Psychological Bulletin
2001, Vol. 127, No. 2, 229–248

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0033-2909/01/$5.00 DOI: 10.1037//0033-2909.127.2.229

Just Teasing: A Conceptual Analysis and Empirical Review

Dacher Keltner, Lisa Capps, Ann M. Kring, Randall C. Young, and Erin A. Heerey
University of California, Berkeley

Drawing on E. Goffman's concepts of face and strategic interaction, the authors define a tease as a playful provocation in which one person comments on something relevant to the target. This approach encompasses the diverse behaviors labeled teasing, clarifies previous ambiguities, differentiates teasing from related practices, and suggests how teasing can lead to hostile or affiliative outcomes. The authors then integrate studies of the content of teasing. Studies indicate that norm violations and conflict prompt teasing. With development, children tease in playful ways, particularly around the ages of 11 and 12 years, and understand and enjoy teasing more. Finally, consistent with hypotheses concerning contextual variation in face concerns, teasing is more frequent and hostile when initiated by high-status and familiar others and men, although gender differences are smaller than assumed. The authors conclude by discussing how teasing varies according to individual differences and culture.

Teasing is central to human social life. People tease to socialize, flirt, resolve conflicts, and pass the time in imaginative and playful ways. With slight variations in utterance and display, teasing can lead to more disturbing ends, as when teasing humiliates or harasses. As prevalent as teasing is in everyday life, it is absent as a coherent topic in empirical psychology. The reasons for this absence are several. Teasing is often subsumed under, and at times conflated with, humor, play, irony, sarcasm, and bullying. Teasing, as we shall see, has not been adequately defined and therefore resists measurement and manipulation. Moreover, teasing is a relational process, ideally requiring the study of individuals in the stream of their spontaneous interactions.

Our interest in this article is to provide theoretically derived answers to four questions and, in doing so, to synthesize extant literatures. What is teasing? When do people tease? How does teasing change with development? And how does teasing vary across contexts? We draw on the theorizing of scholars interested in how so-called face concerns—the concern for one's own and others' social esteem—influence language and social interaction (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Clark, 1996; Goffman, 1967). This theoretical tradition leads us to define teasing as an intentional provocation accompanied by playful markers that together comment on something of relevance to the target of the tease. This definition and the concepts of face and strategic interaction help differentiate teasing from related categories of behavior, such as bullying, and generate testable hypotheses about when people tease and how they do so across development and social context.

Literatures Relevant to the Review

In this review, we integrate studies in developmental, social–personality, and clinical psychology as well as anthropology, sociology, and discourse analysis. Some studies focused explicitly on teasing; others examined teasing in the context of bullying, romantic idiom, conflict resolution, deception, conversational humor, language socialization, insults, and even tickling (when used to prompt a change in behavior). From these latter studies, we isolated findings that specifically relate to teasing. For example, some studies of romantic idiom included questions that reference teasing and therefore generated findings relevant to this review.

In Table 1, we classify each study that contributed to our review according to its methodology, the context in which teasing was studied, and the components of teasing that were examined. The attempt to synthesize studies of teasing is plagued by the absence, ambiguity, or variation in how teasing is defined and operationalized. Different samples of individuals (e.g., young children vs. adults) are themselves likely to define teasing differently, and the same individuals may use the term *teasing* to refer to different behaviors in different contexts. These issues have hampered the study of teasing and motivate our attempt to offer a theory-based definition of teasing that is empirically testable across contexts and methods.

In addition to these definitional problems, the specific approaches to the study of teasing have limitations as well. Controlled experiments that manipulate who teases whom or the content of teasing scenarios are likely to capture highly constrained teasing behavior. Self-report methods used in peer nomination studies, in which participants nominate who gets teased or teases, and narrative studies, in which participants describe previous teasing experiences, are problematic in several ways. For example, reports of one instance of teasing or the few group members who are regularly teased may overrepresent extreme forms of teasing; nonverbal forms of teasing are perhaps less salient and more

Dacher Keltner, Lisa Capps, Ann M. Kring, Randall C. Young, and Erin A. Heerey, Department of Psychology, University of California, Berkeley.

Much of the insight, originality, and voice of this article came from the gifted and greatly missed mind of Lisa Capps, who passed away during the final revisions of this article. We would also like to thank Herb Clark, Peter Collette, Paul Harris, and Sue Ervin-Tripp for many edifying discussions and playful provocations.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dacher Keltner, Department of Psychology, 3210 Tolman Hall, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720-1650. Electronic mail may be sent to keltner@socrates.berkeley.edu.

Table 1
Studies That Contributed to Empirical Review

Reference	Study type	Participants	Teasing context	Measurement of teasing
Abrahams (1962)	Observational	Lower-class African Americans	Sounding with friends	Provocation, off-record markers, target response, audience response, context
Alberts (1992)	Observational	40 romantic couples	Teasing in conflict discussion	Provocation, off-record markers, target response
Baxter (1992)	Interview–narrative	49 male participants, 53 female participants (Study 1)	Descriptions of play	Provocation, target response
		35 male participants, 58 female participants (Study 2)	Sort categories of play	
Bell et al. (1987)	Questionnaire	100 U.S. college-aged romantic couples	Reports of idiom	Elicitor, provocation, target response, context
Bell & Healy (1992)	Narrative	231 U.S. college students	Interpersonal idiom	Provocation, target response, context
Betcher (1981)	Observational	Couples in therapy, children at play	Behavior in therapy	Provocation, off-record markers
Bradney (1957)	Observational	Department store workers	Teasing, joking at work	Elicitors, provocation, context
Cash (1995)	Questionnaire	111 U.S. college women	Rated experience of teasing	Provocation
Clancy (1986)	Observational	5 preschoolers and their mothers in Japan	Home interactions	Elicitors, provocation, off-record markers
Corsaro & Maynard (1996)	Observational	1 preschool class in Italy; 1 preschool class in U.S.	Classroom interactions	Elicitors, provocation, off-record markers, target response, audience response
Coser (1959, 1960)	Observational	Mental hospital staff	Jokes at staff meetings	Provocation
Demuth (1986)	Observational	9 preschool children and 7 caregivers in Lesotho, South Africa	Home interactions	Provocation, off-record markers, target response, audience response
Drew (1987)	Observational	Adults in conversations	Home, phone conversations	Elicitor, provocation, target response, context
Dunn & Munn (1986)	Observational	46 sibling pairs (18 and 24 months) and their mothers	Home interactions	Provocation, target response, audience response
Eder (1991)	Observational	High school students	School lunch interactions	Elicitors, provocation, off-record markers, target response, audience response, context
Eder (1993)	Observational	59 10- to 14-year-old girls	School lunch interactions	Elicitors, provocation, off-record markers, target response, audience response, context
Eisenberg (1986)	Observational	2 Mexican American girls (21 to 38 months), family members	Home interactions	Elicitors, provocation, off-record markers, target response, audience response, context
Feldman & Dodge (1987)	Observational	311 1st-, 3rd-, & 5th-grade children	Response to teasing scenario	Target response
Gaffin (1995)	Observational	Faeoroe of New Foundland	Community interactions	Elicitors, provocation, target response, audience response
Georgesen et al. (1999)	Narrative	117 U.S. female participants, 93 U.S. male participants	Teasing questionnaire, response to teasing video	Target response, context
Gleason & Greif (1983)	Narrative	3 families	Dinner table conversation	Provocation
Goodwin (1990)	Observational	African American families in Pennsylvania	Home interactions	Elicitors, provocation, target response, audience response
Greene & Hoats (1971)	Experimental	2 blind, retarded U.S. girls	Tickling in response to self-destructive behavior	Target response
Grilo et al. (1994)	Questionnaire	40 U.S. overweight female participants	Teasing questionnaire	Provocation
Handelman & Kapferer (1972)	Observational	Israeli workshop employees, Zambian miners	Work-related conversations	Elicitors, provocation, off-record markers, target response, audience response
Heath (1983)	Observational	Members of 2 small communities (Trackton & Rondville) in North and South Carolina	Interactions at home, school, and in communities	Elicitors, provocation, off-record markers, target response, audience response
Hinshaw et al. (1989)	Experimental	24 boys with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, aged 6.5 to 12.4 years	Peer provokes with nickname	Provocation, target response
Hoover et al. (1992)	Questionnaire	200 12- to 18-year-olds	Bullying questionnaire	Provocation, target response, context
Hopper et al. (1981)	Narrative	50 married individuals (Study 1); 112 married couples (Study 2)	Descriptions of romantic idiom	Provocation, context

Table 1 (*continued*)

