"GROW UP YOU BIG BABY!":

THE EXPERIENCE AND EFFECTS OF TEASING IN ADULTHOOD

A Dissertation

by

JOSHUA P. BIAS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2005

Major Subject: Counseling Psychology

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,   Dan Brossart
Committee Members,   Linda Castillo
                        Collie Conoley
                        Arnold LeUnes
Head of Department,   Michael R. Benz

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ABSTRACT

"Grow Up You Big Baby!:"

The Experience and Effects of Teasing in Adulthood.

(December 2005)

Joshua P. Bias, B.A., Texas Tech University;

M.S., Texas A&M University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Dan Brossart

The immediate effects of teasing on children and adolescents are well documented, but in recent years, the long-term effects of teasing on adults have gained research attention. Recollections of teasing during youth have been shown to be related to increased psychosocial distress during adulthood.

The present study focused on replicating the findings of previous work, as well as expanding the existing knowledge base concerning teasing and adulthood. Eighty-four adult participants completed a questionnaire packet designed to measure teasing history and perception, and levels of depression, anxiety, self-esteem, and life satisfaction.

Results indicated that recalled teasing experiences from youth are related to psychosocial distress in

adulthood. Teasing experiences were related to increased rates of depression and anxiety, lower self-esteem, and reduced life satisfaction. Notable differences were also found between the frequency and focus content of teasing between youth and adulthood. Implications for practice and recommendations for future research are presented.

DEDICATION

Thank you for the love and support you've given me, not only during this process, but throughout my life. I dedicate this work to Dair, Momma, Dad, Ben and Zach.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the many individuals who have offered guidance and support throughout my graduate career, particularly during this research process.

I wish to express my gratitude to my dissertation committee. I appreciate your openness and flexibility in allowing me to pursue my research interests. I want to thank you for asking the questions that pushed me to be a better researcher. The time and effort given to this project, and my professional and personal development, is greatly appreciated. I particularly want to thank Dan Brossart, my committee chair, for his patience and encouragement at every stage during this project. I appreciate the opportunities I've had to work with and learn from Collie Conoley on previous teasing studies that helped provide the groundwork for the current research.

I also want to acknowledge the contributions from staff at the University of Oregon Counseling and Testing Center. Regular conversations with Shelly Kerr and Robin Holmes provided additional motivation and inspiration to complete this project. The contributions made by David Espinoza in data scoring and analysis proved invaluable – without him, I might still be hand scoring my data.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Teasing is an integral aspect of human social interaction. It is a universal experience that all persons participate in at some level, be they teaser or target. The teasing experience transcends culture, gender, and socio-economic status level. Despite the prevalence of teasing, it remains a difficult construct to concretely define and study because of its multifaceted nature. As Keltner, Young, Heerey, & Oemig (1998) poignantly stated "Teasing is paradoxical… criticizes yet compliments, attacks yet makes people closer, humiliates yet expresses affection," (p. 1231). This statement captures the challenge in pinpointing the concept of teasing on the continuum of potential experiences and interpretations. So much of what defines teasing is the subjective perceptions of the individuals involved in the interaction.

Recently the topic of teasing has received increased attention in response to highly-publicized incidents where victims of pervasive teasing have retaliated against their

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This dissertation follows the style and format of the *Journal of Anxiety Disorders.*

teasers in violent ways, often with deadly results. A common thread among these incidents were adolescents subjected to chronic name-calling and appearance-based teasing (Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003). Such incidents have led researchers to inquire about the effects of teasing on the individual. Research studies have focused on the effects of teasing on children and adolescents because these ages consist of important psychological, emotional, and social developmental periods.

Pervasive teasing during childhood can have a substantial detrimental impact on a person's social and emotional development. The negative effects of teasing on children and adolescents have been well researched. Feelings of embarrassment, humiliation, and shame are among the notable immediate consequences (Kowalski, 2003; Shapiro, Baumeister, & Kessler, 1991). Physical violence is a common response to teasing among children and adolescents (Craig, 1999; Mooney, Creeser, & Blatchford, 1991; Warm, 1997). The development of body image dissatisfaction and eating disturbances has also been linked to being teased (Thompson, Cattarin, Fowler, & Fisher, 1995; Thompson, Fabian, Moulton, Dunn, & Altabe, 1991). Another consequence of teasing is the increased likelihood of being victimized

in the future (Hodges & Perry, 1999; Perry, Williard, & Perry, 1990). Longer-term emotional and psychological consequences include increased rates of depression and anxiety, loneliness, and low self-esteem (Kowalski, 2003).

Researching the long-term negative consequences of childhood teasing that persist into adulthood is a relatively new endeavor. Of the available research to date, a history of teasing has been linked to elevated levels of depression and anxiety as an adult (McCabe, Antony, Summerfeldt, Liss, & Swinson, 2003; Roth, Coles, & Heimberg, 2002; Storch, Bravata, Storch, Johnson, & Roth, & Roberti, 2003; Storch, Roth, Coles, Heimberg, Bravata, & Moser, 2004). Fears of negative evaluation, feelings of loneliness (Storch et al., 2004), and lower self-esteem in adulthood (Gleason, Alexander, & Somers, 2000; Kowalski, 2000, 2003) have also been shown to be related to childhood and adolescent teasing.

Teasing has been shown to serve a variety of purposes and positive social functions. During childhood and adolescence, a primary function of teasing is to promote and reinforce social conformity and norms (Kowalski, 2003). Self-presentation, identity regulation, and displays of social power and control are among the other functions

(Kowalski et al., 2001). Mills (2001), Kowalski (2003), and Kowalski et al. (2001) offer that the purpose and function of teasing change as the individual matures and develops socially and psychologically. However, research has not examined the purpose/functions of teasing beyond childhood and adolescence into adulthood, and has only hypothesized regarding developmental trends. These hypotheses offer that the experience of adulthood can help buffer against the negative effects of teasing.

Coping and responding to teasing is an important area as it can influence the individual's sense of efficacy, social standing, and likelihood of being teased in the future and overall perceptions of teasing in general. Adaptively coping with teasing can also help mediate the negative consequences and enhance the positive effects of the interaction. Children are often encouraged by parents and teachers to ignore teases and taunts; however, research has shown that ignoring may not be the most effective coping strategy. For example, use of humor when responding to teasing has yielded promising results that increase liking and decrease the potential for future teasing (Bias, Conoley, & Castillo, in press; Evans, 2002; Landau, Milich, Harris, & Larson, 2001; Lightner, Bollmer, Harris, Milich,

& Scambler, 2000; Scambler et al., 1998). By employing pro-social, nonviolent responses to teasing, individuals can be better equipped to handle such situations and are less likely to perceive themselves as a victim. Exploring the findings further, Bias et al. (in press) found differences in effectiveness even across different forms of humorous responses.

Statement of the Problem

Teasing, despite its pro-social functions, has been shown to have a detrimental impact on psychological, emotional, and social development of children and adolescents. To date, few studies have investigated how the impact of these negative teasing experiences effect the individual during adulthood; however, available research suggests that the problems associated with teasing continue into adulthood (Gleason et al., 2000; Kowalski, 2003; Kowalski et al, 2001; McCabe et al., 2003; Roth et al., 2002; Storch et al., 2003, 2004). Examining the relationship between childhood teasing and psychological, emotional, and social distress in adulthood can provide valuable information. For instance, the results of such research can be used in the development of prevention and intervention programs that can educate individuals on

effective coping strategies, increase their resiliency to both the immediate and long-term effects of teasing, and empower potential victims, particularly children.

It is important to underscore that the consequences of teasing are not all visible on the surface, and when internalized by the victim may become more longstanding. Exploring the long-term consequences of childhood teasing in order to gain an understanding of what potentially lies ahead for teased individuals if they do not effectively cope is an important endeavor. Understanding the implications for an individual's subjective life satisfaction as influenced by past and present experiences with teasing adds an important layer to our understanding of teasing.

Purpose of the Study

The present study sought to expand the existing knowledge base concerning the relationship between teasing during childhood and adolescence, and emotional and social distress in adulthood. This study aimed to replicate the findings of previous research, in particular the relationship between a history of teasing and elevated levels of depression and anxiety (McCabe et al., 2003; Roth et al., 2002; Storch et al., 2003; 2004) and lower self-

esteem (Gleason et al., 2000) in adulthood. The current study further aimed to explore other quality of life factors, such as well-being and interpersonal relationships, possibly related to teasing.

In addition, the degree to which humor is employed as a teasing coping strategy was also investigated, as humor has been shown to be an effective coping method (Bias, Conoley, & Castillo, in press; Evans, 2002; Lightner, Bollmer, Harris, Milich, & Scambler, 2000; Scambler et al., 1998).

The current study also investigated some of the differences between the focus, content, and frequency of teasing interactions during childhood versus those in adulthood. To this point, empirical literature has not examined the experience of teasing as it occurs during adulthood. Differences in the frequency and content focus of teasing interactions from childhood to adult were of particular interest.

