported more negative emotion ($Ms = 1.03$ vs. 0.75), $F(1, 57) = 21.29$, $p < .001$, and less positive than negative emotion than teasers ($Ms = 2.55$ vs. 3.23), $F(1, 56) = 37.19$, $p < .001$, who reported more positive emotion than targets ($Ms = 3.98$ vs. 3.58), $F(1, 57) = 38.09$, $p < .001$.

Hypothesis 4: Gender and the Experience of Teasing and Being Teased

Consistent with Hypothesis 4, women reported more negative ($Ms = 0.93$ vs. 0.78), $F(1, 57) = 19.53$, $p < .001$, and less positive than negative emotion than men ($Ms = 2.71$ vs. 3.06), $F(1, 56) = 16.23$, $p < .001$, who reported more positive emotion ($Ms = 3.85$ vs. 3.71), $F(1, 56) = 6.28$, $p = .01$. These main effects were qualified by Gender $\times$ Role interactions on the measures of negative, $F(1, 57) = 4.93$, $p < .05$, and overall emotion, $F(1, 56) = 7.86$, $p < .01$. These interactions indicated that whereas men reported similar negative emotion as teaser and target, women found being the target especially aversive (see Table 3). Consistent with our second gender-related prediction, the face threat in the man's teasing was negatively correlated with the woman's self-reports of positive emotion ($r = -.47$, $p < .01$), whereas the correlation between the woman's face threat and her partner's positive emotion was not significant ($r = -.20$). To test for the significance of this interaction, we first removed the couple variance from the face threat score by subtracting the couple average from the male score and the female score. We then conducted a regression analysis with gender, face threat, and the interaction between the two as predictor variables and positive emotion as the outcome measure. The interaction between gender and face threat was not significant.

The three-way ANOVA also revealed that participants' reports of their own positive emotion were greater than their partner's estimates ($Ms = 3.87$ vs. 3.70), $F(1, 57) = 5.63$, $p < .05$. Interactions between role and estimate on the measures of positive, $F(1, 57) = 4.82$, $p < .05$; negative, $F(1, 57) = 14.14$, $p < .001$; and overall emotion, $F(1, 56) = 13.41$, $p < .001$, indicated that participants underestimated their partner's positive emotion as a target and overestimated their partner's positive emotion as a teaser (see Table 3 for means). No other main effects or interactions were significant.

Research Question 1: Does Teasing Communicate Norm Deviations?

Fourteen percent of the participants used a metaphor of love (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) in the nicknames they gave to their

Table 3

Participants' Emotional Responses to Teasing in Study 2

| | Female partner's emotion | | | | Male partner's emotion | | | |
| | As teasers | | As targets | | As teasers | | As targets | |
Emotion	Self-report	Partner's estimate	Self-report	Partner's estimate	Self-report	Partner's estimate	Self-report	Partner's estimate
Negative								
M	0.81	0.78	0.95	1.48	0.83	0.58	0.88	0.83
SD	0.88	0.98	1.02	1.29	0.95	0.72	1.04	0.97
Positive								
M	3.83	4.12	3.50	3.40	4.14	3.84	3.99	3.44
SD	1.64	1.62	1.64	1.59	1.59	1.62	1.70	1.58
Overall								
M	3.02	3.34	2.55	1.92	3.31	3.24	3.11	2.61
SD	1.88	1.60	2.12	2.00	1.70	1.67	1.85	1.90

Note. The measure of overall emotion was equal to the mean of the negative emotions subtracted from the mean of the positive emotions.

partners, referring to their partner as an object or food (e.g., "Apple Dumpling," "Talkative Jellybean") or a deity. Partners were more likely to tease each other about negative than positive characteristics (see Table 4) and to articulate more hostility ($M = 3.69$) than flattery ($M = 2.62$) in their teases, $t(116) = 5.94, p < .01$.

Research Question 2: How Might Teasing Relate to Increased Affiliation?