Reference	Study type	Participants	Teasing context	Measurement of teasing
Keltner et al. (1998)	Experimental	48 U.S. fraternity members; 60 U.S. romantic couples	Telling humiliating stories	Provocation, off-record markers, target audience response, context
Lyman (1987)	Observational	1 U.S. fraternity; 1 sorority	Fraternity–sorority interaction	Provocation, off-record markers, target response, audience response
McGhee (1976)	Observational	43 6- to 11-year-olds	Humor behavior at day camp	Elicitors, provocation
Miller (1986)	Observational	3 U.S. working-class families with 2- to 3-year-olds	Home interactions	Elicitors, provocation, off-record markers, target response, audience response
Mooney et al. (1991)	Narrative	175 11-year-olds	Reports of bullying content	Provocation, target response
Moore (1995)	Observational	100 U.S. 13- to 16-year-old girls	School and mall interactions	Provocation, off-record markers, context
Morgan (1996)	Observational	1 African American family in Chicago	Home interactions	Provocation, target response, audience response, context
Murphy (1983)	Observational	Members of Sevillan community	Home, community interactions	Provocation, off-record marker, target response, audience response
Ochs (1986)	Observational	4 preschool children and caregivers in Western Samoa	Family interactions	Provocation, off-record markers, target response, audience response
Olweus (1993b)	Questionnaire	76 13-year-olds, 51 16-year-olds, 87 23-year-olds	Peer ratings of victimization; peer, teacher ratings of victimization	Elicitors, target response
Pizzini (1991)	Observational	1 U.S. doctor's office	Office interactions	Provocation, context
Reddy (1991)	Observational	11 U.K. infants in 1st year	Play at home	Provocation, off-record markers
Savin-Williams (1977)	Observational	6 13-year-olds	Dominance at summer camp	Provocation, context
Schieffelin (1986)	Observational	4 infants and 12 children aged 1 to 10 years in Papua, New Guinea	Home interactions	Elicitors, provocation, off-record markers, target response, context
Schwartz et al. (1993)	Observational	30 play groups, each with 6 6- to 8-year-old boys	Behavior in play group	Provocation, off-record markers, target response
Shapiro et al. (1991)	Narrative	174 8- to 14-year-olds	Essay about teasing, being teased	Provocation, target response, context
Siegel (1995)	Observational	Fijian, Hindi consultants	Teasing in conversation	Provocation, off-record markers
Slugoski & Turnbull (1988)	Experimental	256 U.S. college students	Read scenarios describing insult	Provocation, off-record markers, target response, context
Stebbins (1975)	Narrative	77 U.S. college students	Teasing as a put-on (deception)	Provocation
Straehle (1993)	Observational	2 U.S. female participants, 1 U.S. male participant	Conversations during weekend	Elicitors, provocation, off-record markers, target response, audience response, context
Thompson et al. (1995)	Questionnaire	406 U.S. female participants	49-item teasing questionnaire (about appearance, obesity)	Provocation, target response
Thorne (1993)	Observational	U.S. elementary school children	Behavior in classrooms, hallways, lunchroom, and playground	Elicitors, provocation, target response, audience response, context
Thorne & Luria (1986)	Observational	U.S. elementary school children	Behavior in classrooms, hallways, lunchroom, and playground	Elicitors, provocation, target response, audience response, context
Underwood et al. (1999)	Experimental observational	382 8-, 10-, and 12-year-olds	Child provoked by peer after losing at game	Target response
Voss (1997)	Observational	26 6- and 8-year-olds	Teasing on playground	Elicitors, provocation
Warm (1997)	Narrative	250 5- to 17-year-olds	Describe teasing, motives	Provocation, off-record markers, target response
Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo (1986)	Observational	24 Kwaraõae children (6 months to 16 years) and caregivers in Solomon Islands	Home, community interactions	Elicitors, provocation, off-record markers, target response, audience response
Whitney & Smith (1993)	Questionnaire	6,758 8- to 16-year-olds	22-item bullying questionnaire	Provocation, context
Young et al. (2000)	Experimental	80 9- to 14-year-old boys at basketball camp	Taunting during basketball exercise	Provocation, off-record markers, target response, context

difficult to describe; and the teasing of young children cannot easily be assessed. Finally, although naturalistic and ethnographic studies characterize teasing in the contexts of people's daily lives, they tend to involve small samples of individuals and their potentially idiosyncratic interpretations of their interactions. Notwithstanding these concerns, the findings from diverse studies, once integrated into a coherent approach to teasing, support several hypotheses that we develop in ensuing sections, which renders methodological inadequacies of any one particular study less problematic.

What Is Teasing?

Previous Approaches: Ambiguities and Limitations

Researchers have used the term *teasing* to refer to diverse behaviors. Teasing has been observed in the contexts of offer–withdrawal games between parents and their young children, bullying on the playground, the flirtatious pinching and eye covering amongst adolescents, and in ritualized insults, adult banter, and romantic nicknames. Given the breadth of contexts in which teasing has been studied, it is not surprising that researchers have offered various definitions of teasing, which we present in Table 2. The overlap in the definitions is considerable. Almost all investigators agree that teasing involves aggression. Except for theorists who consider teasing one kind of bullying (e.g., Boulton & Hawker, 1997), most scholars believe that teasing also incorporates more prosocial behaviors as well, most typically humor or play.

These definitions suffer from four noteworthy limitations. First, researchers have tended to define teasing according to a specific research context, sample, or phenomenon. Definitions that hinge on specific behaviors, such as insults, verbalizations, or taunting, however, may not apply to other contexts. For example, definitions of teasing that refer only to verbal forms of teasing (e.g., teasing as a verbal insult) do not adequately characterize the teasing of very young children or purely nonverbal forms of teasing. What is needed is a definition of teasing that transcends social context, sample, and modality of behavior.

Second, previous definitions have been ambiguous in important ways. Although many definitions refer to an aggressive component, teasing does not involve all kinds of aggression. Unintended aggression and aggression that is carried out for purely hostile reasons (e.g., hitting someone on the foot with a hammer) are unlikely to be viewed as teasing. The references to play are similarly ambiguous: Not all forms of humor or play can be classified as teasing, such as simple role playing (children acting as monsters), games, or the telling of amusing anecdotes.

Third, previous definitions have not differentiated teasing from related categories of behavior, most notably bullying. One sees in Table 2 that certain researchers and theorists equate teasing with bullying. As a consequence, inferences are drawn about teasing from research on bullying. This situation is problematic: Not all instances of bullying are teasing, and the kind of teasing that is perpetrated by bullies is almost certain to be only one variant of teasing.

Finally, previous definitions have offered little conceptual basis for resolving a central tension in the literature on teasing. Many researchers, particularly those who have studied teasing in the context of language socialization in other cultures, emphasize the prosocial outcomes of teasing, including affiliation, socialization, and conflict resolution (Betcher, 1981; Briggs, 1960; Eisenberg, 1986; Goodwin, 1990; Heath, 1983; Mitchell-Kernan, 1972; Moore, 1995; Morgan, 1996; Ochs, 1986; Pawluk, 1989; Tannen, 1993). Other researchers, particularly those who have studied teasing in the context of bullying in young children, have highlighted the antisocial outcomes of teasing, such as social rejection and aggression (e.g., Boulton & Hawker, 1997; Olweus, 1978, 1993a; Randall, 1997). An ideal definition of teasing would account for how teasing can lead to antisocial and prosocial outcomes.

Our first interest, therefore, is to define teasing in a way that (a) encompasses the diverse behaviors classified as teasing across contexts; (b) clarifies the nature of the aggression and play in the tease; (c) differentiates teasing from related practices, such as bullying; and (d) brings together the findings of researchers who have emphasized either the more prosocial or antisocial outcomes of teasing. To achieve these aims, we turn to the writings of the sociologist Erving Goffman on face and how concerns over face shape strategic interaction.

Conceptual Background: Face, Strategic Interaction, and Off-Record Behavior

Erving Goffman's analysis of social interaction has influenced theorizing about a wide array of social behaviors, including language use (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Clark, 1996), the self (Schlenker & Leary, 1982), embarrassment (Keltner & Buswell, 1997), and flirtation (Sabini & Silver, 1982). Goffman's (1967) analysis of social interaction derives, to a large extent, from the concept of face, which he defined as "an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (p. 5). More recent treatments have distinguished positive face, which refers to the positive claims about the self, from negative face, which refers to the desire to act with freedom from imposition of others (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Maintaining face in the stream of social interactions is a powerful motive and collaborative endeavor, shaping the course and content of public and private interactions. To maintain their own face and that of their interaction partners, individuals act according to norms of politeness, modesty, and self-control, which Goffman referred to as *demeanor*. They express appreciation of each other, which Goffman labeled *deference*. They engage in *face work*, such as avoiding sensitive topics or disregarding actions that may threaten the face of another (Goffman, 1957, 1967, 1971). And when confronted with the likelihood of threatening another's face—for example, when making a suggestion or request—individuals will often resort to strategic indirectness to avoid imposition or casting aspersions (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

One frequent way in which people engage in indirect behaviors is with the use of off-record markers. Whereas on-record communication and action is direct, relevant, honest, and to be taken literally (Clark, 1996; Grice, 1975), off-record markers violate these rules with a variety of tactics, such as exaggeration or understatement, that suggest that nonliteral interpretations of the act are possible (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The most well documented example of strategic indirectness is politeness (for review, see Brown & Levinson, 1987). Politeness tactics accompany behaviors in which one individual threatens the face of another, for example, by imposing on another with a request or threatening another individual's positive face with a critique. To reduce the face-threatening potential of such an act, the individual will accompany the behavior—a request or critique in our examples—with off-record strategies, such as hints, questions, rhetorical questions, or metaphors. For example, commenting on a friend's tendency to tell inappropriate stories is face threatening to both individuals: The target of the comment would be embarrassed or