This research is significant in that it investigated relatively unexplored areas of teasing, a universal experience. The negative effects of teasing are not limited to the age in which the teasing occurred, but rather, can continue throughout adult life. The current study is also

important because it examined potential similarities and differences between the experiences of teasing during youth versus those experienced during adulthood. Ideally, results of such research can be used to help develop guidelines and practices that provide individuals with the appropriate life-long skills and techniques to effectively cope with teasing interactions.

Research Questions

The current study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What relationships exist between retrospective teasing experiences in childhood and adolescence and quality of life indexes (i.e., self-esteem, life satisfaction, rates of anxiety and depression) in adulthood?

2. To what extent are individuals' affective perceptions of their teasing experiences related to emotional, psychological, and social distress as an adult?

3. What is the relationship between individuals' use of humor as a coping strategy influence their perceptions of and experiences with teasing interactions?

4. How are teasing experiences in adulthood (i.e., nature, focus, frequency) different from those during childhood and adolescence?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Definitions

Teasing can be a difficult construct to define because of its many forms, ranging anywhere from playful joshing to aggressive bullying. Teasing is often discussed in concert with other concepts such as play, humor, and bullying rather than as an independent idea. Contemporary definitions attempt to incorporate the multiple facets that result in teasing behavior. These definitions present teasing as a continuum where each interaction can fall between playful and aggressive, resulting in positive and negative outcomes.

Shapiro, Baumeister, and Kessler (1991) defined teasing as "a personal communication, directed by an agent towards a target that includes three components: aggression, humor, and ambiguity," (p. 460). This broad definition encompasses the variability and range of possibilities within any given teasing interaction. Subsequent definitions retain variations of these components.

Warm (1997) defined teasing as "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). The teasing components outlined by Shapiro et al. are present here: the aggressive act to intentionally cause a reaction, the ambiguous presentation of the act, and the humorous escape.

Voss (1997) described teasing as "humorous taunts," (p. 241). Particularly important is the notion that these humorous taunts are situated and contextual, meaning the researcher must have knowledge of both the participants and the situation. Voss discussed the subjective nature of teasing as an obstacle facing researchers attempting to fully explore and interpret teasing interactions. These definitions (Shapiro et al., 1991; Voss, 1997; Warm, 1997) emphasize the role of humor in making teasing a playful experience, but also acknowledge the potential for misinterpretations or unappreciated humor that contribute to negative teasing experiences.

Eder (1991) and Kowalski (2000) discuss the concept of teasing as being interactionally constructed and not something that is easily defined objectively. The ambiguous nature of a teasing interaction allows each participant the opportunity to exert influence on the path the interaction

follows and lands on the continuum. Meaning for that particular interaction is developed and attributed by the participants, based on their own subjective experience, interpretation of the tease, and relational history. The implications of any given interaction go beyond that interaction and can impact future interactions and relationships.

More recent definitions of teasing retain some nuances of previous descriptions, but also address some of the motivation behind teasing behavior. For example, Kowalski (2001) defines teasing as "identity confrontation couched in humor," (p. 198). Presented in such a way that can be interpreted as funny, some aspect of the target's identity is challenged or attacked. Roth, Coles, and Heimberg (2002) employed a specific set of characteristics when defining teasing as "the experience of receiving verbal taunts about appearance, personality, or behavior," (p. 152).

A conceptual and empirical review of existing teasing literature yielded this definition from Keltner, Capps, Kring, Young, and Heerey (2001): "intentional provocation accompanied by playful off-record markers that together comment on something relevant to the target," (p. 234). The "off-record markers" are teasing components that account

for the ambiguity and humor in the teasing interaction. Depending on the target's interpretation, these markers influence the hostile or affiliative nature of the teasing on the target. According to Keltner et al, a provocation can not be considered a tease if the off-record markers are absent.

<div align="center">Functions</div>

The social function teasing serves during childhood and adolescence have been outlined in the literature, and shown to be both positive and negative. Boxer and Contes-Conde (1997) reported that teasing can be used as a way of enhancing relationships among peers. From infancy through childhood, parents will often use playful forms of teasing (ex. "peek-a-boo" games, "I'm going to get you!") to teach young children lessons about object permanence and constancy, autonomy, body integrity and control, and distinguishing magic from reality (Warm, 1997). Alternatively, teasing is also used to demean and degrade individuals in social contexts (Kowalski, 2003).

Socialization and the indirect teaching of social norms is one of the primary functions of teasing (Eder, 1991; Kowalski et al., 2001; Voss, 1997; Warm, 1997). For instance, being teased about a particular behavior can

promote understanding for the individual of what is perceived as acceptable or inappropriate behavior within that group. Teasing also promotes social conformity (Kowalski, 2003; Shapiro et al., 1991). Prime examples occur in high school when individual characteristics are highlighted and ridiculed because they do not fall into the "in-group" or popular crowd. Social rejection in the form of teasing has been shown as contributing factors in many recent school shootings (Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003).

Teasing also serves the function of providing a space to self-disclose information that would otherwise remain confidential (Kowalski et al., 2001). This is particularly true of embarrassing and anxiety-provoking topics (Eder, 1991). Conveying liking for others indirectly is an example by which potentially uncomfortable information is expressed through teasing.

Social dominance can be established, and power and control exerted through teasing (Kowalski, 2003; Shapiro et al., 1991). Individuals with more status in a social hierarchy can easily shift focus from their own potentially flawed characteristics and attributes by teasing someone with less power or social status.

Teasing also serves the function of self-presentation and identity regulation (Kowalski et al., 2001). How good-natured or malicious a person teases can influence whether that person is perceived as funny and social or tough and mean. When teasing, people can choose to disguise their true feelings and intention, another form of identity regulation (Shapiro et al., 1991). Self-teasing and self-deprecating humor can also influence self-presentation, making oneself more approachable.

People have different motivations when teasing others, often mediated by the factors of the teaser's age and level of relationship between teaser and target (Kowalski et al., 2001). Age is an important factor as literature has shown that the functions of teasing changes throughout development (Keltner et al., 2001; Kowalski, 2003; Kowalski et al., 2001; Mills, 2001). As the individual matures and verbal skills become more sophisticated, both the content and function of teasing evolve. Emotional and psychological maturity can also help the perpetrator recognize the potential for harm that can come from teasing others (Keltner et al., 2001).

Perceptions of Teasing

Research into teasing has shown the qualitative differences in the perceptions of teasing between targets and perpetrators to be important. Kowalski (2000) had participants write two narrative accounts of their experiences with teasing – one story as a victim and one as perpetrator. Consistent with previous research, the content of teasing was shown to predominantly focus on physical appearance and body parts. Targets of teasing displayed an ambiguous understanding of the perpetrator's motives behind the teasing interactions. Perceptions of teasing by targets were generally more negative than those by perpetrators. Victims expressed annoyance and perceived themselves to be viewed less favorable by their teasers. Victims also subsequently experienced a decline in their self-esteem. Alternatively, perpetrators perceived such teasing interactions as humorous; however, many acknowledged feelings of guilt regarding their actions (Kowalski, 2000).

Bollmer, Harris, Milich, and Georgesen (2003) also investigated the differences among perceptions between victims and perpetrators, finding similar results. Results of this study found that victims of frequent teasing tend to be self-focused in their assessment of the interaction.

Trying to reflect on how they contributed or why they deserved to be teased. Frequent victims of teasing were rated as less friendly and as having poor social skills. Bollmer et al. offered the explanation that frequent victims may be more guarded and hesitant when entering social relationships, which perpetuates the cycle strained relationships.

Georgesen, Harris, Milich, and Young (1999) employed structural equation modeling (SEM) that included variables of personality characteristics, teasing history, and personal narratives to explore perceptions of teasing. Results indicated that personality variables influence how an individual interprets and responds to a tease stimulus. Development of intervention strategies should be conscious of the impact of personality variables.

Negative Effects

The consequences and negative effects of teasing are well publicized in the media (Leary et al., 2003). Research has documented how teasing can lead to violence (Mooney, Creeser, & Blatchford, 1991; Warm, 1997), the development of body image disturbances and eating disorders (Eder, 1991; Grilo, Wilfley, Brownell, & Rodin, 1994; Lunner, Werthem, Thompson, Paxton, McDonald, & Halvaarson, 2000;

Thompson, Cattarin, Fowler, & Fisher, 1995; Thompson,

Fabian, Moulton, Dunn, & Altabe, 1991; Warm, 1997), and

patterns of victimization (Hodges & Perry, 1999; Perry,

Williard, & Perry, 1990) among youngsters.

While teasing may begin as non-hostile or even well-

intentioned, results indicate that many children retaliate

with violence against their teasers (Mooney et al., 1991;

Warm, 1997). A case study review of school shootings

between 1995-2001 illustrated the role of social rejection

(often from chronic teasing) in those violent attacks

(Leary et al., 2003). Chronic, malicious teasing, along

with other forms of rejection, combined with additional

risk factors (interest in bombs/firearms, preoccupation

with death, psychological problems) were present in at

least 12 of the 15 shooting cases reviewed. Victims of the

shootings were often individuals who had a direct history

of teasing or rejecting the shooter. Shooters experienced a

pattern of teasing about appearance, weight, and name-

calling, and were subjected to public humiliation.