We chose two procedures to address how teasing might relate to increased affiliation. First, we examined the correlations be-

tween the prosocial content of the tease and the partners' responses to their teasing, treating the couple as the unit of analysis. Consistent with expectation, the overall prosocial teasing index correlated with the target's increased flirtation ($r = .30$, $p < .05$), positive emotion ($r = .44, p < .01$), reduced negative emotion ($r = -.28, p < .05$), and increased positive relative to negative emotion ($r = .53, p < .01$).

To determine whether different kinds of teasing would relate to different responses, we classified each tease into one of four categories defined according to whether it was above or below

Table 4

Content of Teases of Romantic Couples in Study 2

Characteristic	Woman teases male partner	Man teases female partner	Comparison t
Negative			
Negative personality trait	24.0	21.0	0.37
Negative interaction	22.0	17.0	0.66
Unusual personal habits	25.0	2.0	3.74*
Unpleasant appearance	13.0	8.0	0.85
Sexual abnormality	15.0	4.0	2.00*
Inappropriate body functions	9.0	8.0	0.19
Flirtatiousness	4.0	6.0	−0.47
Jealousy	4.0	4.0	0.00
Athleticism, physical prowess	7.0	0.0	2.03*
Excessive drinking or drugs	7.0	2.0	1.28
Social ineffectiveness	2.0	2.0	0.00
Lack of commitment	2.0	0.0	1.06
Positive			
Positive interaction	15.0	15.0	0.00
Sexual prowess	9.0	10.0	−0.18
Positive personality trait	13.0	4.0	1.70*
Pleasant appearance	4.0	6.0	−0.47
Neutral			
Shared experience	15.0	33.0	−2.22*
Personal preference	22.0	25.0	−0.37
Physical characteristic	5.0	15.0	−1.74*
Commitment	5.0	6.0	−0.23

Note. Numbers are the percentages of participants who teased about the theme.
* $p < .01$.

Table 5
Relationships Between Kind of Tease and Targets' Response in Study 2

| Variable | High-hostility tease style Redressive action | | Low-hostility tease style Redressive action | | Contrasts | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | 1 vs. 2, 3, 4 | | | 1 vs. 3, 4 | | | 1 vs. 2 | | |
	Low (1)	High (2)	Low (3)	High (4)	F	df	p	F	df	p	F	df	p
Overall emotion													
Teasing task	4.44	6.65	7.69	6.83	10.60	1, 115	<.01	10.98	1, 88	<.01	4.80	1, 56	<.05
Conflict discussion	0.75	2.73	3.01	1.73	3.02	1, 103	<.10	2.32	1, 78	ns	2.52	1, 51	ns
Negative emotion													
Teasing task	1.26	0.99	0.49	0.85	5.28	1, 115	<.05	7.01	1, 88	<.01	1.06	1, 56	ns
Conflict discussion	2.03	1.49	1.41	1.25	5.44	1, 102	<.05	5.66	1, 78	<.05	2.40	1, 50	ns
Positive emotion													
Teasing task	3.01	4.09	4.06	3.97	8.85	1, 115	<.01	7.51	1, 88	<.01	6.17	1, 56	<.05
Conflict discussion	2.45	2.89	2.74	1.94	0.04	1, 103	ns	0.08	1, 78	ns	0.89	1, 51	ns
Evaluations of partner													
Partner is fair, cooperative, noncompetitive	4.47	6.08	5.79	6.00	23.59	1, 102	<.001	19.25	1, 77	<.001	17.98	1, 50	<.001
Partner is open, honest, trustworthy	5.17	6.92	6.33	6.63	21.04	1, 103	<.001	15.07	1, 78	<.001	19.56	1, 51	<.001

median levels of face threat and redressive action. This procedure allowed us to compare the correlates of teasing that were relatively high or low in face threat and redressive action (see Table 5). In the teasing task and conflict discussion, face-threatening, nonredressive teasing tended to be associated with more negative emotion, less positive emotion, and, in the conflict discussion, more negative evaluations of the partner's conflict behavior as compared with the other three kinds of teasing (see the results of Contrast 1 vs. 2, 3, and 4) and teasing that conveyed low levels of face threat (see the results of Contrast 1 vs. 3, 4). On certain measures, the antisocial teasing, defined by elevated face threat and low levels of redressive action, was associated with more negative outcomes than the teasing of similar face threat that was accompanied by redressive actions (see column with results of Contrast 1 vs. 2).