Table 2
Definitions of Teasing

Author	Definition
Abrahams (1962)	" 'Playing the dozens' is . . . illustrated by the use of *agonistic rhymed verbal forms* . . . the dozens stands as a mechanism which helps the Negro youth adapt to his changing world and trains him for similar and more complex verbal endeavors in the years of his manhood . . . One insults a member of another's family; others in the group make disapproving sounds to spur on the coming exchange. The one who has been insulted feels at this point that he must reply with a slur on the protagonist's family which is clever enough to defend his honor . . . This leads the other . . . to make further jabs. This can proceed until everyone is bored with the whole affair, until one hits the other (very rarely), or until some other subject . . . interrupts the proceedings" (p. 209; italics added).
Alberts (1992)	"A tease may be profitably viewed as an *aggressive verbalization* couched in some situational qualifiers indicating *playfulness*" (p. 155; italics added).
Boulton and Hawker (1997)	"While it is clear that teasing consists of *verbal name calling, taunts, and derision,* the intention of the teaser may vary. Thus, some people equate teasing with *playful verbal statements* of a trifling or petty nature, whereas others stress its *destructive, hostile nature*" (p. 54; italics added).
Brenman (1952)	"Teasing seems to stand somewhere between *aggression* and *love*" (p. 265; italics added).
Drew (1987)	"The kind of *playful humorous jibes* which are called teases in English" (p. 219; italics added).
Dunn and Munn (1986)	"Tease. Child or sibling makes *attempt to provoke or upset* the antagonist. The inference that an act involved such a deliberate attempt required narrative details of the act" (p. 586; italics added).
Eder (1993)	"Here teasing will be defined as any *playful remark* aimed at another person, which can include mock challenges, commands, and threats as well as imitating and exaggerating someone's behavior in a playful way. While the content of teasing would often be *negative or hostile* if taken literally, the playful meaning is determined in part by cues from the teaser indicating that the remark should be taken in a playful manner" (p. 17; italics added).
Eisenberg (1986)	"A teasing sequence was defined as any conversational sequence that opened with a *mock challenge, insult, or threat.* A key feature of the teasing sequence was that the teaser *did not intend the recipient to continue to believe the utterance was true,* although he or she might intend the recipient to believe initially" (pp. 183–184; italics added).
Gaffin (1995)	"Taunting is a form of 'sport,' as one informant put it, that, I suggest, channels community expectations about male behavior and directs individuals' own ambivalent positions and feelings about their place in the wider group" (p. 151).
Miller (1986)	"Teasing, as practiced by three families from South Baltimore, is a complex form of *verbal play,* marked by such modifications of the normal pattern of speech" (p. 199; italics added).
Mooney et al. (1991)	"Whereas teasing can be both *playful and malicious in intent,* bullying can never be considered as playful" (p. 103; italics added).
Radcliffe-Brown (1940)	"A peculiar combination of *friendliness and antagonism* . . . it is not meant seriously and must not be taken seriously" (p. 104; italics added).
Reddy (1991)	"Its chief criterial feature seems to be that it is a behaviour *directed to achieve affective effects on other "organisms"* and not for obtaining other "benefits"—such as food, toys, status, mates, etc. . . . it is an element of a relationship" (p. 144; italics added).
Schieffelin (1990)	"For this analysis, teasing and shaming will be taken as sequences or speech acts with a particular rhetorical force where *speakers attempt to inhibit or change a person's actions as well as convey a particular affective message about the relationship* between those individuals involved and an audience or potential audience of family, peers, and community" (p. 166; italics added).
Shapiro et al. (1991)	"Teasing is a personal communication, directed by an agent toward a target, that includes three components: *aggression, humor, and ambiguity*" (p. 460; italics added).
Straehle (1993)	"In his discussion of play and fantasy, Bateson (1972) observes that "the *playful nip* denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite" (p. 180). "As a form of humor or play, teasing is a language 'nip' that can signal and *enhance speaker enjoyment and rapport.* At the same time, however, teasing is thought to be closely bound to *real antagonism;* the playful nip may easily be mistaken for a hostile bite" (p. 211; italics added).
Voss (1997)	"Like Eder (1991), I define teasing as *humorous taunts.* For teasing to be successful, the target must respond in a playful manner . . . If the target responds in a hostile, impatient, or angry fashion, teasing may escalate to ridicule" (pp. 241–242; italics added).
Warm (1997)	"Teasing is a deliberate act designed by the teaser to *cause tension* in the victim, such as anxiety, frustration, anger, embarrassment, humiliation, etc., and it is presented in such a way that the *victims can escape if they 'catch' on*" (p. 98; italics added).
Whitney and Smith (1993)	"We say a child or young person is being bullied, or picked on, when another child or young person, or a group of children or young people, say nasty and unpleasant things to him or her. It is also bullying when a child or a young person is hit, kicked, threatened, locked inside a room, sent nasty notes, when no one ever talks to them and things like that. These things can happen frequently and it is difficult for the child or the young person being bullied to defend himself or herself. It is also bullying *when a child or young person is teased repeatedly in a nasty way.* But it is not bullying when two children or young people of about the same strength have the odd fight or quarrel" (p. 7; italics added).

offended by such a revelation, and the friend offering the comment risks being perceived as unkind and insensitive. Politely commenting in indirect fashion, with rhetorical questions ("Do you think they understood that story?"), hints ("You might want to tell that story only to your closer friends"), and other tactics allows the individual to pose the comment while leaving open alternative interpretations of the comment, thus protecting the face of both individuals.

Flirtation has likewise been analyzed as a strategically indirect behavior motivated by face concerns (Sabini & Silver, 1982). That is, in interactions between potential romantic partners, the direct communication of attraction is face threatening: Such displays risk putting the object of affection in an awkward position and, of course, if unreciprocated, are a potential embarrassment for the communicator of affection. With such high stakes, individuals resort to indirect behaviors, such as subtle compliments, playful physical contact, and coy glances that express potential romantic interest in an indirect, off-record, and plausibly deniable way (Sabini & Silver, 1982). If the object of affection does not reciprocate, the communicator of affection can deny that the attraction ever existed, and each individual's face is preserved. When face concerns are low (e.g., when one individual enjoys greater power vis-à-vis another), one would expect flirtation to be more direct and on record.

Teasing as Indirect, Playful Provocation

On the basis of Goffman's analysis of face and strategic interaction, we define a tease as an intentional provocation accompanied by playful off-record markers that together comment on something relevant to the target. We refer to the concept of provocation instead of aggression or criticism because, as we detail below, a tease involves an act, either verbal or nonverbal, that is intended to have some effect on the target. Although the provocation itself can be delivered indirectly (as in ironic teasing), what typically makes the tease indirect and less face threatening for both teaser and target is the accompanying off-record markers, which signal that the provocation is to be taken in jest. The off-record component of the tease accounts for the humorous nature of teasing as well as its ambiguity.

This definition helps to solve the problems of previous approaches to teasing. The constructs of provocation and off-record marker generalize across particular social contexts, samples, cultures, phenomena, and modalities of behavior. A provocation can be verbal (a sarcastic comment) or nonverbal (a poke in the ribs). In a similar manner, off-record markers can be verbal (exaggeration, metaphor) or nonverbal (prosodic variation). These two constructs, therefore, organize the diverse behaviors that have been observed in studies of teasing.

Our definition of teasing as an intentional provocation accompanied by off-record markers directed at someone that comments on something of relevance to the target also clarifies what kind of aggression and play are involved in teasing. There are many forms of playful aggression (e.g., during rough and tumble play) that are not intended and unlikely to be labeled as teasing. The act, therefore, must be intended for it to be labeled as teasing.[1] There are many forms of play that are not directed at a target, such as joke telling or storytelling, that would not be classified as teasing. And there are many forms of play that are directed by one person toward another but that do not comment on something relevant to the target, and these forms of play or humor are unlikely to be considered teasing. For example, individuals who have assumed pretend roles (e.g., in play or acting) may provoke each other, but it is unlikely they would view the interaction as teasing (Clark, 1996). People often recount amusing anecdotes about one another in ways that do not highlight something of present relevance to the target. This type of storytelling does not fall within the domain of teasing.

The construct of off-record marker helps differentiate teasing from other behaviors that have often been conflated with teasing. Individuals can provoke one another in numerous ways, but if the provocation is not accompanied by off-record markers, it is not teasing. Direct criticism and forms of humiliation can involve a commentary directed at another individual but lack the off-record markers that signal that the commentary is to be taken in the spirit of play. Scales that measure bullying refer to provocations such as kicking, name calling, and taking valued objects, but again, when these actions do not also involve off-record markers, they are more appropriately considered direct acts of hostility (bullies do tease, however, but we suggest that their teasing is more likely to be of an extremely hostile form involving highly aggressive provocation and few off-record markers). There are more benign, on-record forms of provocation, such as polite reprimands, which involve a critical commentary and certain kinds of redressive actions (apologies, qualifications), but these comments are on record and to be taken literally, whereas the tease has the off-record component, which signals that the provocation is to be taken in part in jest.

Finally, our approach points to specific ways in which teasing will vary in its antisocial or prosocial outcomes. The nature of the provocation itself can lead to teasing that is primarily hostile or affiliative. Some provocations are painful and humiliating (e.g., pinning to the ground; making demeaning comments); others evoke less pain and even pleasure (tickling; comments on excessive yet laudable acts or attributes). The presence of off-record markers will influence the hostile or affiliative effect of a tease: Provocations with minimal off-record markers are likely to be perceived as literal, direct, and aggressive; provocations accompanied by numerous off-record markers will be perceived as playful and humorous. Indeed, in a study of romantic partners, holding constant the hostility of the provocation, teases that involved few off-record markers evoked more negative emotion (anger, contempt) and less positive emotion (amusement, desire, love) than those that involved more off-record markers (Keltner, Young, Heerey, Oemig, & Monarch, 1998). Finally, the commentary of the tease (i.e., what it refers to in the target) can be more or less

[1] The question of how the intent behind the tease is inferred is of profound interest. Clark (1996) suggested that a tease involves a claim about the target that occurs in the realm of pretense (e.g., the target is a gifted practitioner of many forms of dance) and that contrasts with what is implicitly true and known about the target (the target is clumsy). This contrast between the claim that occurs in pretense and what is actually true signals the intent of the tease (in our example, to comment on the target's unusual clumsiness). These interesting speculations warrant empirical attention.

relevant to the individual. Comments that are highly relevant to the target run the risk of greater offense (Drew, 1987).

In summary, we have posited that the core elements of a tease are an intentional provocation and playful off-record markers, which together comment on something relevant to the target. This definition encompasses the diverse behaviors labeled teasing in the literature, from simple offer–withdrawal games between mother and child to the ritualized, metaphorical needling of old friends. This definition helps clarify ambiguities in such concepts as aggression, humor, and play. Our definition differentiates teasing from related practices, from bullying to polite reprimands. And our approach points to specific ways in which teasing can lead to more prosocial or antisocial outcomes. Teasing is a heterogeneous category of behavior, with many forms and outcomes that hinge on the particular combination of provocation, off-record marker, and commentary. We now rely on the concepts of provocation and off-record marker to organize the empirical literature on the content of teasing, thus revealing the myriad and artful ways that people tease.

Empirical Studies of the Content of Teasing

Intentional provocation. The first element of a tease is the provocation, which is intentionally directed at some act or attribute of the target. Provocations can be nonverbal or physical (pokes in the ribs, physical imitation) and verbal (nicknames, derogatory comments). Certain provocations directly affect the target, as in the case of nicknames or taking cherished objects. Other provocations comment on the target indirectly, as in the case of ironic teasing in which the teaser provokes the target by saying the opposite of what is meant (e.g., Clark, 1996; Drew, 1987; Mitchell-Kernan, 1972; Morgan, 1996) or by featuring members of the target's family (Abrahams, 1962). In many provocations, the initial act is aggressive in intent (taking an object, name calling). Some provocations may first involve a positive overture (e.g., a parent offers a desired object to a child; an adolescent dissembles romantic interest in another) that becomes provocative when retracted or repudiated.

The literature on teasing suggests that the provocation refers to one of three things: (a) something about the target, (b) the relationship between the teaser and target, or (c) some object of interest to the target.[2] The provocation of the tease frequently highlights some undesirable attribute or action of the target. Several studies indicate that conversational teasing refers to deviant aspects of the target's physical appearance, personality, intellectual and social abilities, and social behavior (Eisenberg, 1986; Shapiro, Baumeister, & Kessler, 1991; Siegel, 1995; Straehle, 1993). Nonverbal forms of teasing can highlight deviant acts or attributes of the target: Pointing may draw attention to an unusual physical feature or circumstance that betrays normative expectations; physical mocking may constitute an iconic reference to the deviation, for example, through exaggerated imitation.