Another profound and potentially long-term negative

consequence of teasing is the development of body image

disturbances and eating disorders (Grilo et al., 1995;

Lunner et al, 2000; Thompson et al., 1995; Thompson et al.,

1991). Literature indicates that the most common form of teasing focuses on physical appearance, specifically size and weight (Eder, 1991; Kowalski, 2000; Warm, 1997). The negative message imbedded in chronic teasing that focuses on a particular body part or physical attribute can be internalized by the target, who then engages in behavior, often unhealthy, to alleviate the teasing by altering their appearance.

Chronic victims of teasing are also likely to be the target of future victimization. Perry et al (1990) postulate that signs of distress, anxiousness, sadness, and withdrawal all serve as tangible rewards for aggressive children. Such reactions from victims of teasing only reinforce the behavior or the perpetrators. Hodges and Perry (1999) further note that these distressed reactions by victims can signal that they are unable to effectively defend themselves, thus making them more prone to be targeted for future attacks.

<div align="center">Long-term Consequences</div>

Examining the long-term consequences of teasing is a relatively new endeavor. Recent studies have exhibited a relationship between negative experiences of childhood and adolescent teasing and higher rates of anxiety and

depression (McCabe, Antony, Summerfeldt, Liss, & Swinson, 2003; Roth et al., 2002; Storch, Bravata, Storch, Johnson, Roth, & Roberti, 2003; Storch, Roth, Coles, Heimberg, Bravata, & Moser, 2004), lower self-esteem, and devalued interpersonal relationships in adulthood (Gleason, Alexander, & Somers, 2000; Kowalski, 2000, 2003).

In one of the preliminary studies in this area, McCabe et al. (2003) investigated the relationships between childhood teasing and bullying and the presence of anxiety disorders in adulthood. Participants were drawn from three groups of diagnosed individuals: social phobia (SP), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and panic disorder (PD). Participants were asked if they had been teased, about what topic, and their level of anxiety in response to the tease. The assessment methods used in this study did not provide a detailed teasing history as would subsequent instruments. Nonetheless, results indicated that the negative experience of teasing and bullying contribute to the development of social phobia, which had the highest rates among the three groups.

Roth et al. (2002) illustrated the relationship between childhood teasing and the experience of depression and anxiety in adulthood. The study involved undergraduate

college students completing self-report instruments
measuring teasing history, and depression and anxiety
rates. The link was shown to include general and social
anxiety. The authors contend that the thinking patterns
common in anxiety and depression may develop as a response
to intense childhood teasing. In this study, as in the
current, teasing was defined as "experience of receiving
verbal taunts about appearance, personality, or behavior,"
(p. 152).

Storch et al. (2003) further examined the link between
childhood teasing and psychosocial distress in adulthood,
offering results that support the findings of Roth et al.
(2002). This study involved a pool of undergraduate
students completing the Teasing Questionnaire (TQ), Beck
Depression Inventory (BDI), and State-Trait Anxiety
Inventory - Trait version (STAI-T), among other
instruments. In addition to higher rates of depression and
anxiety, the results indicated increased fear of negative
evaluation and loneliness as related to pervasive childhood
teasing. Storch et al. contend that psychosocial distress
and maladjustment in adulthood may be a byproduct of both
the teasing experience itself and the individual's
interpretation of the interaction. The authors also offered

that such retrospective inquiry (use of TQ) is a valid and effective means of exploring these relationships.

A study by Storch et al. (2004) replicated the findings of prior research (Roth et al., 2002; Storch et al., 2003), providing additional support for the relationship between childhood teasing and adult psychosocial maladjustment. The significant contribution of this study lies in the revisions made to the Teasing Questionnaire, which resulted in a hypothesized five-factor model of teasing. The Teasing Questionnaire – Revised (TQ-R) proposed that teasing occurs along the following domains: performance, academic issues, social behavior, family background, and appearance. Results indicated that teasing in the performance domain was most strongly linked to fear of negative evaluation. Adult struggles with depression, anxiety, and loneliness were related to teasing in the social domain. It was proposed that teasing in the social domain as having more profound long-term impact because that topic includes the aspects of personality and identity characteristics of the individual. Teasing along the domains of academic issues and family background were not directly related to psychosocial distress later in life.

The little studied relationship between childhood teasing and lower self-esteem during adulthood was examined by Gleason et al. (2000). The study explored the influence of three domains of childhood teasing (competency, weight, appearance) on later self-esteem for males and females. This study used the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE), the Perception of Teasing Scale (POTS), and the Physical Appearance Related Teasing Scale (PARTS) with undergraduate students. Gleason et al. noted the importance of understanding this relationship as high self-esteem is associated with healthy functioning (ex. academic achievement, general well-being; cited in Steinberg, 1999). Results indicated that chronic teasing, particularly about appearance, was related to lower levels of self-esteem later in life.

Gender differences illustrated how men's self-esteem was more negatively affected when teased about competency while women's self-esteem was more damaged by appearance and competence related teases. Results also showed men as less sensitive to teasing when compared to women. Gleason et al propose that men and women should be considered separately due to the differences in topic/domain/ forms of teasing and degree of sensitivity (Gleason et al., 2000).

In a study of narratives of perceptions of teasing from perpetrators and victims, Kowalski (2000) reported that negative experiences with teasing were related to lower scores of self-esteem. Results showed that targets rated teasing experiences as more negative than did perpetrators, and were able to vividly recall the nature of those experiences. Targets of teasing were also more likely to perceive their relationships with perpetrators as more devalued and their image viewed less positively. Consistent with other research, appearance was the predominant topic of teasing.

Kowalski (2003) offered additional information on the effects of teasing on self-esteem. After providing narratives describing an incident of being teased during childhood, participants were asked why they had chosen to share that particular experience. Responses include:

- I chose this episode because it impacted my social life and self-esteem greatly.

- It is the aspect that hurts me the most and is still causing problems in my life.

- The teasing was a constant occurrence and I still have bad feelings about it.

- It was a horrible experience that I probably never will forget.

The responses indicated the magnitude of the impression left by being teased on the individual's self-esteem, even after many years (Kowalski, 2003).

Another byproduct of teasing and perceptions of the interaction is the experience of relational devaluation. As noted, perceptions of the teasing interaction can greatly differ between victim and perpetrator. Victims often attribute the motives of the teaser as being negative or malicious, an indication that the teaser does not appreciate or value their relationship (Leary et al., 1998). Beyond aspects of identity challenge that are present in teasing, these assumptions can be reinforced by the affective experience of embarrassment, humiliation, exclusion, and interpersonal rejection (Crozier & Skliopidou, 2002; Kowalski, 2000). These feelings of having relationships devalued by others can have a negative impact on future relationships the victim may enter. Victims of teasing become self-focused in their perception and assessment of teasing interactions. They can ignore (perhaps unconsciously) other outside factors that may

contribute to their being targeted. When the value of a relationship is questioned, these individuals are likely to continue this pattern of self-focused, inward assessment, resulting in self-blame (Kowalski, 2000).

Name-calling, a relatively unexamined form of teasing, has also been shown to have long-term effects on individuals (Crozier & Skliopidou, 2002). This study asked adult participants to recall their experiences of being called names while at school. Most indicated that the experiences were negative, eliciting feelings of anger, unhappiness, shame, and embarrassment at the time. Participants who were categorized as "most hurt" by the effects of name-calling, rated their current emotions regarding the experience as more negative and as having had greater long-term effects on personality and attitudes. Of the 220 participants, 52 reported that name-calling was still a painful experience for them.

Crozier & Skliopidou (2002) indicated that name-calling is predominantly based on appearance, as is much teasing, but can also be a play on the individual's name or an animal name. As with other forms of teasing, name-calling serves as an attack on or threat to the target's identity. As name and appearance are central to an

individual's identity, the negative impact of name-calling on the individual can be quite damaging.

<div align="center">Humor</div>

Humor, like teasing, is a social construct that can be difficult to define. Traditional conceptualizations of humor focus on the incongruence of what is expected versus what actually occurs in a situation. Robinson and Smith-Lovin (2001, p. 124) define verbal humor as "all remarks that are (apparently) intended to elicit amusement and/or have that result." In social interaction, humor serves multiple functions. Chief among these functions is cohesion building, or bonding, among peers. This has been shown to be particularly important in early stages of group development. Self-directed humor can be illustrative of an individual who can comfortably share information about themselves and be viewed as approachable (Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2001).

Examining the construct of humor from a functional perspective, Graham, Papa, & Brooks (1992) developed and validated the Uses of Humor Index (UHI), a measure of how sense of humor is utilized. Reviewing previous humor literature, Graham et al derived twenty-four functions of humor. Use of factor analysis revealed three primary

factors: positive affect, expressiveness, and negative affect. Positive affect refers to offering/seeking inclusion and identifying with others. Expressiveness is the function of using humor to self-disclose and exhibit affection for others. Lastly, negative affect serves the antisocial function of exerting control over others by demeaning or disparaging them. Graham et al. (1992) note that this is but one model outlining the functions humor serves.