Discussion

To extend the findings from Study 1, we examined the teasing of women and men in intimate relationships. As in fraternity members' teasing, romantic partners' teasing focused on norm violations related to personality, personal habits, sex, and other issues of importance in personal relationships (Research Question 1). Teasing does seem to allow individuals the opportunity to negotiate relationship norms. The teasing produced elevated positive emotion, and the prosocial content of the tease was consistently related to increased positive outcomes and reduced negative outcomes, pointing to possible ways that teasing increases affiliation or hostility (Research Question 2).

The more focused hypothesis testing again revealed important sources of variation in the content and experience of teasing. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, satisfied romantic partners teased

each other in more prosocial ways than less satisfied partners. This was true both in the teasing task and in the conflict interaction. These findings are consistent with a basic prediction of politeness theory (e.g., Slugoski & Turnbull, 1988) and with the documented perils of power assertions (Whisman & Jacobson, 1990) and benefits of humor and play (Baxter, 1992) in romantic relationships.

Somewhat problematic for Hypothesis 1, couples who eventually broke up actually teased in more prosocial ways than couples who stayed together. For the very reason that prosocial teasing may help couples who stay together stay happy, by eliciting positive emotion and reducing the hostility of conflictual situations, prosocial teasing may lead to the demise of other relationships by leading those partners into flirtations with others. Consistent with this speculation, we found that teasers' levels of flirtatious behavior were higher in couples who broke up than in those who stayed together, suggesting that romantic partners destined to dissolution may have been more prone to flirtatious, relationship-threatening behavior.[5]

Hypothesis 2 held that disagreeable individuals would tease in less prosocial ways. As in Study 1, this hypothesis received mixed support. Whereas disagreeable men did tease in less prosocial ways defined by increased face threat and reduced redressive action, no systematic relation was found between women's agreeableness and their teasing.

Consistent with Hypothesis 3, targets again reported more negative emotion than teasers. Study 2 also showed that teasers

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[5] A *t* test indicated that teasers' levels of flirtatious behavior were higher in couples who broke up than in those who stayed together (Ms = 10.50 vs. 6.51), t(51) = 2.53, p < .05.

reported more positive emotion than targets. In combination with the results of Study 1, these findings clearly indicate that dynamics concerning who teases whom have important implications for the experience of those teasing interactions. For example, in situations in which a more powerful person is endowed with an asymmetrical freedom to tease a less powerful person, as in cases of bullying and sexual harassment, the powerful person will find greater pleasure in those interactions than the less powerful person, who will find them more aversive.

Our final hypothesis concerned gender differences in the content and experience of teasing. As predicted, women and men responded to being teased differently. Women experienced more negative and less positive emotion in response to being teased, consistent with incidental results of previous studies (e.g., Hopper et al., 1981). One might be tempted to attribute these gender differences to differences in how the women and men were teased by their partners, but that proved not to be the case. Consistent with other studies that have shown few gender differences in aggression associated with prosocial outcomes (Frodi, Macaulay, & Thome, 1977), women and men did not differ in the overall prosocial teasing index. For the most part they also teased each other about similar themes (interestingly, women did tease more about personal habits and sexual issues, whereas men teased more about physical characteristics).