The provocation of the tease can also refer to the relationship between the teaser and target. Teasing that occurs in the contexts of pinning and taunting (Pellegrini, 1995) signals the teaser's power over the target. Provocative eye covers, arm restraints, and physical touches directed by one person toward another (Moore, 1995) comment on the teaser's presumed closeness and intimacy with the target. In the *pre-index*, a linguistic form that provokes the listener to request information from the speaker (Beach & Dunning, 1982), the teaser provokes the listener with claims of knowing something the other does not (as when children taunt "I know something you don't know.").

Finally, the provocation of the tease can refer to an object of interest to the target. Offer–withdrawal games, in which a mother, for example, presents a desired object and then withdraws it on the infant's display of interest, comment on the parent and child's interest and respective control over the desired object (Reddy, 1991). Mothers in certain cultures have been known to tease their nursing infants by offering their breast and then repeatedly pulling away when the infant shows interest (Schieffelin, 1986).

Off-record markers. Direct provocations have many potential costs. If the provocation of the tease is delivered directly without redress, it can escalate into serious hostility (Abrahams, 1962; Dunn & Munn, 1986; Fisher, 1976; Fry, 1992; Heath, 1983; Miller, 1986; Murphy, 1983; Schieffelin, 1986; Shantz, 1987; Shapiro et al., 1991). The provocation of the tease is also a face-threatening act for both teaser and target. The provocation may call attention to some negative attribute or act of the target and, in other kinds of teasing (e.g., arm restraint, pinning down), impinge on the freedom of the target to act in unimpeded fashion. The provocation can also threaten the face of the teaser, whose reputation as a fair and kind individual is called into question if revealed to be too hostile or inappropriate in teasing. For these reasons, the teaser accompanies the provocation with off-record markers that reduce its face-threatening potential for both teaser and target.

To render a communication off record, the speaker deviates from norms that govern on-record communication, which include that the utterance be direct, relevant, and honest (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Clark, 1996; Grice, 1975). Off-record strategies deviate from these maxims of communication, thus signaling that an utterance has other meanings than that made explicit in the utterance (Brown & Levinson, 1987). For example, to prompt another to brush his teeth more regularly, an individual might rely on a variety of off-record strategies that violate the maxims of direct, relevant, and honest communication, such as hints, understatements, and rhetorical questions (for a full list of off-record strategies, see Brown & Levinson, 1987). A good deal of evidence across diverse methods indicates that teasing incorporates many of these off-record markers to convey that the provocation is in jest or intended to be playful or affectionate.

For example, teasing includes various linguistic off-record markers that index the nonserious nature of the commentary in the provocation. Formulaic expressions are common to teasing (Abrahams, 1962; Eisenberg, 1986; Goodwin, 1990; Schieffelin, 1986; Straehle, 1993; Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1986) and deviate from the communication norm that individuals communicate in an appropriate manner. In "playing the dozens," African American adolescent males tease by sounding oft-heard, profane poems

[2] Our analysis of the referents of the provocation was influenced by Clark's claim that teasing is an act of joint pretense (Clark, 1996) and Leslie's observation (Leslie, 1987) that there are a limited number of forms of pretense (i.e., about attributes, about objects).

about the target or his mother (Abrahams, 1962). In a narrative study of the spontaneous conversations between three close friends, formulaic phrases such as "Yes, dear" were used in teasing (Straehle, 1993). Parents tease with expressions such as "yeayea-yea" (Miller, 1986) or repetitive, humorous phrases rhythmically placed in social routines (Drew, 1987).

Exaggeration marks the playfulness of the tease by deviating from norms governing that communication be appropriately informative and truthful (Drew, 1987; Handelman & Kapferer, 1972; Schieffelin, 1986). Thus, teasing can involve exaggerated detail (Straehle, 1993), excessive profanity (Drew, 1987), or an exaggerated characterization, as in the use of a nickname such as "horse mouth" to a child who does not speak clearly (Ochs, 1986). In playing the dozens, African American adolescent males tease by posing implausible claims about each other's mother (Abrahams, 1962). Fraternity members tease about absurdly excessive sexual and drunken behavior (Keltner et al., 1998). It is ironic that more exaggerated commentaries in the provocation are likely to be easier for the target to perceive as light-hearted.

Idiomatic expressions belong to a class of communicative acts that operate outside of the usual restrictions of on-record communication and are often used in teasing. Couples develop relationship-specific idioms to communicate teasing insults (Betcher, 1981; Hopper, Knapp, & Scott, 1981). The Kaluli in Papua New Guinea use a recognizable class of ambiguous words to tease, known as *bale to* words, as well as rhetorical questions, which are marked by their clipped final vowel and repetition. Teasing is also marked by jeers and pejorative nicknames (Gaffin, 1995; Straehle, 1993), which often have metaphorical content (Keltner et al., 1998). In a study of the teasing of romantic partners, a significant proportion of the nicknames they spontaneously generated for each other from two randomly paired initials (e.g., A.D.) included metaphors (apple dumpling, adorable dog; Keltner et al., 1998). Metaphors violate the on-record norm of direct, truthful communication (Brown & Levinson, 1987). References to someone present as "he" or "she" rather than speaking directly to the person deviate from the norm of direct communication and constitute teasing when playfully delivered by means of exaggerated pitch contours or emphatic stress (Straehle, 1993).

Teasing also incorporates a rich vocabulary of nonverbal off-record markers, which deviate from maxims of direct, truthful, and appropriate communication. Teasers have been observed to display exaggerated facial expressions (Keltner et al., 1998), mannerisms that mimic those of the intended recipient (Morgan, 1996), or iconic displays—such as the wink (Eisenberg, 1986), the rubbing of one finger over another, or the paradoxically aggressive raised fist and chin (Miller, 1986)—to signal that teasing is taking place. Fine-grained analyses of the teasing amongst friends (e.g., Abrahams, 1962; Straehle, 1993) and parents and children (e.g., Eisenberg, 1986; Miller, 1986) have identified several prosodic off-record markers in teasing, including elongated vowels; sing-song voice; emphatic stress; short switching pauses; loud, rapid delivery; dramatized sighs; and utterances that are either louder or quieter than preceding utterances. Parents tease children, for example, by using high-pitch vowel elongation and exaggerated pitch contours in saying "Mine!" in referring to the child's toy (Miller, 1986). The Kaluli rely on intonation to distinguish a form of talk commonly used in teasing called "Keab," in which one sounds angry but is not, from "Enteab," which conveys true anger (Schieffelin, 1986). In a similar manner, parents tease young children by scolding angrily in an exaggerated manner, and young children are quick to grasp parents' playful intentions and to mock-scold in return (Rogoff, 1990). Members of different ethnic communities convey nonliteral meaning in teasing and other linguistic practices with high pitch and shifts in vocalization speed (Levinson, 1983; Pomerantz, 1984; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974).

In addition to off-record markers, Brown and Levinson (1987) also discussed certain redressive actions that reduce the face-threatening potential of behaviors. Positive politeness tactics, such as praise or the expression of common ground, express approval (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and may explain certain elements of a teaser's behavior. For example, some kinds of laughter signal affiliation (Keltner & Bonanno, 1997) and often accompany the delivery of a tease (Alberts, 1992; Briggs, 1960; Corsaro & Maynard, 1996; Drew, 1987; Gaffin, 1995; Glenn, 1989; Long & Graesser, 1988; Schieffelin, 1986; Straehle, 1993). Other positive politeness tactics include the teaser's friendly physical contact or knowing eye contact as well as implicit praise in the tease (Keltner et al., 1998). Negative politeness tactics express the desire not to impinge on another individual's freedom of action and include apologies, deferential displays, hedges, and minimizations or impersonalizations of actions (e.g., avoiding the use of "I" or "you" in a request). Negative politeness may account for frequent displays of embarrassment and apologies on the part of the teaser as well as the target (Keltner et al., 1998). Additional research is needed to further illuminate the role of positive and negative politeness tactics in teasing.

Thus far, we have focused on what teasing is. We have drawn on discussions of face and strategic interaction to define a tease as an intentional provocation accompanied by playful, off-record markers directed by one person toward another that comments on something of relevance to the target. Despite the advantages of our approach to teasing, it is not without limitations. We have said little about how the target's response contributes to the interaction. We take this issue up in the closing section of the article. For certain critical assertions, the empirical evidence is wanting and our review highlights important areas for further research. More focused studies certainly need to document the frequency with which the different kinds of provocations and off-record markers occur. Only one study has directly documented how the hostility of the tease varies according to the presence of off-record markers (Keltner et al., 1998), and further work is needed here to clarify that fine, seemingly ineffable boundary between teasing for fun and teasing that goes too far. Having reviewed the literature on what teasing is, we now examine when it occurs.

When Do People Tease?

Our definition of teasing as playful provocation provides two clues as to when people will be likely to tease. First, the provocation in the tease suggests that the teaser perceives some need to elicit some response in the target, implying that the teaser is likely to desire some change in the target or interaction with the target. Teasing, it follows, is likely to arise in contexts in which ongoing interactions between teaser and target deviate from some more desired state of affairs. Second, the presence of off-record markers

in the tease suggests that drawing attention to the act that prompts the tease is a sensitive matter and is face threatening to both teaser and target, thus prompting the need for the teaser to act indirectly.

It is unfortunate that no study has looked comprehensively at the antecedents of teasing. Nor has any study compared the events that prompt teasing as opposed to related behaviors, such as playful story telling, direct criticism, or ridicule. Instead, relevant studies—typically observational studies of spontaneous interactions—have noted the conditions or acts that immediately precede the tease. Although these studies are correlational in nature, and many of the observations are unsystematic, they consistently suggest that teasing occurs following two kinds of disruptions in social interactions: norm deviations and interpersonal conflict.