Humor is widely regarded as an adaptive way to cope with life's difficulties. Thorson & Powell (1993) describe sense of humor as a way of perceiving the world and a style of navigating social interactions and self-protections. For example, using humor to ease a tense situation and make others feel comfortable is one of the more adaptive applications. Sense of humor can be comprised of a combination of the following elements: recognition of oneself as a humorous person, recognition of others' humor, appreciation of humor, laughing, and coping humor. With each of these elements being present on a continuum, there is much variability among individuals' sense of humor. It is noted that self-deprecating humor ("taking oneself lightly" or the ability to "poke fun at oneself") is

regarded as a mature and adaptive coping strategy. Consequently, using humor aggressively to criticize or degrade others is not respected as a mechanism, but rather viewed as maladaptive and antisocial (Thorson & Powell, 1993).

Thorson & Powell reviewed the existing instruments that measure humor, noting that these instruments assessed only one element of sense of humor, like behavioral responses or humor appreciation. As a result, Thorson & Powell developed the Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale (MSHS). The MSHS assesses the following elements of sense of humor: humor production and social use; adaptive humor and coping; humor appreciation; and attitudes toward humor (Thorson & Powell, 1993).

Subsequent research using the MSHS yielded other relationships between sense of humor and psychological wellness. Increased humor scores were shown to positively correlate with increased optimism and self-esteem. Conversely, increased humor scores were shown to negatively correlate with depression and other forms of psychological distress (Thorson, Powell, Sarmany-Schuller, and Hampes, 1997).

Other studies investigating the use of humor as a coping strategy have found similar results. After viewing a sad cartoon, higher scores on a coping humor scale were associated with less negative mood (Moran & Massam, 1999). The role of humor as both emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies has been illustrated. Individuals with a high sense of humor reported less stress and anxiety and were more likely to approach situations with problem-solving strategies when compared to individuals with low sense of humor (Abel, 2002).

The target's response to a tease can have direct influence on the path the interaction takes. In a study by Scambler, Harris, and Milich (1998), children rated the effectiveness of videotaped peers' responses to a hostile teasing provocation. Responses to the teasing were one of the following: humorous response, ignoring response, hostile response. Results indicated that the humorous response to teasing was perceived as most effective, followed by ignoring and hostile responses. It was also shown that the humorous response increased the likeability of both the perpetrator and target. Use of the humor response also decreased the likelihood of future teasing. These results are important and show that teased children

can more effectively influence an interaction through humor than through the long-held advice by adults of ignoring. Georgesen et al. (1999) replicated the findings of this study and also found that generic humorous responses to teasing were effective. Landau et al. (2001) presented use of humorous responses as superior to hostility.

Bias, Conoley, and Castillo (in press) expand on this vein of research to illustrate how different types of humorous responses may be more effective than others. Participants were asked to rate the effectiveness of responses (Affiliative Humor, Self-Deprecating Humor, Aggressive Humor, Ignoring, and Physical threat) in reaction to a cartoon teasing stimuli. Findings suggest that Affiliative humor (humor that is joining and makes light of the situation) is viewed as more effective than Self-Deprecating humor, Aggressive humor, Ignoring, and physical threat. When using an effective humorous response, targets were less likely to be teased in the future, feel more positive about themselves after the interaction, and have gains in social status. To experience a more pleasurable future encounter between teaser and target, both Affiliative humor and Self-Deprecating humor were

rated as more effective than Aggressive humor, ignoring, and physical threat.

An innovative study asked both parents and children to respond to teasing stimuli (Lightner, Bollmer, Harris, Milich, & Scambler, 2000). Both parents and children equally rated humor, ignoring, and empathic responses as better than a hostile response. Among children, older children were most likely to employ humorous responses while younger children were more likely to respond by telling an adult about the teasing. Interestingly, participants had difficulty in the open-ended portion of the study that required them to generate specific responses to the teasing stimulus. Humor and Empathic responses were particularly difficult for children to generate. This point illustrates the importance of training interventions that teach individuals effective ways to respond to teasing as on-the-spot generation can be a challenge (Lightner et al., 2001).

In a study of prevalence of bullying in the workplace, Danish researchers Hogh and Dofradottir (2001) also examined strategies used for coping with bullying. Humor was shown to be a good coping strategy in less severe

conflict situations. Humor was also used to defuse intense situations.

Present Study

The present study builds on the existing empirical knowledge base regarding the relationship between teasing during childhood and adolescence, and psychosocial distress in adulthood. This study aimed to replicate the findings of previous research, in particular the relationship between a history of teasing and elevated levels of depression and anxiety (McCabe et al., 2003; Roth et al., 2002; Storch et al., 2003, 2004) and lower self-esteem (Gleason et al., 2000; Kowalski, 2003; Kowalski et al., 2001) in adulthood. The current study further aimed to explore other quality of life factors, such as well-being and interpersonal relationships, possibly related to teasing. The degree to which humor is employed as a coping strategy was also investigated.

The current study also investigated some of the differences between the experience and perception of teasing in childhood versus that in adulthood. Differences in the content and focus of teasing interactions were of particular interest. To this point, empirical literature

has also not examined targets' subjective perceptions of teasing interactions from an adult perspective. Prior research has shown that teasing serves pro-social functions during the developmental periods of childhood and adolescence; however, the function teasing serves in adulthood has yet do be explored in the literature.

The present study addresses the following questions:

1. What relationships exist between retrospective teasing experiences in childhood and adolescence and quality of life indexes (i.e., self-esteem, life satisfaction, rates of anxiety and depression) in adulthood?

2. To what extent are individuals' affective perceptions of their teasing experiences related to emotional, psychological, and social distress as an adult?

3. What is the relationship between individuals' use of humor as a coping strategy influence their perceptions of and experiences with teasing interactions?

4. How are teasing experiences in adulthood (i.e., nature, focus, frequency) different from those during childhood and adolescence?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The 84 participants for the present study were
recruited from the student, faculty, and staff population
of a large, rural university in the Northwest. The sample
recruited for this study was intentionally older than
samples found in previous research in order to investigate
the construct of teasing and the effects of teasing from an
adult perspective. The participants in this study were 25
years of age and older. Advertisement and recruitment for
this study was primarily conducted via email correspondence
to various graduate departments and campus student groups.
Flyers advertising the study were also used.

The group of 84 participants was comprised of 63.1%
women (N = 53) and 36.9% men (N = 31). Racial and ethnic
composition of the sample was 83.3% who identified as Euro-
American/Caucasian (N = 70), 6.0% as Asian-
American/Pacific-Islander (N = 5), 3.6% as African-American
(N = 3), 3.6% as Multi-Ethnic (N = 3), 2.4% as
Latino/Hispanic (N = 2), and 1.2% as Native American (N =
1). Ages of the participants were broken into the following
six ranges: 25-30 (44%, N = 37), 31-35 (16.7%, N = 14), 36-

40 (13.1%, *N* = 11), 41–45 (8.3%, *N* = 7), 46–50 (6.0%, *N* = 5), and 50+ (11.9%, *N* = 10). The average age for this sample is approximately 35.5 years old (*M* = 2.51, *SD* = 1.77).

Instruments

Teasing Questionnaire (TQ; Roth et al., 2002). The TQ is a 20-item Likert-type format scale that retrospectively asks adults to recall experiences of being teased as adolescents. The TQ examines different areas to include, but also expand upon the traditional topics of weight and appearance (ex. behavior-related, intelligence-based). This scale also measures the frequency of being teased about each topic to provide a more complete teasing history of the individual. Unlike other instruments, the TQ does not measure participants' reactions or feelings about being teased. TQ scores had a reliability of α = .84. Existing literature offers no information on validity for the TQ, but correlates with POTS (*r* = .65). The TQ is presented in Appendix A1.

For the purposes of this study, the TQ was revised to explore current teasing experiences among adults (TQ-Adult). Questions were reworded to assess the content and frequency of present teasing interactions that may occur in

the workplace in addition to school settings. For example, the statement "I was teased because I excelled at school (I was brainy)," was altered to read "I get teased because I excel at school/work (I am brainy)." The TQ-Adult maintains the same structure as the TQ. Scores on the TQ-Adult had a reliability of α = .85. In terms of validity, the TQ-Adult correlates with the TQ (r = .71). The TQ-Adult is presented in Appendix A2.

Perception of Teasing Scale (POTS; Thompson et al., 1995). The POTS is a 22-item Likert-type instrument that assesses the content and affective impact of an individual's history of being teased. The POTS is comprised of two subscales, Weight-Related Teasing (WT) and Competency Teasing (CT). This instrument is a revision of previous work to include the non-weight teasing subscale. The POTS also includes a subjective assessment of teasing effect (e.g., "How upset were you by the teasing?"). POTS scores had a reliability of α = .90. Existing literature offers no information on validity for the POTS, but correlates with TQ (r = .65) and TQ-Adult (r = .52). The POTS is presented in Appendix B.

Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale (MSHS; Thorson & Powell, 1993). The MSHS is a 24-item Likert-type

questionnaire that measures humor as a coping mechanism, generation of humor, attitudes regarding humor, and appreciation of humor. Scores on the MSHS had a reliability of α = .94. Existing literature provided little information on the validity of this instrument. The MSHS is presented in Appendix C.