Why might women respond to being teased with more negative emotion than men? One possibility is that men, who seem to engage in teasing interactions more frequently than women (e.g., Mooney et al., 1991; Tannen, 1990), may have habituated to the face-threatening potential of the tease. In fact, some have claimed that teasing is a training ground for young men to prepare for an aggressive, competitive adult world (e.g., Abrahams, 1962). Alternatively, women may be socialized to be more sensitive to potential threats to relationships (Hinde, Tamplin, & Barrett, 1993; Sheldon, 1993), which would make them more responsive to the potential risks and threats of the face threat of the tease. Given the role of teasing in flirtation, courtship, conflict negotiation, and problematic interactions such as sexual harassment, these gender-related issues warrant further study.

General Discussion

Teasing lies on a perilous boundary between aggression and play and can increase intimacy and integrate members into groups or through subtle changes of form become a vehicle of victimization and ostracism. To integrate these opposing observations, we advanced a face threat analysis of teasing, positing that teasing involves intentionally aggressive behavior and redressive actions that mitigate the face threat of the tease.

Consistent with this analysis, the teasing among fraternity members and romantic couples centered on norm violations and varied according to the social relationship, the individual teaser, and the role in the interaction. A face threat analysis of teasing also shed light on how teasing can relate to increased affiliation or aggression. More prosocial teasing correlated with more positive responses in the target, whereas more antisocial teasing correlated with more negative responses in the targets in Study 2. Before turning to the more general discussion of these findings, we discuss several limitations of our research.

A first limitation has to do with our conceptual approach. Given the divided claims about the negative or positive nature of teasing, we chose to study the causes and consequences of different kinds of teasing. The documented relations between social status and relational satisfaction and the content of teasing fit nicely into the broader literature on social status and humor and politeness (e.g., P. Brown & Levinson, 1987; Coser, 1960) and romantic satisfaction and humor and hostility (e.g., Baxter, 1992). We did not, however, compare teasing with related phenomena, such as nonaggressive play, simple joke telling, irony, sarcasm, or unintentional insults. As a consequence, we cannot make claims about the unique properties of teasing. This kind of research is clearly needed (e.g., see Baxter, 1992).

A second limitation pertains to the ecological validity of the teasing paradigm. Most of our analyses concentrated on the teasing produced in the nickname, storytelling exercise. Teasing related to nicknames is only one kind of teasing (e.g., Pawluk, 1989) and may not typify typical teasing interactions. The teasing was reciprocal by design, which may have rendered the teasing more playful than the teasing that would be observed in asymmetrical teasing relationships. By requiring individuals to tease one another, we may have studied teasing that would not occur in naturalistic interactions (e.g., low-status individuals teasing high-status individuals). Participants were videotaped, which may have accounted for the embarrassment and submissiveness teasers displayed, which might not be observed outside the laboratory or in more private situations. Although we addressed some of the concerns by studying the spontaneous teasing during interpersonal conflict, it still is important to study the causes, content, and consequences of other kinds of teasing, such as purely physical teasing or collective teasing.

Third, our research focused on variations in the content of teasing and therefore says little about the causes of the occurrence of teasing. Several questions about the occurrence and likelihood of teasing await investigation. What kinds of social conditions, events, and interactions prompt teasing (e.g., see Drew, 1987)? What sorts of individuals are likely to tease or be teased? What is the likelihood of teasing at different stages of relationships?

Finally, as we noted earlier, our findings relating the content of the tease to participants' responses were correlations and preclude causal conclusions. Some of these correlations point to experimental manipulations worthy of study. For example, one would expect teases delivered without playful markers to generate more negative responses and that acquaintances allowed to tease one another would become closer than acquaintances not given such an opportunity.

Teasing in the Context of Social Relationships

Social context determines the meaning of teasing in fundamental ways. To study teasing in social context, we examined how teasing would vary according to two relationship variables theorized to moderate face-threatening behavior: status differences and the affective nature of the bond. Across the two studies, people more concerned about the evaluations of their interaction partners—low-status fraternity members and satisfied romantic partners—teased in more prosocial ways, consistent

with hypotheses. We believe studies of teasing and social context need to proceed in at least three directions.