Norm Deviations

Individuals often tease others who have violated social norms. The evidence for this claim is well-replicated, coming from several studies using observational, narrative, ethnographic, and self-report methods. Analyses of spontaneous conversations indicate that teasing occurs in response to a speaker's violation of communication norms, for example, following inane statements or improbable claims, boasts, redundancies, long-winded or overly formal utterances, or descriptions of impossible events (Drew, 1987; Straehle, 1993). At ages when within-gender play is the norm, girls, and especially boys, are often teased by peers if seen repeatedly interacting with someone of the opposite sex (Thorne, 1990, 1993; Thorne & Luria, 1986). An observational study of the teasing of first and third graders found that school children teased about norm violations, such as the lack of adherence to the rules of playground games (Voss, 1997). In a similar manner, Eder's (1991) observational study of high school girls at the lunch table found that teasing focused explicitly on violations of rules regarding physical contact, attire, and feminine behaviors. A review of ethnographic accounts of sexual insults (many of which are used in teasing) found that they focus on deviations of culture-specific norms regarding sexual behavior (Flynn, 1976). In institutional settings, teasing frequently focuses on violations of norms concerning work loads and professional demeanor (Coser, 1959, 1960; Yedes, 1996). Parents tease children in ways that highlight violations of prohibitions against possessiveness, selfishness, sulking, and aggression (e.g., Dunn & Brown, 1994; Miller, 1986; Schieffelin, 1986). Physical forms of teasing, such as tickling associated with deviant behavior, have been used to extinguish self-destructive behaviors in children, including those with developmental disabilities (Greene & Hoats, 1971).

Teasing also highlights norm deviations by attributing hypothetical, nonnormative characteristics to the target, which may motivate the target to avoid such transgressions. Accounts of so-called sounding, for example, describe African American adolescent boys who tease each other by attributing female characteristics to one another (Abrahams, 1962). In a similar manner, school-aged boys have been observed to tease by referring to each other with girls' names or by homosexual name calling (Thorne, 1993; Thorne & Luria, 1986). In code-switching, a teaser will address a target using the linguistic practices of an undesirable outgroup, thus attributing that group's characteristics to the target. For example, African Fijians tease each other by using Hindi words and forms of Hindi grammar that differ from Fijian grammar (such as object–verb order), Australian Aborigines tease brothers-in-law by speaking in a female tone of voice, and Apaches may tease by addressing the recipient in English (reported in Siegel, 1995).

Interpersonal Conflict

Teasing has long been believed to be an indirect, playful way to negotiate conflict (Dollard, 1930; Eder, 1993; Eisenberg & Garvey, 1981). Consistent with this supposition, cumulative evidence indicates that teasing often occurs in response to interpersonal conflict. For example, an observational study of sibling and parent–child interactions identified the occurrence of conflicts (e.g., over rule violations, aggression, power) and teasing (defined as the deliberate attempt to provoke or upset another) in families with children between the ages of 1 and 2 years (Dunn & Munn, 1985). As children engaged in increased conflict with their siblings and parents, they tended to negotiate these conflicts with increased teasing. Eder (1991) observed that high school girls often teased one another to negotiate conflicts of interests, particularly over affection for boys or intimacies with other group members. Straehle's (1993) analysis of spontaneous conversations found that three friends were most likely to tease one another when discussing divergent goals and beliefs. An observational study found that department store workers were particularly likely to tease when resolving conflict-laden issues, such as the delegation of limited office space (Bradney, 1957). Ethnographers in Seville have documented the salience of teasing in confrontations between fathers and their adolescent sons that constitutes a rite of passage into adolescence (Murphy, 1983). Finally, among the Kwaraõae of the Solomon Islands, the transition to toddlerhood is marked by interactions in which fathers tease infants about wanting to nurse and mothers respond on behalf of their children, thus playing out disagreements over the appropriate time to wean (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1986).

Teasing may also occur in response to *potential* conflict, allowing individuals to negotiate potential problems before they arise. Thus, anthropologists have long noted that teasing occurs in so-called joking relationships that are fraught with potential conflict, for example, those between in-laws (Apte, 1985; Radcliffe-Brown, 1940). However, this idea remains to be more thoroughly examined empirically. Teasing among the Kaluli in New Guinea (Schieffelin, 1986, 1990) and the Basotho in South Africa (Demuth, 1986) frequently occurs during the distribution of food and other goods, when conflict is likely. In a similar manner, an observational study of third graders, although based on a fairly small sample, found that they teased each other more frequently when brought into tight quarters, which increases the likelihood of conflict (Voss, 1997).

These studies of the conditions and actions that prompt teasing, as we have noted, have been correlational in nature and suffer from obvious problems in interpretation: Does interpersonal conflict prompt teasing, or is it increased by teasing? Experimental studies would surely help clear up these sorts of questions. Many of the observational studies have had very small sample sizes (e.g., Voss, 1997) or did not systematically measure the alleged elicitors of teasing (e.g., norm violations, conflict). No study has compared the actions that elicit teasing with those that prompt other behaviors,

such as directly criticizing or ignoring the action. And there are certain to be other kinds of events that prompt teasing—particularly among children—and, likewise, conditions that render teasing very unlikely. For example, teasing occurs in the context of flirtation (e.g., Moore, 1995), suggesting that affiliative behaviors and circumstances may give rise to teasing. Brown and Levinson (1987) suggested that off-record communication, such as teasing, is highly unlikely in certain situations, such as emergencies or times when needs are urgent (e.g., during physical trauma, accidents, funerals). This speculation further suggests that norm violations or interpersonal conflicts of an urgent nature, such as those that revolve around physical or emotional distress, would not prompt teasing but instead direct commentary and criticism. These questions await exploration. Nevertheless, accumulated evidence indicates that teasing often occurs in response to norm violations and interpersonal conflict.

Teasing Across Development

The study of teasing and development offers a window into developmental changes in language, social understanding, and relationships (e.g., Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Rich with this sort of promise, this line of inquiry is equally rife with problems. There has been no systematic documentation of the development of teasing. The studies that do exist have defined teasing in different ways (see Table 2), thus making cross-study comparisons difficult. Much of what is known about teasing is derived from children's reports of teasing rather than observations of how they actually tease. Notwithstanding these problems, our approach highlights certain requirements of teasing, which lay the foundation for predictions concerning development-related changes in the content, understanding, and enjoyment of children's teasing.

A tease, we have argued, has two core components: an intentional provocation and playful off-record markers. The generation and comprehension of off-record markers hinge on several related abilities. Most notably, off-record markers require the ability to use nonliteral communication and thus to distinguish between the verbatim content of an utterance and its intended meaning. The generation and understanding of teasing therefore require the ability to understand behaviors that involve multiple, contradictory intentions. Several literatures relevant to the generation and understanding of contradictory intentions point to likely developmental shifts in teasing.

A first relevant literature is that on play fighting. Playful fighting, like teasing, conveys contradictory intentions. The literature on the ability to differentiate aggressive from playful fighting hints at the possible age at which children begin to understand multiple, contradictory intentions and, we would argue, teasing. Smith and Lewis (1985), for example, found that six of eight preschoolers could discriminate between videotaped scenes of playful and aggressive fighting, but the majority had difficulty articulating the basis for this distinction. In a larger study of older children, Boulton (1993) found that 8-year-olds were quite able to distinguish playful from aggressive fighting, but that children could not consistently do so or provide clear justifications for their choices until 11 years of age. Moreover, an interview study revealed that the most common responses from children ages 8 to 10 years given to distinguish playful from aggressive fighting were the presence of playful cues or off-record markers, such as facial expressions, verbal intonation, and laughter (Smith & Boulton, 1990).

Studies of irony and sarcasm more clearly point to likely developmental changes in the generation and understanding of teasing. Sarcasm and ironic utterances can be forms of teasing when directed at another individual as a provocation or commentary. The interpretation of irony and sarcasm requires (a) the ability to attend to paralinguistic features and contextual information to infer nonliteral intent and (b) the ability to make inferences both about the speaker's beliefs and about what the speaker wants the listener to believe (Capelli, Nakagawa, & Madden, 1990; Dews & Winner, 1997; Dews et al., 1996; Winner, 1988). By 6 years of age, children can identify salient off-record markers (Becker, 1994) and begin to recognize that sarcastic and ironic utterances differ from sincere communication. Although their knowledge improves significantly by age 8, they do not develop a comprehensive understanding of sarcasm and irony until ages 11 to 13 years (Ackerman, 1983; Demorest, Meyer, Phelps, Gardner, & Winner, 1984; Dews & Winner, 1997).

For example, Demorest et al. (1984) identified three developmental steps in the discrimination of two deliberately false remarks: sarcasm and deception. Six-year-olds tended to take such remarks as sincere, by assuming, for example, that a speaker who says "your hair looks terrific" in response to seeing a decidedly uneven cut actually believes it is a good haircut or is pretending to like the haircut, as in a white lie. By 9 years of age, children no longer mistook deliberate falsehood for sincerity, and the majority did not interpret sarcasm as deceptive. Finally, 13-year-olds fully grasped that the intended meaning and purpose of sarcasm was out of line with the statement (e.g., that the speaker intended to convey a negative opinion of the haircut).

Researchers have also chronicled children's developing awareness that individuals use irony to mute critical communication or to render it funny or playful (Dews & Winner, 1997; Kreuz, Long, & Church, 1991; Long & Graesser, 1988). Dews and Winner (1997) found that 5- to 6-year-olds rated ironic criticism as less mean but no more funny than literal criticism, whereas 8- to 9-year-olds also picked up on the funny aspect but not as extensively as did college students. In a similar manner, with respect to the production of irony, it appears that children and adults use similar intonation patterns (heavy stress, slow speech, nasalization) but that children tend to display negative facial expressions whereas adults display playful, positive facial expressions.

What predictions do these findings generate about teasing? These literatures, combined with knowledge of general developmental trends in social understanding, lead to the following hypotheses. Given their budding sensitivity to off-record markers (Becker, 1994), one would expect 5-year-old children to recognize highly salient forms of teasing but to maintain a bias toward a literal interpretation of meaning. One would expect the ability to discern the intended meaning of teasing to improve significantly at about 8 years of age, in concert with advances in the ability to know others' mental states (Perner & Wimmer, 1985; Winner & Leekam, 1991) and appreciation of the potential to feel conflicting emotions simultaneously (Harter & Whitesell, 1990). Finally, given evidence that explicit awareness of meaning and purpose of irony, coupled with appreciation of its playful, humorous side, consolidates sometime between ages 11 and 13 years (Demorest et

al. 1984), one would expect an analogous, fairly dramatic shift with respect to teasing. To be specific, early adolescence should mark an increase in the generation and comprehension of more playful forms of teasing. We turn now to data, albeit limited, concerning the generation and comprehension of teasing over the course of development.