Beck Depression Inventory – Second Edition (BDI-II; Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996). The BDI-II is a 21-item scale that assesses the presence of depressive symptoms within the last two weeks. The properties of this measure have been widely researched and it remains one of the most popular self-report measures of depression. BDI scores had a reliability of α = .93. In terms of concurrent validity, the BDI-II correlates with the Hamilton Psychiatric Rating Scale for Depression-Revised (r = .71) and Beck Hopelessness Scale (r = .68) (Farmer, 2001).

State-Trait Anxiety Inventory – Trait version (STAI-T; Spielberger, 1983). The STAI-T is a 20-item scale that assesses an individual's tendency to experience anxiety and perceive certain situations as stressful. The STAI-T has been shown to have distinct anxiety (STAI-A) and depression (STAI-D) factors. Scores on the STAI-T had a reliability of α = .96. The STAI-T is correlated with the Taylor Manifest

Anxiety Scale (*r* = .80), the IPAT Anxiety Scale (*r* = .75), and the Multiple Affect Adjective Check List (*r* = .52) (Spielberger, 1983).

     Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965). The RSE is a widely-used ten item, Likert-type scale that measures an individual's self-reported level of global self-esteem. Scores on the RSE obtained a reliability of α = .92. In terms of concurrent validity, the RSE correlates with the Lerner Self-Esteem Scale (*r* = .72) (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). The RSE is presented in Appendix D.

     Quality of Life Inventory (QOLI; Frisch, 1994). The QOLI is a 32-item, Likert-type scale that measures an individual's sense of life satisfaction or happiness. Quality of life is defined as the "subjective evaluation of the degree to which… most important needs, goals, and wishes have been fulfilled," (p. 2). This instrument measures an individual's ratings of Importance and Satisfaction across 16 areas of life: Health, Self-Esteem, Goals-and-Values, Money, Work, Play, Learning, Creativity, Helping, Love, Friends, Children, Relatives, Home, Neighborhood, and Community. QOLI scores had a reliability of α = .80. The QOLI has been significantly correlated with the Satisfaction with Life Scale and the Quality of

Life Index, but additional validity studies are recommended (Johnson, 2001).

<div align="center">Procedure</div>

Potential participants were contacted via various academic department or campus organization email listservs to which they belonged. Individuals interested in participating in the study responded to the primary investigator via email, providing an address where the paper-pencil questionnaire packet could be mailed. Survey instruments were completed by the participants at their own discretion in terms of time and location. Total completion time for the survey packet was between 20 and 30 minutes. Completed packets were returned to the primary investigator via campus or U.S. mail.

Participants who fully completed the survey packet were entered into a random drawing for one of two $100 gift certificates. A card for contact information for the drawing was included in the materials and kept in a file separate from completed survey data. The drawing was held at the completion of data-collection. The results of the survey were anonymous. Raw data was stored in a locked file cabinet in the office of the primary investigator. University counseling referrals were provided in the

questionnaire packet as it was possible that some individuals may experience mild to moderate distress caused by remembering painful or embarrassing events.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Question #1: What relationships exist between retrospective memories of teasing in childhood and adolescence and "quality of life" indexes (i.e., self-esteem, life satisfaction, rates of anxiety and depression) in adulthood?

Pearson product-moment correlations were computed between recollections of teasing experiences and current symptoms of depression, anxiety, self-esteem level, and degree of life satisfaction. Relationships were shown to be statistically significant between all measures of psychosocial wellness and distress (Table 1). Using standards outlined by Cohen (1988), correlations of $r = .30$ were defined as a medium effect size and $r = .50$ were considered to be a large effect size.

Statistically significant relationships were found between memories of teasing (TQ-Ch) and increased rates of depression (BDI: $r = .57$, $p < .01$) and anxiety (STAIT-A: $r = .40$, $p < .01$), lower self-esteem (RSE: $r = .51$, $p < .01$), and life satisfaction (QOLI: $r = -.46$, $p < .01$). Similar

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and Pearson product-moment correlations among TQ and POTS and measures of depression, anxiety, self-esteem, and life satisfaction.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. TQ-Ch	16.44 (10.22)					
2. POTS	.65**	17.87 (5.72)				
3. BDI-II	.57**	.42**	10 (9.35)			
4. STAIT-A	.40**	.33**	.79**	38.95 (13.6)		
5. RSE	.51**	.40**	.67**	.59**	17.65 (6.12)	
6. QOLI	-0.46**	-.37**	-.73**	-.62**	-.58**	2.71 (.93)

Note. Means (and standard deviations) are presented on the matrix diagonal.

     **P < .01 level (two tailed)

relationships, though weaker, were found between the content portion of the POTS and increased rates of depression (BDI: r = .42, p < .01) and anxiety (STAIT-A: r = .33, p < .01), lower self-esteem (RSE: r = .40, p < .01), and life satisfaction (QOLI: r = −.37, p < .01).

Robust linear regressions were computed to assess how symptoms of psychosocial wellness and distress are predicted by the collective influence of an individual's teasing experience (frequency/rate, content/focus, perception/affective response). The use of robust regression is warranted when the assumptions of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression are not met (Anderson & Schumacker, 2003). For example, robust regressions are used to account for overly influential outliers within the data, a nonnormal distribution, and/or heteroscedasticity around the regression line (Wilcox, 1998). Robust regression reduces the influence of outliers through a process of coefficient estimation. In the current study, the data was not normally distributed and influential outliers were masked when using OLS. The minimum m-estimation (MM) was the robust regression method used in this study, as it was shown to outperform other methods (e.g., Anderson & Shumacker, 2003). The MM-type robust regressions were

performed using the statistical program, S-PLUS Version 7.2 (Anderson & Schumacker, 2003).

Cohen's (1988) standards for determining magnitude of regression effect sizes were considered when reviewing current results. According to Cohen, regressions with R^2 = .02 are defined as small, R^2 = .15 are defined as medium, and R^2 = .35 are defined as large effect sizes. It is important to note that although Cohen's guidelines were based on ordinary least squares (OLS) and did not incorporate robust characteristics, they can provide a framework by which to analyze the results.

Regression results (see Table 2) indicate that 17.7% of the variance for depression scores is accounted for by POTS content and affect factors and TQ scores. Teasing frequency, content, and affect factors also predicted 12.6% of the variance for anxiety scores, 23.8% for self-esteem scores, and 18.8% for life satisfaction scores.

It should be noted that differences in scores between men and women in this study were examined. Results yielded no statistically significant differences in teasing, depression, anxiety, self-esteem, or life satisfaction scores between the genders.

Table 2
Robust linear regressions of TQ and POTS predicting rates
of anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and life satisfaction.

POTS & TQ Predicting Depression (BDI-II)

	Std. Err.	t-value	p	R^2
Intercept	4.15	−.47	0.64	
POTS: Content	0.44	0.85	0.40	
POTS: Affect	0.32	−.37	0.72	
TQ-Child: TOTAL	0.17	2.32	0.02	
				0.18

POTS & TQ Predicting Anxiety (STAIT)

	Std. Err.	t-value	p	R^2
Intercept	4.19	5.26	0.00	
POTS: Content	0.45	3.07	0.00	
POTS: Affect	0.32	−2.30	0.02	
TQ-Child: TOTAL	0.17	1.38	0.17	
				0.13

POTS & TQ Predicting Self-Esteem (RSE)

	Std. Err.	t-value	p	R^2
Intercept	2.55	3.80	0.00	
POTS: Content	0.27	0.89	0.38	
POTS: Affect	0.18	−0.12	0.91	
TQ-Child: TOTAL	0.11	1.85	0.07	
				0.24

POTS & TQ Predicting Life Satisfaction (QOLI)

	Std. Err.	t-value	Pr	R^2
Intercept	0.50	7.08	0.00	
POTS: Content	0.05	−1.04	0.30	
POTS: Affect	0.04	0.75	0.46	
TQ-Child: TOTAL	0.02	−2.56	0.01	
				0.19

Question #2: How are individuals' perceptions of their teasing experiences related to emotional, psychological, and social distress as an adult?

Pearson product-moment correlations were computed between affective perceptions of teasing experiences and current symptoms of depression, anxiety, self-esteem level, and degree of life satisfaction. Relationships were shown to be statistically significant between all measures of psychosocial wellness and distress (Table 3).

Statistically significant and meaningful relationships were found between affective perceptions of teasing (POTS) and increased rates of depression and anxiety, lower self-esteem, and life satisfaction.

Robust linear regression results (see Table 4) indicate that 12% of the variance for self-esteem scores is accounted for by POTS affect factors. Additional regression results yielded three small effect sizes, where teasing affect factors predicted 6% of the variance for anxiety scores, 5% for life satisfaction scores, and 4% for depression scores.

Table 3
Descriptive statistics and Pearson product-moment
correlations among POTS: Affect and measures of depression,
anxiety, self-esteem, and life satisfaction.