First, variation in the concern for face threat differentiates other social contexts and relationships and should produce predictable variation in the content of teasing. For example, interactions in earlier stages of relationships or in more formal than informal settings are likely to be defined by heightened concern over face threat and therefore produce teasing that is marked by less face threat and increased redressive actions.

Second, researchers should identify the more transient features of social contexts that influence teasing in systematic ways. On the basis of our findings, one would expect the teasing between people attempting to gain power over one another, such as competitors at work or on the grammar school playground, to be more face threatening and less redressive. The same is likely to be true of individuals in conflict. On the basis of the established links between dispositional hostility and teasing, one might expect transient frustration or anxiety to produce more aggressive teasing.

Finally, other aspects of the social context are likely to determine the meaning of teasing and warrant study. For example, how does the meaning of a tease change when delivered in front of a large audience as opposed to no audience? How does the meaning of a tease change when delivered among friends versus strangers? In a public versus a more private place?

Individual Differences in Teasing

Inspired by research on individual differences in bullying, we examined how adult personality relates to teasing. We chose to study a trait known to correlate with hostility—agreeableness—which is defined by kindness and sympathy on the positive end and hostility, coldness, and aggression on the negative end. The evidence indicated that disagreeable, hostile men in Study 1 and Study 2 teased in less prosocial ways. We found no significant relations, however, between levels of prosocial teasing and agreeableness for the female participants of Study 2.

The study of individual differences in teasing is an important topic for students of teasing and personality. Individual-differences variables that are likely to predict more positive forms of teasing, such as individual differences in humor (e.g., Martin & Lefcourt, 1983), deserve attention. It would be interesting to investigate why certain individuals are prone to being teased. Perhaps these individuals respond to teasing more favorably or deviate from normative standards of appearance, personality, and habit in ways that call forth teasing from others. Finally, the consequences of individual differences in teasing merit attention (e.g., Thompson et al., 1995). For example, teasing style might contribute to the difficulties disagreeable individuals have in forming and maintaining friendships.

The Experience of Teasing and Being Teased

Previous findings have suggested that the pleasure and pain associated with teasing and being teased differ. Although there were some inconsistencies, across the two studies targets tended to enjoy the teasing less than teasers and to report and express more negative emotion. We suspect that these differences in the

experiences of targets and teasers would be greater in contexts not labeled as teasing interactions, as in our teasing paradigm, which may have reduced the difficulty the target faced in interpreting the face-threatening tease in friendly terms.

In explaining the differences in the experience of teasing and being teased, we claimed that teasers would be more fully aware than targets of the playful intentions behind the tease. We did not study these inferential processes directly, and they deserve empirical attention. The differences in teasing and being teased also bear on discussions of the social consequences of teasing. For example, teasing related to bullying may be particularly aversive because the victim is consistently the target of teasing and denied the opportunity to tease. Teasing may be particularly prone to negative outcomes in relations defined by power differences because low-status individuals enjoy less freedom to tease (e.g., Coser, 1960).

Finally, more systematic research is needed on the outcomes of teasing. The results from the two studies hint at possible ways in which teasing may enhance or worsen social bonds. It will be important to establish relations between teasing and increased affiliation more firmly, comparing, for example, the development of relationships in which teasing does and does not occur. Just as important, researchers should explore how teasing leads to negative outcomes, as in cases of obesity-related teasing (e.g., Cattarin & Thompson, 1994) and sexual harassment. We hope that a face threat analysis of teasing points to relevant manipulations and conceptual approaches.

Conclusions

Teasing is central to social life but has been ignored by social and personality psychologists. A face threat analysis renders the paradoxical nature of teasing amenable to empirical study and points to a variety of hypotheses, a few of which we tested in the current research, concerning the determinants and outcomes of teasing. Given the connections between teasing and diverse phenomena such as flirtation, language development, sexual harassment, and socialization, there are still several studies required before this common yet profound practice is understood.

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