Developmental Changes in the Content of Teasing

Researchers have noted several developmental changes in the content of teasing. The content of teasing changes as a function of shifts in the salience of particular social norms. Self-report (Warm, 1997) and observational studies suggest that the content of teasing directed to and by children changes in accord with (violation of) norms concerning behaviors and issues that are relevant at different points in development, for example, possessiveness and aggression during the preschool years (Dunn & Brown, 1994; Miller, 1986; Schieffelin, 1986), associations with members of the opposite sex during elementary school (Thorne, 1993; Thorne & Luria, 1986), fashion-related and dating behavior in puberty (Eder, 1991), and experimental behaviors related to sex and drug use during adolescence and early adulthood (Keltner et al., 1998). An important next step will be to document shifts in issues, norms, and conflicts that are salient to various groups of children and contingent shifts in the focus of teasing.

With respect to the off-record content of teasing, the literature on irony indicates that 11- to 13-year-old children are able to grasp the communication of multiple, contradictory intentions and should therefore begin to tease in more playful ways at that age. A recent study of taunting at a basketball camp supports this prediction (Young, Keltner, Londahl, Capps, & Tauer, 2000). Pairs of boys (either ages 9 to 11 years or 12 to 14 years) were separated from the rest of the camp to engage in a basketball exercise. Each boy's task was to shoot one free throw; if he made it, he won; if he missed, he lost. Before the boy attempted the shot, his partner was instructed to either cheer him on or taunt him for 15 seconds at a distance of 5 feet. The taunt condition produced more hostility (e.g., clenching of fists, shouting) and also more off-record markers (e.g., metaphors, intonation shifts, repetition). Consistent with the literature on irony, in the taunt condition, 12- to 14-year-olds were more likely than 9- to 11-year-olds to mitigate their hostile behavior with off-record markers, including vocalization shifts (whispering, slow or fast speed), repetition, and metaphors.

In a similar manner, in an interview study of 250 children ages 6 to 16 years, Warm (1997) found that teasing became increasingly symbolic with age: 45% of 1st graders and 80% of 11th graders reported engaging in symbolic teasing, which included less blatant forms of criticism as well as the use of language and gesture to convey the spirit of play. Although we know that children become less reliant on nonverbal forms of teasing as they acquire language (e.g., Dunn & Munn, 1986), it will be important to delineate the increasingly sophisticated and subtle ways in which children use their bodies—as well as their voices—to establish teasing as such. In addition, further research is needed that presents children at various ages with a particular category of norm violation that typically inspires teasing (e.g., a classmate's clumsiness, the unbridled zeal of a teacher's pet) or observes them in such contexts and examines age-related changes in the presence and nature of the teasing that follows.

Developmental Changes in the Understanding of Teasing

As children learn to comprehend nonliteral communication and to recognize multiple, often contradictory emotions and intentions, they should begin to understand the playful, prosocial aspects of teasing. Experimental work on the comprehension of varieties of teasing other than ironic and sarcastic remarks has yet to be completed. Studies of personal accounts of teasing suggest that whereas children of all ages emphasize the hurtful nature of teasing, the accounts of older children increasingly feature its playful, prosocial side. In Warm's (1997) survey study, for example, participants of all ages described teasing as being motivated by the desire to inflict discomfort on another, but a significant percentage of children over age 11 years noted positive motives and consequences as well (Warm, 1997). Another interview study similarly found that 97% of children in elementary-school (ages 5–10 years) reported experiencing negative emotion in response to being teased, whereas this was true of only 78% of participants in junior high school (ages 11–13 years; Shapiro et al., 1991). It will be important to generalize these findings to children's understanding of actual teasing interactions.

It is problematic, however, to interpret these findings as evidence that older children are more adept at discerning teasers' prosocial intentions. Younger children do not use off-record markers in their teasing as frequently, and developmental differences in conceptions of teasing may derive from interactions with same-aged peers. Studies are needed that present children of different ages with the same teasing interactions and then assess whether their own responses and attributions of hostility and play vary in systematic ways. Underwood and colleagues recently conducted research that addressed some of these concerns, and they, too, documented developmental shifts in the understanding of teasing-like behavior at around age 11 or 12 years. In one study, second-, fourth-, and sixth-grade girls and boys were taunted by a same-aged confederate about losing at a video game (Underwood, Hurley, Johanson, & Mosley, 1999). Compared with the two younger groups, the sixth-grade children (about 12 years old) showed more positive responses to the taunting, as evident in fewer facial expressions of sadness and more humorous verbal responses. In a similar study, fourth-, seventh-, and tenth-grade girls and boys were asked to imagine being the victim of different acts of social and physical aggression, and they then rated the hurtfulness of the vignettes (Galen & Underwood, 1997). Some of the portrayals of social aggression resembled teasing (e.g., the subject is mocked for not being invited to a party). As one would expect from our analysis, starting at age 12 or 13 years (i.e., the seventh grade), the children found the acts of social aggression less hurtful.

Finally, although we have purposefully avoided relying on bullying-related findings, it is interesting to note that bullying increases during the middle school years but then declines precipitously starting at around age 12, after which time it is infrequently reported (e.g., Hoover, Oliver, & Hazler, 1992). For example, in one survey study in England, 8- to 11-year-olds reported frequencies of bullying and being bullied that were twice that of 11- to 16-year-olds (Whitney & Smith, 1993). Developmental shifts in

the content and understanding of teasing, which we have documented above, may in part account for development-related reductions in the frequency of bullying, which can involve very hostile forms of teasing.

In summary, the study of teasing and development offers important tests of face-derived hypotheses concerning the likelihood, content, and enjoyment of teasing. It will be important for future research to measure more directly development-related changes in face and their relation to teasing. The links between the generation of playful teasing and the ability to understand the multiple intentions behind a tease are likewise an important line of inquiry and may shed light, more generally, on how children learn to tease in effective ways and use that teasing to navigate their increasingly complex social worlds.

Variations in Teasing Across Social Contexts

Having defined teasing and considered when it occurs and how it changes with development, we now turn to the question of how teasing varies across different social contexts. Theorists have argued that teasing varies dramatically according to the social context in which it takes place (e.g., Pawluk, 1989). Teasing, from this point of view, is constructed within particular interactions, contexts, and relationships. It is unfortunate that few scholars have offered concrete hypotheses concerning how teasing might vary across contexts. Such a theoretical endeavor requires an operationalization of teasing that works across diverse contexts and a conceptualization of some psychological process present to varying degrees in different contexts that accounts for variation in teasing. Perhaps for these reasons, researchers have tended to focus on teasing within specific contexts amongst people in certain relationships, or they have attended little to context-related variation in teasing.

We focus on two features of the context for which there are sufficient data to arrive at some generalizations: (a) the relationship between teaser and target and (b) gender. Although our analysis thus far highlights several ways in which teasing may vary across contexts (e.g., what it is about, what prompts it), our ensuing review focuses on the likelihood of teasing and the hostility of the tease. We represent our predictions in Figure 1, which draws on conceptualizations of face and strategic interaction (Brown & Levinson, 1987). According to this analysis, some contexts are defined by elevated concerns over face (e.g., formal occasions or exchanges with high-status others), whereas other contexts are defined by reduced face concerns (e.g., informal settings or interactions amongst familiar individuals). When face concerns among individuals are minimal, individuals are more likely to act directly in an on-record fashion than indirectly with off-record behaviors (see Strategy column in Figure 1). For example, with reduced face concerns, potential romantic partners will be more likely to state directly their attraction than convey it indirectly in flirtation or avoid the topic altogether.

This analysis leads to the following predictions concerning context-related variation in teasing. In terms of the likelihood of teasing, Figure 1 specifies that with increasingly minimal concerns about face, individuals will (a) be more likely to comment directly, an on-record strategy, than pursue the off-record strategy of teasing; and (b) be more likely to tease than not comment at all. No study has compared the frequencies with which people either tease or go on record with direct commentary. Instead, researchers have addressed when people tease rather than avoid teasing in the first place. Thus, the literature we review bears on the prediction related to when people tease rather than not tease.

Figure 1 likewise generates predictions concerning the hostility of the tease, for which there is some relevant evidence. To be

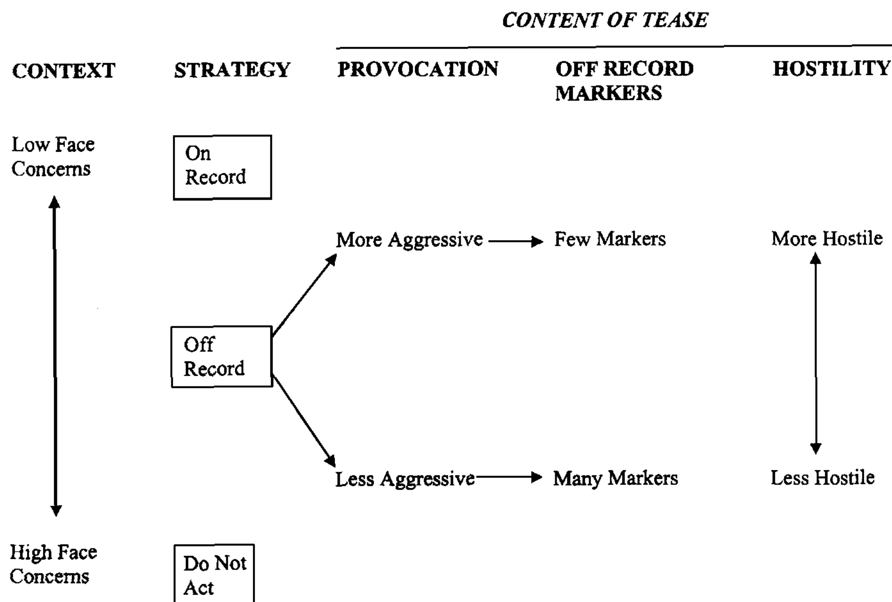

Figure 1. A face-threat analysis of teasing.

specific, if individuals choose to tease, with reduced face concerns individuals should tend to tease in more hostile fashion (with an aggressive provocation and fewer off-record markers). In contrast, when face concerns are relatively high, teasers will be more likely to tease in a less hostile fashion. We assess these two hypotheses by reviewing studies of how teasing varies across relationships and gender.

