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## **The Development and Validation of the Teasing Communication Scale**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to develop the Teasing Communication Scale. Integrating Infante's (1987) model of verbal aggression and Baxter's (1987, 1992) perspectives of personal idioms, a conceptual framework of teasing communication was constructed. Drawing on both areas, the Teasing Communication Scale (TCS) was developed and validated. The TCS identifies a person's tendency to demonstrate affectionate or aggressive teasing. From a pilot study, Study I, and Study II, scale items were created, a stable factor structure was established, and initial validation was tested. Results provided evidence to support the reliability and temporal stability of the affectionate and aggressive dimensions.

Today's society is plagued by interpersonal violence. The presence of interpersonal violence is visible in all aspects of our culture. One population at risk is adolescents. Teenagers demonstrate violent and aggressive tendencies toward their peers, families, and strangers. The teenagers who perpetrate these violent acts have been characterized by low self-esteem and emotional insecurities, and speculation suggests teasing is a major contributing factor. Because of this, we need to be able to understand and control better the influence of teasing. A measure of teasing communication would serve as a viable tool to assess the use of teasing by the adolescent population. With this information, educators, as well as parents, will be better equipped to provide the counseling, sensitivity training, and coping skills necessary to avoid violence. Adolescent violence is just one context that could benefit from greater understanding of teasing communication.

Although substantial literature focuses on the use of messages and how they affect interactions, the specific use of teasing messages in conversations has been relatively understudied. Two purposes for this study were to examine how and why teasing communication is used, and to that end, to develop a scale that assesses variations in teasing messages. Verbal aggression and personal idioms researchers have explored the evaluative nature of teasing both as constructive and as destructive communication for relationships. These independent definitions of teasing identify teasing as a communication message, demonstrative of each area. However, neither has thoroughly explored nor fully defined the conceptual domain of teasing. The criteria for including teasing as a message type are based on theoretically limited definitions. Acknowledging the importance of teasing in regard to both aggression and idiomatic research warrants further examination as well as a broader conceptualization of the teasing construct.

To aid in clarifying this domain, the Teasing Communication Scale (TCS) was developed. The conceptualization of the Teasing Communication Scale (TCS) is based on the synthesis of specific features of these two lines of research. Establishing a scale designed specifically to measure variations in teasing will allow fuller understanding of teasing by accommodating both perspectives. Two bodies of literature underscore the complexity of teasing and that teasing merits deeper examination.

Some evidence suggests that teasing communication is integral to verbal aggression. Verbal aggression researchers consistently have suggested that teasing is a self-concept damaging message (Infante, 1987a; Infante, Sabourin, Rudd, & Shannon, 1990; Infante, Trebing, Shepherd, & Seeds, 1984; Infante & Wigley, 1986; Rancer, Baukus, & Amato, 1986). Although teasing mostly has been studied as one possible type of verbally aggressive message, a recent examination (Mottet & Thweatt, 1997) focused specifically on teasing as symbolic aggression. The study revealed that teasing can take several forms, including, but not limited to, self-concept attacks. According to Mottet and Thweatt (1997), teasing is an "intentional aggressive form of verbal communication that is directed by an agent toward a target with the intent of psychologically hurting the target" (p. 242). This definition is consistent with the conception of verbal aggression posed by Infante and Wigley (1986). Under this domain of the verbal aggression literature, teasing represents one means of expressing hostile intentions.

A general consensus regarding teasing as negative creates incongruency with the body of literature that identifies teasing as a beneficial aspect of interpersonal communication (Alberts, 1990; Baxter, 1992; Bell & Healey, 1992; Hopper, Knapp, & Scott, 1981), specifically personal

idioms research. These theoretical aspects and empirical data point to a conceptual conundrum. Each differentially posits teasing as valenced negatively or positively.