	1	2	3	4	5
1. POTS: Affect	19.71 (7.87)				
2. BDI-II	.40**	10 (9.35)			
3. STAIT-A	.26*	.79**	38.95 (13.6)		
4. RSE	.31**	.67**	.59**	17.65 (6.12)	
5. QOLI	-.27*	-.73**	-.62**	-.58**	2.71 (.93)

Note. Means (and standard deviations) are presented on the
matrix diagonal.
    **P < .01 level (two tailed)
    *P < .05 level (two tailed)

Table 4

Robust linear regressions of POTS: Affect predicting rates of anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and life satisfaction.

POTS Predicting Depression (BDI-II)

	Std. Err.	t-value	p	R^2
Intercept	3.39	0.79	0.43	
POTS: Affect	0.17	1.55	0.12	
				0.04

POTS Predicting Anxiety (STAIT)

	Std. Err.	t-value	p	R^2
Intercept	4.04	7.30	0.00	
POTS: Affect	0.19	2.14	0.04	
				0.06

POTS Predicting Self-Esteem (RSE)

	Std. Err.	t-value	p	R^2
Intercept	1.79	5.44	0.00	
POTS: Affect	0.08	3.89	0.00	
				0.12

POTS Predicting Life Satisfaction (QOLI)

	Std. Err.	t-value	p	R^2
Intercept	0.44	6.91	0.00	
POTS: Affect	0.02	−1.93	0.06	
				0.05

Question #3: How does individuals' use of humor as a coping strategy influence their perceptions of and experiences with teasing interactions?

Pearson product-moment correlations were computed between recollections of teasing experiences and overall sense of humor and ability to use humor as a coping strategy (see Table 5). Results indicated no statistically significant relationships. Though unremarkable, robust linear regression yielded an effect size of .03. Additional analyses were not computed due to the absence of relationships.

Additionally, Pearson product-moment correlations were computed between measures of current psychosocial distress and wellness and measures of overall sense of humor and coping humor. Again, results yielded no statistically significant relationships and further analyses were not computed (Table 6).

Question #4: How is the teasing experience in adulthood (i.e., frequency and content focus) different from that of childhood and adolescence?

The last research question explored the differences of the focus and nature of teasing between adulthood and childhood/adolescence. Paired samples t-tests between

Table 5
Descriptive statistics and Pearson product-moment correlations among TQ and POTS and measures of overall sense of humor and coping humor.

	1	2	3	4	5
1. MSHS: Cope	7.27 (2.24)				
2. MSHS	0.78*	46.44 (11.5)			
3. TQ	−0.09	−0.06	16.44 (10.22)		
4. POTS: Cont.	0.02	0.09	.65*	17.87 (5.72)	
5. POTS: Aff.	−0.06	0.02	.61*	.85*	19.71 (7.87)

Note. Means (and standard deviations) are presented on the matrix diagonal.
     *$P < .01$ level (two tailed)

51

Table 6
Descriptive statistics and Pearson product-moment
correlations among MSHS-Coping and MSHS and measures of
depression, anxiety, self-esteem, and life satisfaction.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. MSHS: Cope	7.27 (2.24)					
2. MSHS	0.78*	46.44 (11.5)				
3. BDI-II	0.03	0.14	10 (9.35)			
4. STAIT-A	0.06	0.19	.79*	38.95 (13.6)		
5. RSE	−0.01	0.16	.67*	.59*	17.65 (6.12)	
6. QOLI	−0.06	−0.17	−.73*	−.62*	−.58*	2.71 (.93)

Note. Means (and standard deviations) are presented on the
matrix diagonal.
　　　*P < .01 level (two tailed)

childhood/adolescence and adulthood were computed for each area of teasing focus in the TQ: behavior-related, affect-related, appearance-based, intellect-related (Table 7).

Results indicate a significant difference in overall teasing from adolescence (M = 16.69, SD = 10.43) to adulthood (M = 9.21, SD = 8.18), t(74) = 8.74, p < .001. Examination of the means indicated less teasing in every form, or focus, in adulthood compared to youth. Results exhibit more behavior-related teasing in adolescence (M = 3.68, SD = 3.57) compared to adulthood (M = 2.73, SD = 3.35), t(74) = 3.31, p < .001. Affect-related teasing was also shown to be greater in adolescence (M = 4.45, SD = 4.21) compared to adulthood (M = 2.41, SD = 3.23), t(74) = 5.27, p < .001. Teasing that was intellect-based was less in adulthood (M = 1.71, SD = 1.69) than adolescence (M = 3.05, SD = 1.99), t(74) = 6.14, p < .001. Lastly, results showed the largest difference in appearance-based teasing between adolescence (M = 4.12, SD = 2.89) and adulthood (M = 1.57, SD = 1.73), t(74) = 7.96, p < .001.

Table 7
Paired sample statistics for behavior-related, affect-
related, intellect-based, appearance-based, and total
teasing from childhood and adulthood.

	TQ	Mean	N	SD	SEM
Pair 1	Child: Beh	3.68	75	3.57	0.41
	Adult: Beh	2.73	75	3.35	0.39
Pair 2	Child: Aff	4.45	75	4.21	0.49
	Adult: Aff	2.41	75	3.23	0.37
Pair 3	Child: Int	3.05	75	1.99	0.23
	Adult: Int	1.71	75	1.69	0.20
Pair 4	Child: App	4.12	75	2.89	0.33
	Adult: App	1.57	75	1.73	0.20
Pair 5	Child: TOT	16.69	75	10.43	1.21
	Adult: TOT	9.21	75	8.18	0.94

TQ: Child & Adult	Pair Correlation r	Sig.
Pair 1 Behavior	0.75	.000
Pair 2 Affect	0.60	.000
Pair 3 Intellect	0.48	.000
Pair 4 Appearance	0.36	.001
Pair 5 TOTAL	0.71	.000

TQ: Child & Adult	Paired Differences Mean	SD	SEM	t	df	Sig.
Pair 1 Behavior	0.95	2.48	0.29	3.31	74	.001
Pair 2 Affect	2.04	3.35	0.39	5.27	74	.000
Pair 3 Intellect	1.35	1.90	0.22	6.14	74	.000
Pair 4 Appearance	2.55	2.77	0.32	7.96	74	.000
Pair 5 TOTAL	7.48	7.41	0.86	8.74	74	.000

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study had three primary goals. The first was to replicate and further examine the relationship between memories of childhood and adolescent teasing and psychosocial distress in adulthood. The second goal was to examine the moderating effects of sense of humor as a coping strategy for teasing. The third was to explore the differences in nature, focus, and frequency of teasing between childhood/adolescence and adulthood.

In regard to the first goal, results of this study indicate positive relationships between recalled teasing experiences and psychosocial distress in adulthood. As shown in previous research, increased rates of depression and anxiety (McCabe et al., 2003; Roth et al., 2002; Storch et al., 2003, 2004) and lower self-esteem (Gleason et al., 2000; Kowalski, 2003; Kowalski et al., 2001) in adulthood are related to past teasing experiences. These results are important as they reinforce the notion that the consequences of teasing during childhood and adolescence are not limited to those age periods, but that those negative effects can also extend into adulthood.

Two primary hypotheses have emerged to explain these relationships. Storch et al. (2002) contends that anxious and shy children make attractive targets for teasing by perpetrators. A second explanation posits that chronic teasing can actually facilitate the development of thinking and coping patterns that manifest as psychological distress in the form of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem during adulthood (Storch et al., 2003). Though more research is needed in this area, it would appear that the second hypothesis is more likely. Results of this study illustrate how the collective factors of an individual's teasing experiences predict psychosocial wellness and distress in adulthood.

Unique to this study when compared to previous work, was the investigation into degree of life satisfaction in adulthood as related to recalled teasing. As teasing is a social phenomenon, peoples' degree of ability and comfort in forming social relationships may be negatively affected by teasing experiences. Thus, this study employed a subjective measure to assess a person's satisfaction with a variety of life factors, particularly social relationships (e.g. romantic, family, friends). Life satisfaction is not limited to only social relationships, but also includes

degree of importance and contentment with internal (e.g., self-esteem, creativity, learning, and goals-and-values) and external (e.g., money, home, neighborhood) factors. As predicted, results from this study indicated life satisfaction in adulthood to be negatively related to recalled experiences of teasing. People with a history of teasing during their youth were more likely to have lower life satisfaction scores in adulthood. A potential hypothesis is that persistent discomfort or inability to connect with others socially over time contributes to feelings of isolation that can be manifested as anxiety, depression, and/or low self-esteem.

These findings serve to illustrate that the consequences of teasing during youth are more far-reaching in scope than simply the increased rates of depression and anxiety, and diminished self-esteem in adulthood found in existing literature. An individual can be negatively impacted by teasing experiences on many levels. It is for this reason that developing adaptive coping strategies for teasing is important, so as to prevent unnecessary distress later in life.