Variation in Teasing Across Relationships

Researchers have drawn clear connections between the concern for face and two variables that are germane to different kinds, domains, and stages of social relationships: power and social distance (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Slugoski & Turnbull, 1988). Individuals who have less power and those who are more distant are assumed to be more concerned about maintaining their own face and that of their interaction partner and should therefore engage in more strategically indirect behavior. The literature on politeness tactics is consistent with these predictions: For example, subordinates and strangers are more likely than dominant and familiar individuals to use politeness tactics when making requests, such as by apologizing for the request or making it indirectly (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Following this argument and evidence, one would expect teasers who enjoy elevated power vis-à-vis the target or those who are familiar with the target to (a) be more likely to tease and (b) tease in more hostile ways (i.e., involving a more aggressive provocation and fewer off-record markers). Studies that have assessed the power of teaser and target, as well as their degree of familiarity, provide evidence that with some degree of consistency supports these two predictions.

Social power. High-power individuals are less dependent on others (e.g., Emerson, 1964) and are less concerned about the face-threatening potential of their actions (Brown & Levinson, 1987); therefore, they should be both more likely to tease than low-power individuals and more likely to tease in a more hostile manner. Several studies that have focused on the teasing of individuals in different power-related roles or who vary in their peer-rated status support this prediction (power and status are typically highly correlated and affect face concerns in similar ways; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2000). Thus, observations of hospital staff meetings found that senior staff members were more likely to make jokes at the expense of junior staff members than vice versa (Coser, 1959, 1960). Pizzini's (1991) analysis of interactions in obstetrical–gynecological settings found that doctors teased more often than midwives, who were more likely to tease than nurses. An observational summer camp study found that high-status boys, as nominated by sociometric ratings by peers, were more likely to tease than low-status boys (Savin-Williams, 1977). A survey of teasing amongst third, fifth, and eighth graders found that popular children were more likely to tease (Shapiro et al., 1991).

Two studies provide support for the hypothesized relation between the power of the teaser and the hostility of the tease. One study compared the teasing of high-status members in a fraternity, as defined by the offices they held in the fraternity and their peer-rated status, and low-status members, who were recently admitted to the fraternity. Consistent with prediction, high-status members' teasing was more hostile, involving more aggressive provocations and fewer positive and negative politeness tactics (Keltner et al., 1998). This finding was replicated in a study of taunting at a basketball camp (Young et al., 2000). That is, high-status boys (rated as respected, influential, and popular by coaches at the camp) were again more aggressive in the physical provocations of their teasing. It will be important to replicate these findings with female participants and in other contexts where power and status differences are pronounced (e.g., work).

Social distance. Individuals in relationships defined by reduced social distance (or increased familiarity) are assumed to be less concerned about the face-threatening potential of their behavior (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This analysis leads to the rather counterintuitive prediction that people who are familiar with each other should be more likely to tease and to tease in more hostile ways. Teasing does appear to be more likely with increasing familiarity, although the evidence largely derives from informal observation rather than systematic comparison of the teasing in conditions of more or less familiarity. Abrahams noted that playing the dozens amongst African American males occurred only between friends (Abrahams, 1962). Observations of teasing in Mexican American homes indicated that adults addressed teases to those with whom they were most close, and that teasing was most frequent during breaks from chores, when people were relaxed and returned to their familiar ways with one another (Eisenberg, 1986). It will be important for more highly controlled studies to replicate these observations.

Only one study has addressed whether familiarity increases the hostility of teasing. In the study of basketball campers (Young et al., 2000), the same pairs of boys taunted each other on the first and third days of the camp, which allowed us to compare the hostility of boys' taunting as they presumably became more familiar with one another. The boys did indeed taunt in more aggressive fashion the second time around, consistent with the prediction generated by face theory. Studies of other contexts and relationships are clearly needed, where increased familiarity (e.g., between old friends or romantic partners) may produce other changes in teasing. It was interesting that although the basketball campers were more hostile on the third day, they reported just as much pleasure. The hostility of the tease might increase with increased familiarity but so might other processes that make the teasing more affiliative and pleasurable. For example, more familiar others are likely to be better able to deliver teases with clear playful intent, to understand when teasing is taking place, and to know which topics are less hurtful and which are to be avoided. These sorts of issues warrant exploration.

The studies of power, social distance, and teasing point to systematic sources of variation in the likelihood and hostility of teasing. We again hasten to note that most of the findings reviewed in this section are correlational and would be strengthened by controlled manipulation studies. No study has directly measured face concerns and how they relate to social power and social distance. This sort of direct evidence is clearly needed. No study has isolated the pure effects of one relational variable on the likelihood and content of teasing while controlling for the influences of other variables. For example, familiarity is certain to be correlated with the positivity of affect between teaser and target, which has its own predictable effects on the content of teasing (Keltner et al., 1998).

Future research in this area could proceed in several directions. Research needs to examine other relationship variables (e.g., is the relationship in its early stages or established?) and other features of the tease (what people tease about) that are beyond the ken of face theory. Other processes than face concerns are certain to vary systematically across relationships, including changes in the meaning of face concerns, knowledge about others' specific face concerns, and knowledge of others' teasing style, and warrant empirical attention. In addition, it will be important for researchers to document how contextual variables influence the interpretation of the tease—an important part of teasing that we have thus far ignored. For example, increased familiarity appears to predispose targets of teasing to interpret teases in more prosocial terms (Alberts, 1992). Consistent with this claim, in a study involving hypothetical scenarios, individuals were more likely to interpret insults delivered by a friend as more benign than those delivered by a stranger (Powers & Glenn, 1979). Status and power likewise are likely to shape the interpretation of the tease. Thus, in one study that presented a hypothetical teasing scenario, low-status (neglected or rejected) children, as nominated by sociometric peer ratings, were more likely to attribute hostile intent to the teaser than were high-status (popular and average) children (Feldman & Dodge, 1987). From a more general standpoint, this sort of research has the potential of identifying how teasing varies across contexts and why teasing can lead to such different outcomes (e.g., affiliation or affront), depending on the context in which it occurs.

Teasing and Gender

The claims about gender differences in teasing are widespread, yet the available empirical evidence does not always support these claims. For example, although some authors have argued that men rely on teasing more to affiliate and express affection (Tannen, 1990), empirical studies indicate that both boys and girls use teasing to indirectly express affection toward someone of the opposite gender (Eder, 1993; Thorne, 1990). In addition, indirect evidence suggests that boys, men, girls, and women tease in response to similar events, namely norm violations (e.g., Keltner et al., 1998; Mooney, Cresser, & Blatchford, 1991; Shapiro et al., 1991; Warm, 1997). Among children, norm violations that are ripe for teasing include mixed-gender interactions (Thorne, 1993; Thorne & Luria, 1986; but see Thorne, 1990). Both boys and girls are teased by making an explicit reference to "liking" the opposite sex (Thorne & Luria, 1986), and both boys and girls use teasing to communicate gender-related, heterosexual norms, with girls mocking traditional female behavior (Eder, 1993) and boys using homosexual name calling (Thorne, 1993; Thorne & Luria, 1986). Thus, although some gender differences in teasing may indeed exist, there are also certain to be important similarities.

Understanding whether there are gender differences in teasing and, if so, understanding the contexts under which these differences are likely to be manifest nevertheless has important implications for the study of the communication between women and men and their often difficult misunderstandings. It is unfortunate that the extant data on gender and teasing are limited. Studies interested in assessing gender differences in teasing need to study the same kind of teasing (e.g., physical, verbal) in similar contexts; this research has yet to be conducted. Notwithstanding these limitations, the concepts of face and strategic interaction help inform hypotheses about differences in the frequency and content of teasing between men and women.

In studies of conversational interactions, there is some evidence, albeit a bit equivocal, that women use positive and negative politeness tactics more often than men, suggesting that face threat may be of greater concern to women than men (e.g., Baxter, 1984; Holmes, 1989; see Aries, 1996, for a review). Women's greater use of politeness tactics, however, is not necessarily cross-situational and in some instances may reflect more about status (i.e., women being stereotypically of lower status than men) than gender. Thus, studies interested in gender differences in teasing should also measure and consider status and power. That women and men do appear to differ in face concerns in certain contexts, however, leads us to predict that men should tease more often than women and that their teasing should be more hostile. Robust evidence in support of these predictions is still wanting, yet the available empirical studies indirectly support each of these propositions.

A handful of studies suggests that across ages, males seem more likely to tease than females. For example, one observational study of mixed-gender interactions on the playground found that boys tease girls more than vice versa in third grade (Voss, 1997). In a similar manner, in a day camp setting, boys ranging in age from 6 to 11 years teased more than girls did (McGhee, 1976). The evidence in adults is less robust but similarly suggests that men are more likely to tease than women (e.g., Lampert, 1996). In her narrative study of teasing amongst three friends, Straehle (1993) found that the male friend was responsible for most of teases (48% as opposed to chance distribution of 33%). Men are believed to be more likely than women to engage in put-ons, which include teasing (Stebbins, 1975). In a study of family interactions, men were more likely than women to tease children (Eisenberg, 1986), and in an observational study of parents' speech with their children, fathers more frequently called their children by affectionately insulting names than did mothers (Gleason & Greif, 1983). In one study of romantic idiom, men were nearly twice as likely as women to generate teasing insults (Bell, Buerkel-Rothfuss, & Gore, 1987), although a similar study found no gender differences in the report of teasing insults as examples of romantic idiom (Bell & Healy, 1992). In a similar manner, an interview study of undergraduate same-sex friends and heterosexual couples found no gender differences in verbal teasing (Baxter, 1992).

Do men and women tease in different ways? We would predict that men's teases would involve more aggressive provocations and fewer off-record markers. However, no study has directly assessed this hypothesis. Some evidence suggests that young boys are more likely to tease in more hostile ways in mixed-gender interactions (Thorne & Luria, 1986), but a study of romantic teasing between adult men and women found no differences in the levels of hostility, dominance, or deference (Keltner et al., 1998). No studies have directly examined the manner in which men and women deliver teases. Yet we would argue that this delivery is precisely where gender differences in teasing may be found. In short, this brief review of gender and teasing has, in some ways, raised more questions than it has answered, thus highlighting the need for more systematic studies of the ways in which men and women tease. In future research, it will be essential to link gender variations in

teasing to social context, considering the target, the audience members, and the teaser's relation to these others.

The Future Study of Teasing

We began this review by posing four questions: What is teasing? When does it occur? How does teasing change with development? And how does teasing vary across social contexts? We have drawn on Goffman's analysis of face and strategic interaction to define a tease as an intentional provocation accompanied by playful off-record markers in which one person comments on something of potential relevance to the target. This definition has helped to solve problems with previous accounts of what teasing is and, in combination with other ideas about face concerns and strategic interaction, has allowed us to formulate hypotheses and integrate studies relevant to when teasing occurs and how it varies with development and according to social contextual factors.