Past research has identified teasing as one type of personal idiom (Baxter, 1992). Personal idioms represent one quality of interpersonal relationships. Used symbolically to define relational cultures (Baxter, 1987), idioms are individual expressions of speech accepted by both conversational partners (Bell, Buerkel-Rothfuss, & Gore, 1987). Idiomatic communication consists of private codes with unique meaning that embody the values, meanings, rituals, vocabularies, and traditions which represent the culture of the relationship (Baxter, 1992; Bell & Healey, 1992). A personal idiom is identified as one of eight types of playful personal idioms that occur among same sex friends and opposite sex romantic couples (Baxter, 1992). Similarly, Hopper, Knapp, and Scott (1981) found the friendly teasing insult to be a form of play among married and cohabiting couples. Teasing in this form represents communication that maintains interpersonal relationships and increases bonding. Beatty and Dobos (1993) also found results inconsistent with the conception of sarcasm and criticism. Although criticism is defined as a negative or destructive communication behavior, when delivered in a nonsarcastic manner, it can be productive to father-son relationships. Previous research suggests that the nature of teasing varies, as do intentions of teasing. Bell and Healey (1992) identified teasing insults as a type of idiom in friendship relationships that allows partners to communicate "in the spirit of play" (p. 313). Alberts (1990) classified verbal teasing as a form of kidding or play that reflects the adjustment of the partners in the relationship; the more teasing is perceived as playful, the more adjusted the relationship. This view of teasing represents a positive way in which partners can communicate interpersonal play. Is teasing a form of hostile communication or is it a means of demonstrating play? How can the same type of message produce two distinctly different outcomes? This divergence in defining teasing suggests that the use of this communication behavior is multifaceted and multifunctional.

Thus, interpersonal researchers recognize the possibility that teasing communication can have positive (affectionate) and/or negative (aggressive) expressions in interpersonal communication. The Teasing Communication Scale posits both constructive and destructive dimensions of teasing. Communication is constructive if it increases the positive affect and value of an interpersonal relationship (Infante, 1987a). The constructive definition of teasing communication is drawn from personal idioms research. In the Teasing Communication Scale (TCS), constructive teasing will be termed affectionate teasing and incorporate the general assumptions associated with personal idioms.

Destructive communication, on the other hand, decreases the positive affect and quality of an interpersonal relationship (Infante, 1987a). Destructive teasing derives conceptually from verbal aggression literature. A general contention is that teasing communication represents a form of verbal aggression (Infante, 1987a; Infante et al., 1990; Infante & Wigley, 1986). In this context, teasing is recognized as a type of verbally aggressive message. This classification will serve as the basic premise underlying the destructive dimension of teasing, termed aggressive teasing.

### **Literature Review**

To further define and describe teasing communication it is necessary to assay some central mechanisms identified as constructive and destructive teasing. For constructive teasing, these are personal idioms and relational symbols. For the destructive view, it is verbal aggression.

### **Theoretical Perspectives of Personal Idioms**

Personal idioms theory and research are based on an assumption that relationships are unique mini-cultures which construct their own meaning systems (Baxter, 1987, 1992). It is through these systems that relationship partners communicate emotions and attitudes regarding the relationship. Partners develop personalized communication codes and create unique ways of communicating to deal with their surroundings (Bell & Healey, 1992). Examination of these systems has centered on understanding the meta-messages (i.e., relational messages) partners use to convey meaning (Baxter, 1987). Personalized communication systems consist of the personal idioms and relationship messages used to represent various meanings in relationships.

A primary mechanism contributes to the development and maintenance of relational systems: relational symbols. According to Baxter (1987) relational symbols are “concrete metacommunicative statements about abstract qualities such as intimacy, caring, and solidarity which the parties equate with their relationship” (p. 262). In other words, the symbolic communication in any relationship, at any time, reflects the ever changing state of interpersonal relationships.

Personal idioms are one type of relational symbol evident in Baxter’s behavioral action category (Baxter, 1987; Bell & Healey, 1992; Hopper et al., 1981). Personal idioms are words, phrases, or gestures that have evolved unique meaning within a relationship (Bell & Healey, 1992; Hopper et al. 1981). Baxter (1987) included four personal idioms (i.e. nicknames, affection terms, labels for others, and sexual code words) in her category of behavioral action. Establishing personal idioms between partners has a positive effect on the relationship, particularly in developing and enhancing interpersonal bonding (Hopper et al., 1981).