Another aspect of the current study aimed to isolate an individual's perceptions of the teasing interaction from

other factors, like frequency and content of teasing. The
attention of prior research has focused on teasing
frequency and content. Results show that individuals with
negative perceptions of past teasing experiences are more
likely to also exhibit higher rates of depression and
anxiety, and lower self-esteem and life satisfaction than
individuals with a positive perception. Though not as
remarkable as other relationships in the study, this
relationship between affective recall of teasing
experiences and psychosocial distress in adulthood is
important because it shows the role perception plays in how
teasing experiences are remembered. For example, an
individual may remember teasing experiences as negative and
distressing, regardless of the frequency or focus of such
interactions, which can potentially result in later
psychological problems. Alternatively, the individual who
has positive associations with teasing, regardless of the
severity or duration of those experiences, may avoid the
negative long-term consequences. Memories of teasing, as
with any experience, are comprised of both the content of
what is said and how it is received by the individual.
Coping strategies that foster positive perceptions of
teasing will help influence how individuals recall those

interactions, with the end goal of reducing psychosocial distress as an adult.

In terms of the second research question, results from the current study found no relationship between overall sense of humor or humor as a coping strategy and recollection of teasing experiences. These results are surprising in light of existing literature (Abel, 2002; Bias et al., in press; Georgesen et al., 1999; Moran & Massam, 1999; Scambler et al., 1998; Thorson & Powell, 1993) that predicts humor to be an effective coping strategy. Potentially, humor is an effective "in-the-moment" strategy for handling a teasing interaction that does not directly translate into internalized long-term coping. Another explanation may be that the use of humor as a coping strategy is inconsistent across teasing interactions.

Interestingly, overall sense of humor and coping humor were also shown to play no role in impacting the presence of psychosocial distress in adulthood distress in the form of elevated rates of depression and anxiety, and low self-esteem and life satisfaction, as was shown to be the case in previous research (Abel, 2002; Moran & Massam, 1999).

A potential reason for these disappointing results could be a product of the instruments used to assess sense of humor and humor as a coping strategy. Perhaps the construct of coping humor is better assessed by another instrument. In the context of this study, the MSHS may not be sensitive to the range of what participants may consider coping humor. As humor is a broad concept that can be quite subjective, studying sense of humor may not easily be researched through a Likert-style questionnaire. Perhaps qualitative methods can better understand the nuances of humor, especially as a coping strategy, that traditional quantitative methods may miss.

The last goal was exploratory in nature, as differences between the focus, nature, and frequency of teasing during youth (childhood and adolescence) and adulthood have yet to be examined in the literature. Results of this study indicate remarkable differences between teasing experiences in youth versus adulthood. In terms of frequency, the overall teasing rate decreases from youth to adulthood. This trend of diminished teasing frequency also held true for each of the researched teasing categories: behavior-related, affect-related, appearance-based, and intellect-based. There are multiple potential

reasons for this trend. Perhaps adults' definition of teasing changes over time, so that what was considered teasing happens less frequently. Another reason may be that the social appropriateness of teasing may diminish, or disappear altogether, depending on the environments often associated with adulthood, such as the workplace. An interesting continuation would be to explore the social settings in which adults are most likely to tease or be teased (ex. family versus work). As this is a relatively unexplored topic, further research is warranted to gain a better understanding of the frequency of adult teasing, especially as compared to youth teasing.

In regards to the focus of teasing content, the greatest difference between youth and adulthood on an individual factor was for the appearance-based teasing factor. This finding suggests that adults are not teased as frequently as young people about appearance, which is not surprising as the literature consistently indicates that appearance is the most prevalent form of teasing among young people (Eder, 1991; Kowalski, 2000; Warm, 1997). These results reinforce the impact of appearance-based teasing on youth as it is those experiences that are recalled most vividly as adults. This is especially true

given the research concerning the development of body image
issues as a consequence of teasing (Grilo et al., 1995;
Lunner et al., 2000; Thompson et al., 1995; Thompson et
al., 1991). However, it is interesting to note that
appearance-based teasing ranked second (behind affect-
related) among youth and last among adults in this study.
Such results may be a byproduct of the instrument used in
this study, which will be addressed more fully in regards
to future recommendations.

Based on the results of this study, adults were most
often teased about their behavior. The remaining teasing
areas for adults ranked in the following order: affect-
related, intellect-based, and appearance-based teasing.
Comparatively, youth in the current study were most often
teased about their expression of affect. As was previously
noted, in this study appearance-based teasing ranked
second, followed respectively by behavior-related and
intellect-based teasing.

As this is a new area of research, there are no
explicit theories that account for this switch in focus of
teasing content from youth to adulthood. Keltner et al.
(2001) offers that the function and content of teasing
evolves as the individual matures and becomes more verbally

sophisticated. For perpetrators, psychological and emotional maturity plays roles in recognizing the potential harm to others in the teasing interaction. As adults, perhaps teasing peers about their behaviors is more socially appropriate than targeting identity characteristics, which may be more hurtful. This study skims the surface of adult teasing and provides initial information on patterns and relationships, but further research is needed in the area of teasing function and focus in adulthood.

There were several limitations to this study. Foremost among these limitations are related to the sample. A larger sample would have likely provided a broader spectrum of information regarding teasing. Because the participants were drawn from a university population, predominantly graduate students, the sample was rather homogenous in terms of age, ethnicity, and educational status. The location of the university also contributed to the lack of ethnic diversity in the sample. Interesting gender-based relationships and patterns may have emerged had the sample been larger and more heterogeneous.

Another limitation to this study involved the limited number of variables used to assess the adults' perceptions

of teasing. The instruments used to assess adult teasing did not explore perceptions of or affective reactions to teasing in adulthood, only content and frequency. As illustrated by the results of this study, perceptions of teasing experiences play an important role in determining the impact on the individual. Information on how adults perceive their current teasing interactions would provide valuable information that paints a more complete picture of the construct of teasing in adulthood. The POTS provides information on perceptions of past teasing experiences, but is limited in assessing the range of teasing focus topics. Revision of the POTS is recommended to expand beyond simply weight- and competency-related teasing to include other areas of focus. Development of a new teasing instrument that incorporates affective perception, frequency, and focus/content of teasing would prove extremely beneficial to future research efforts.

Future research in this area would likely benefit from using the Teasing Questionnaire – Revised (TQ-R), which was published after this study had begun (Storch et al., 2004). The factor structure of the TQ may have overemphasized some subscales within the study. For example, the behavior-related subscale was comprised of

eight items versus only three items on the appearance-based subscale. The TQ-R proposes a hypothesized five-factor model of teasing along the following domains: performance, academic issues, social behavior, family background, and appearance. Replication of this study using the TQ-R may produce more remarkable relationships than those found in this study, but could also examine unexplored relationships between teasing domains and areas of psychosocial distress.

Future research should investigate the functions served by teasing in adulthood. Prior research has shown that teasing can serve pro-social functions during the developmental periods of childhood and adolescence; however, the function teasing serves in adulthood has yet to be explored in the literature. Are the functions of adult teasing predominantly pro-social or anti-social? The affective perceptions of the adult teasing experience should also be explored. Are perceptions of adult teasing more positive or negative? How do perceptions change from childhood to adulthood?

Also important to further explore are the different contexts in which teasing occurs. How is teasing different between friends versus between peers or family members? The

relationship between target and perpetrator may play a substantial role in the outcome of the teasing interaction.

The use of humor as a coping strategy should continue to be explored as a means of curtailing the negative effects of teasing. Existing literature supports the idea that humor is an effective coping mechanism for teasing interactions, so it would make sense that humor would be effective at moderating long-term psychosocial distress. As noted previously, use of alternate assessment tools, both qualitative and quantitative, is encouraged.

In conclusion, this study has served to expand the existing knowledge base of how teasing experiences can influence an individual's overall well-being. Quality of Life is used as a phrase that attempts to integrate aspects of self-esteem, subjective life satisfaction, and levels of psychological distress to present a more holistic picture of an individual. Exploring the construct of teasing from this scope promotes understanding of the multiple ways teasing can impact an individual.

This study achieved its primary goals with varying degrees of success. The first goal was to replicate and further examine the relationship between memories of childhood and adolescent teasing and psychosocial distress

in adulthood. This goal was successfully achieved as relationships and expectations between teasing and multiple quality of life factors were confirmed. The second goal was to examine the moderating effects of sense of humor as a coping strategy for teasing. Unfortunately, this goal was inconclusive as results denied a significant relationship. The third was to explore the differences in nature, focus, and frequency of teasing between youth and adulthood. This goal was successful in that it provided new information regarding the experience of teasing in adulthood, but also opened new avenues for future research.

Important to note is that the negative effects of teasing are not only immediate, but can be pervasive into adulthood. Hopefully these findings serve to garner more attention for teasing and the development of effective interventions for children, adolescents, and adults. Knowledge and practice can foster confidence in negotiating teasing interactions throughout the lifespan, which can help to avoid unnecessary psychosocial distress and discomfort.

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APPENDIX A1
Teasing Questionnaire (TQ)

When answering the following items, remember teasing experiences back when you were in middle school and high school. Use the scale below for your answers and darken the appropriate circle.

 0 = "I was never teased about this."
 1 = "I was rarely teased about this."
 2 = "I was sometimes teased about this."
 3 = "I was often teased about this."
 4 = "I was always teased about this."