In the course of this review, we have identified clear avenues for future research. Correlational findings need to be translated to experimental studies. Manipulation studies need to address whether specific events, such as norm violations, and social contextual factors, such as status or familiarity, influence teasing in the ways that the observational evidence suggests. More systematic comparisons of the elicitors, likelihood, and content of teasing across development and gender are certainly needed. We hope such efforts are enabled and guided by our definition of teasing and our proposal that face concerns account for context-related variation in the likelihood and content of teasing. In closing, we consider questions for which ideas about face and strategic interaction lead to testable predictions: the target's response to the tease, individual differences in teasing, and cultural variation in teasing.

The Target's Contribution to the Teasing Interaction

Whereas certain discussions of teasing place great emphasis on how the target's response contributes to the meaning of the tease (e.g., Drew, 1987), we have been silent with respect to this issue. There are several fascinating questions related to the target's response to the tease. To what elements of the tease does the target attend? How does the target infer the teaser's specific intent (see Clark, 1996), and what are the consequences of likely differences in teasers' and targets' attributions of the intent behind the tease (see Shapiro et al., 1991)? To what extent, and under what circumstances, does the tease change the target's future behavior or self-concept?[3] Studies that have examined the target's response to the tease are few in number. Survey and narrative studies of grammar school children (e.g., Mooney et al., 1991; Shapiro et al., 1991) and qualitative analyses of mother–child interactions (e.g., Miller, 1986) and the conversations between Western European adults (Drew, 1987) indicate that the most common response to teasing is some form of counter. Among children, ignoring the tease is also a common response, second only to countering the tease, as evidenced in two survey studies (Mooney et al., 1991; Shapiro et al., 1991). In a laboratory study, nearly half the sample of 8- to 12-year-old children remained silent following verbal taunting and provocation during a computer game contest (Underwood et al., 1999).

It will be important for future studies to examine the determinants and consequences of targets' responses to being teased. It should come as no surprise that we find the face concerns of the teaser and target to lead to interesting predictions. Face concerns should, in part, determine the target's emotional response to the tease. Targets who feel little face concern vis-à-vis the teaser should feel less negative emotion when being teased. Consistent with this formulation, in our study of fraternity teasing it was the low-status members who displayed the most anxiety and embarrassment (Keltner et al., 1998)—a concomitant of their elevated concern for their own and others' face.

Face concerns should likewise influence whether the target responds to the tease in face-threatening ways, for example, by counterteasing or by challenging or refuting the tease (acts that themselves are face threatening). Targets who feel little face concern vis-à-vis the teaser should be more likely to tease in return or counter and rebut the tease. Exploration of the target's response to the tease and ensuing interaction between teaser and target will remedy one of the major shortcomings of this article: that we have ignored the sequelae of the initial tease and how teasing interactions unfold over time.

Individual Differences in Teasing and Being Teased

Meaningful individual differences in who teases and who gets teased are encoded in cultural concepts of the "tease" and "fool". Across cultures, individuals play the role of clown, teasing others even at the most solemn of occasions (Apte, 1985). In the isolated Faorese of New Foundland, the *Rukka*, or community fool, is teased by many to the delight of the community and plays this role across contexts: When a Rukka moves from one fishing boat to another, he quickly becomes that boat's Rukka (Gaffin, 1995). Individual differences in who teases and who gets teased have profound social significance as well. Empirical studies suggest that individual differences in teasing style and response to being teased may play a role in sexual harassment (Fitzgerald, Swan, & Magley, 1997), aggressive response to peers (Feldman & Dodge, 1987; Hinshaw, Buhrmester, & Heller, 1989), and bullying and victimization (Olweus, 1993b).

The concept of face leads to two predictions concerning individual differences in teasing and being teased. First, more frequent and hostile teasers should be those individuals who feel little concern for their own or others' face. Thus, one might expect individuals who are less empathetic, agreeable, and sensitive to others—all individual differences that presumably relate to reduced concerns for others' face—to be more likely to tease and, when teasing, to tease in more hostile ways. Consistent with this hypothesis, fraternity members and romantic partners who reported that they were low in the personality trait agreeableness

[3] For a literature that highlights the potentially powerful effects teasing may have on a target's self-concept, see the studies of Thompson and colleagues on obesity-related teasing. Obesity-related teasing has myriad negative consequences (e.g., Fabian & Thompson 1989; Grilo, Wilfley, Brownell, & Rodin, 1994; Thompson, 1991; Thompson, Fabian, Moulton, Dunn, & Altabe, 1991), including increased body image dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, bulimia, and lower self-esteem (Cattarin & Thompson, 1994; Thompson, Cattarin, Fowler, & Fisher, 1995).

(defined by coldness, competitiveness, and the lack of kindness and sympathy), which would presumably correlate with attunement to face concerns, were observed to tease in more hostile ways (Keltner et al., 1998). Further tests of this hypothesis will require researchers to translate Goffman's concepts of face to relevant psychological constructs (e.g., empathy, agreeableness, theory of mind) but could lead to promising accounts for why some individuals tease in problematic ways and are likely not to understand that they do.

The concept of face leads to a second hypothesis: The targets of more frequent and hostile teasing should be those individuals for whom others feel little face concern. Here again, there is the need for researchers to translate this sort of individual difference to relevant constructs. Some supportive, albeit indirect, evidence suggests that such a line of inquiry will be fruitful. Frequently teased children receive lower peer ratings of social acceptance and higher peer ratings of social rejection, suggesting that other children feel less face threat toward the targets (Shapiro et al., 1991). One would further predict from face theory that these children would also be the targets of more hostile teasing, defined by more aggressive provocations and fewer off-record markers, particularly if teased by children who have few face concerns for themselves. Other studies raise the interesting possibility that the targets of frequent teasing change with development. Olweus (1993b) found no stability in self-reports of being teased from age 13 to 23. Neurotic adults recalled being teased a great deal as children but not as adults (Georgesen, Harris, Milich, & Young, 1999; Thompson, 1991). Again, face concerns may account for this dynamic. Whereas preadolescent children may feel few face concerns for anxious, easily distressed individuals and thus tease them more readily (e.g., Shapiro et al., 1991), adults may actually feel greater face concerns for these kinds of individuals.

Individual differences in teasing are also relevant to understanding certain social ramifications of different psychological disorders. For example, in one study we asked high-functioning autistic children and IQ-matched comparison children to provide definitions of teasing and accounts of personal teasing experiences. We found that high-functioning autistic children—who in many ways show deficits in the concern for their own face and that of others—had more negative concepts of teasing than the comparison children (Heerey, Capps, & Keltner, 2000). In particular, they appeared to not be able to understand nonliteral, off-record markers. As a consequence, they may never learn to engage in more positive forms of teasing, which might in turn contribute to a variety of problems concerning language and social relationships (Capps, Kehres, & Sigman, 1998). For similar reasons, it would be interesting to examine the teasing of highly aggressive children and adults: One might discover that in this social practice individuals alienate themselves from others or fail to establish relationships in the first place.

Cultural Variations in Teasing

The claims about cultural variation in teasing are numerous and striking (e.g., Schiefflin & Ochs, 1986). Few researchers, however, have systematically compared the teasing styles of members of different cultural groups (although see Corsaro & Maynard, 1996; Heath, 1983). Furthermore, those studies of teasing that have been concerned with culture have used different methods: Whereas some research on teasing among White, middle-class Americans has involved analyses of interactions in naturalistic settings (Dunn & Herrera, 1997; Dunn & Munn, 1985, 1986; Eder, 1991, 1993; Reddy, 1991), the majority of studies have made use of questionnaires, surveys, and oral and written interviews; in contrast, investigations of teasing in non-Western cultures and in diverse ethnic communities within the United States have relied on ethnographic, socio-linguistic approaches (e.g., Benedict, 1946; Clancy, 1986; Corsaro & Maynard, 1996; Demuth, 1986; Eisenberg, 1986; Goodwin, 1990; Heath, 1983; Miller, 1986; Watson-Gegeo & Boggs, 1977).

These caveats aside, existing evidence suggests that there is considerable cross-cultural variation in teasing practices. Once again, the concept of face proves useful in generating hypotheses for cross-cultural comparisons. That is, members of certain cultures are believed to have heightened concerns about face, such as the Japanese (e.g., Doi, 1996). In cultures defined by the motive to preserve one's own and others' face, one would expect teasing to be more likely than direct provocation but less likely than avoiding such commentary in the first place. One would also expect the teasing that does occur to be less hostile. Preliminary findings from our own laboratory are consistent with this hypothesis. To be specific, in a study that used the nickname, storytelling paradigm, we found that Asian American romantic partners were less hostile and used more off-record markers in their teasing than European American romantic partners (Campos, Keltner, Peng, & Gonzaga, 2000).

Other studies have yielded findings that are consistent with our analysis. Observations of interactions between caregivers and children indicate that whereas in many White, middle-class American families mothers infrequently tease infants and children (although fathers may do so, particularly their young sons; Gleason & Greif, 1983; Gleason & Weintraub, 1976), in many other ethnic and cultural groups known for directness of communication (and reduced face concerns) mothers and fathers and other community members frequently tease children of both sexes (Clancy, 1986; Demuth, 1986; Eisenberg, 1986; Heath, 1983; Ochs, 1986; Schieffelin, 1986; Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1986). Of course, these are only informal comparisons, and face concerns have not been directly measured in these cultural groups. Nevertheless, these findings suggest that face may allow for comparison of teasing practices across cultures. Culture-related variation in face concerns is likely to also influence the contexts in which teasing arises and the ability to understand teasing.

Conclusions

The questions that we have answered in this review are outnumbered by those that await answer. We hope our conceptualization of teasing as a provocation accompanied by playful off-record markers points to clear ways that teasing can be measured and manipulated in studies that use different methods and samples. We hope our discussion of face concerns proves to be a fertile source of hypotheses concerning how teasing varies across development,

relationships, gender, individuals, and cultures. It is ironic that although Goffman devoted little writing to an analysis of teasing, his perspective on face and strategic interaction sheds light on the forms and variations of this rich social practice.

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Received June 30, 1998
Revision received July 7, 2000
Accepted July 7, 2000 ■

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