1. I was teased because I excelled at school (I was brainy). ⓪ ① ② ③ ④
2. I was teased about being ugly or unattractive. ⓪ ① ② ③ ④
3. I was teased about my height. ⓪ ① ② ③ ④
4. I was teased because I was shy around the other kids. ⓪ ① ② ③ ④
5. I was teased because I was not good at sports. ⓪ ① ② ③ ④
6. I was teased because I wasn't a very cheerful kid. ⓪ ① ② ③ ④
7. I was teased because I often looked nervous (I blushed, ⓪ ① ② ③ ④
    had shaky hands, etc.).
8. I was teased because I was nerdy. ⓪ ① ② ③ ④
9. I was teased because I wasn't very good at initiating or ⓪ ① ② ③ ④
    maintaining conversations.
10. I was teased about particular aspects of my appearance ⓪ ① ② ③ ④
    such as the way that I dressed, wearing glasses, the color
    of my hair, etc.
11. I was teased because I didn't do well in school. ⓪ ① ② ③ ④
12. I was teased because of the way that I spoke (stuttering, ⓪ ① ② ③ ④
    speaking with an accent, etc.).
13. I was teased about my weight. ⓪ ① ② ③ ④
14. I was teased because of various ethnic or cultural differences ⓪ ① ② ③ ④
(e.g., skin color, eating different foods than other kids,
    wearing special items of clothing such as head coverings, etc.).
15. I was teased because I was a trouble-maker who often ⓪ ① ② ③ ④
    misbehaved.
16. I was teased because I cried a lot or acted like a baby. ⓪ ① ② ③ ④
17. I was teased because I wasn't very good at various ⓪ ① ② ③ ④
    performance-related activities like singing, acting, or
    speaking in front of others.
18. I was teased because I was scared of doing lots of things ⓪ ① ② ③ ④
    (e.g., swimming, going camping, etc.)
19. I was teased for talking too much (being chatty). ⓪ ① ② ③ ④
20. I was teased for being a tomboy (if female) or a ⓪ ① ② ③ ④
    feminine boy (if male).

Teasing Questionnaire: Adult (TQ:Adult)

When answering the following items, consider your experiences being teased as an <u>adult</u>. Use the scale below for your answers and darken the appropriate circle.

0 = "I am never teased about this."
1 = "I am rarely teased about this."
2 = "I am sometimes teased about this."
3 = "I am often teased about this."
4 = "I am always teased about this."

1.	I get teased because I excel at work/school (I am brainy).	⓪	①	②	③	④
2.	I get teased about being ugly or unattractive.	⓪	①	②	③	④
3.	I get teased about my height.	⓪	①	②	③	④
4.	I get teased because I am shy around the other adults.	⓪	①	②	③	④
5.	I get teased because I am not good at sports.	⓪	①	②	③	④
6.	I get teased because I am not a very cheerful person.	⓪	①	②	③	④
7.	I get teased because I often look nervous (I blush, have shaky hands, etc.).	⓪	①	②	③	④
8.	I get teased because I am nerdy.	⓪	①	②	③	④
9.	I get teased because I am not very good at initiating or maintaining conversations.	⓪	①	②	③	④
10.	I was teased about particular aspects of my appearance such as the way that I dressed, wearing glasses, the color of my hair, etc.	⓪	①	②	③	④
11.	I get teased because I don't do well at work/school.	⓪	①	②	③	④
12.	I get teased because of the way that I speak (stuttering, speaking with an accent, etc.).	⓪	①	②	③	④
13.	I get teased about my weight.	⓪	①	②	③	④
14.	I get teased because of various ethnic or cultural differences (e.g., skin color, eating different foods than other kids, wearing special items of clothing such as head coverings, etc.).	⓪	①	②	③	④
15.	I get teased because I am a trouble-maker who often misbehaved.	⓪	①	②	③	④
16.	I get teased because I cry a lot or act like a baby.	⓪	①	②	③	④
17.	I get teased because I am not very good at various performance-related activities like singing, acting, or speaking in front of others.	⓪	①	②	③	④
18.	I get teased because I am scared of doing lots of things (e.g., swimming, going camping, etc.)	⓪	①	②	③	④
19.	I get teased for talking too much (being chatty).	⓪	①	②	③	④
20.	I get teased for being too masculine (if female) or too feminine (if male).	⓪	①	②	③	④

APPENDIX B
Perception of Teasing Scale (POTS)

When answering the following items, remember teasing experiences back when you were in middle school and high school.

	Never		Sometimes		Very Often

1a. People made fun of you because you were heavy.

Never   Sometimes   Very Often
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

lb. How upset were you?

Not Upset   Somewhat Upset   Very Upset
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

2a. People made jokes about you being too heavy.

Never   Sometimes   Very Often
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

2b.   How upset were you?

Not Upset   Somewhat Upset   Very Upset
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

3a.   People laughed at you for trying out for
        sports because you were heavy.

Never   Sometimes   Very Often
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

3b.   How upset were you?

Not Upset   Somewhat Upset   Very Upset
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

4a.   People called you names like "fatso."

Never   Sometimes   Very Often
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

4b.   How upset were you?

Not Upset   Somewhat Upset   Very Upset
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

5a.   People pointed at you because you
        were overweight.

Never   Sometimes   Very Often
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

5b.   How upset were you?

Not Upset   Somewhat Upset   Very Upset
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

6a.   People snickered about your heaviness
        when you walked into a room alone.

Never   Sometimes   Very Often
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

6b.   How upset were you?

Not Upset   Somewhat Upset   Very Upset
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

7a.   People made fun of you by repeating
something that you said because they thought it
was dumb.

Never   Sometimes   Very Often
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

7b.   How upset were you?

Not Upset   Somewhat Upset   Very Upset
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

8a.   People made fun of you because you
        were afraid to do something.

Never   Sometimes   Very Often
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

8b.   How upset were you?

Not Upset   Somewhat Upset   Very Upset
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

9a.   People said you acted dumb.

Never   Sometimes   Very Often
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

9b.   How upset were you?

Not Upset   Somewhat Upset   Very Upset
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

10a.   People laughed at you because you didn't
understand something.

Never   Sometimes   Very Often
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

10b.   How upset were you?

Not Upset   Somewhat Upset   Very Upset
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

11a.   People teased you because you didn't
        get a joke.

Never   Sometimes   Very Often
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

11b.   How upset were you?

Not Upset   Somewhat Upset   Very Upset
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

APPENDIX C

Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale (MSHS)

Use the scale below for your answers and darken the appropriate circle.

1 = Strongly agree
2 = Agree
3 = Disagree
4 = Strongly disagree

1. I can often crack people up with the things I say	①	②	③	④
2. Other people tell me that I say funny things.	①	②	③	④
3. I'm regarded as something of a wit by my friends.	①	②	③	④
4. I can say things in such a way as to make people laugh.	①	②	③	④
5. Sometimes I think up jokes or funny stories.	①	②	③	④
6. My clever sayings amuse others.	①	②	③	④
7. I'm confident that I can make other people laugh.	①	②	③	④
8. People look to me to say amusing things.	①	②	③	④
9. I use humor to entertain my friends.	①	②	③	④
10. I can ease a tense situation by saying something funny.	①	②	③	④
11. I can actually have some control over a group by my uses of humor.	①	②	③	④
12. People who tell jokes are a pain in the neck.	①	②	③	④
13. Calling somebody a "comedian" is a real insult.	①	②	③	④
14. Hike a good joke.	①	②	③	④
15. I'm uncomfortable when everyone in cracking jokes.	①	②	③	④
16. I dislike comics.	①	②	③	④
17. I appreciate those who generate humor.	①	②	③	④
18. Uses of humor help to put me at ease.	①	②	③	④
19. I can use wit to help adapt to many situations.	①	②	③	④
20. Trying to master situations through uses of humor is really dumb.	①	②	③	④
21. Humor helps me cope.	①	②	③	④
22. Humor is a lousy coping mechanism.	①	②	③	④
23. Uses of wit or humor help me master difficult situations.	①	②	③	④
24. Coping by using humor is an elegant way of adapting.	①	②	③	④

APPENDIX D
Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE)

Use the scale below for your answers and darken the appropriate circle.

1 - Strongly agree

2 = Agree

3 = Disagree

4 = Strongly disagree

1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.	①	②	③	④
2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	①	②	③	④
3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	①	②	③	④
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.	①	②	③	④
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	①	②	③	④
6. I take a positive attitude toward myself.	①	②	③	④
7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	①	②	③	④
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.	①	②	③	④
9. I certainly feel useless at times.	①	②	③	④
10. At times I think I am no good at all.	①	②	③	④

VITA

Name: Joshua P. Bias

Address: Department of Educational Psychology
          College of Education
          Texas A&M University, MS 4225
          College Station, TX 77843-4225

Email Address: jpbias@tamu.edu

Education:
  B.A., Psychology, Texas Tech University, 1999
  M.S., Counseling Psychology, Texas A&M University, 2001
  Ph.D., Counseling Psychology, Texas A&M University, 2005

APA-Accredited Pre-Doctoral Internship:
  University of Oregon Counseling & Testing Center, 2004-05