Hopper et al. (1981) studied personal idioms in the context of married and cohabitating couples, and identified teasing insults as one of seven types of personal idioms. Of the seven types, teasing insults and expressions of affection were the two most frequently reported types of personal idioms. In characterizing these types of personal idioms, the researchers found that they all integrated both playful and derogatory message behaviors. These types of idioms were distinguished from confrontational idioms by the use of kidding tactics. Regardless of the context, romantic partners demonstrated teasing and affection idioms to communicate.

Baxter (1992) distinguished between playful and nonplayful personal idioms. Results identified eight forms of play: verbal teasing; private verbal code; role playing; prosocial physical play; antisocial physical play; games; gossiping; and public performances. Baxter (1992) and Alberts (1990) found that respondents’ perceptions of the functions of the types of play and how they influence perceptions of relationship closeness were reflected in such forms as the “teasing joke.” When a relationship is non-distressed and stable, joking communication is accepted to reflect more intimate and personal issues of the relationship.

Furthermore, such affectionate expressions reflect the attachment personality trait. Attachment, gregariousness, and assertiveness represent the interpersonal aspects of extroversion, which is the second general trait of the Neuroticism Extroversion Openness Model (Costa & McCrae, 1980). The issue of sociability is explained through the attachment and gregariousness traits (McCrae & John, 1992). Attachment describes a friendly, warm, and open style of social interaction. Attachment represents the emotional and cognitive bonds a person feels toward another, and the patterns of attachment are related to various facets of communication in interpersonal relationships (Guerrero & Burgoon, 1996).

The personal idioms literature provides insight into how interpersonal relationships are created and maintained through the use of relational symbols and personal idioms. Teasing has been identified as one type of symbol or idiom people use to define their interpersonal relationships. This perspective provides a useful foundation to conceptualize the constructive dimension of playful and affectionate teasing.

### **Theoretical Perspective of Aggression**

Juxtaposed to the constructive perspective is a destructive view of verbal aggression. Infante's (1987a) aggressive communication model serves as a theoretical framework to conceptualize teasing. Several characteristics of the model are useful for examining teasing and are applicable to the construction of a model of teasing communication. First, the foundation of the aggressive communication model is rooted in a personality trait approach. In this way, traits are organized according to constructive (argumentativeness) or destructive (verbal aggressiveness) communication. Second, the personality trait approach, as it has been used, is conducive to an interactionist perspective (Infante, 1987b). The personality trait approach suggests that the behavior or outcome represents the interaction between the individual and situation specific variables (Infante, 1987b). The interactionist perspective explains behavior by examining the influence of the environment on the expression of traits (Magnusson, 1990; Magnusson & Endler, 1977). Understanding the aggressive communication model will help to explain further teasing communication and establish a teasing communication model.

Infante's (1987a) model of symbolic aggression includes: assertiveness, argumentativeness, hostility, and verbal aggressiveness. The constructive dimensions of assertiveness and argumentativeness (conceived as a subset of assertiveness) demonstrate a person's use of competent communication skills when dealing with conflict (Infante, 1987a; Infante & Wigley, 1986). The destructive behaviors of hostility and verbal aggressiveness (conceived as a subset of hostility) reflect a person's inability to communicate non-aggressively or to resolve a conflict (Infante & Wigley, 1986). The personality approach has proven valid to examine aggression (Berkowitz, 1962; Buss, 1961; Edmunds & Kendrick, 1980).

Infante's (1986a) Verbal Aggression Model (VAM) provides a useful entry framework for developing a teasing communications measure. Based on the hostility and assertiveness factors of personality and their communicative counterparts of verbal aggression and argumentativeness, both these factors also serve as the foundation to conceptualize teasing communication more fully.

Infante (1987a) defined verbal aggression in the context of interpersonal communication with his aggressive communication model. He suggested that interpersonal communication demonstrates aggression "if it applies force physically and/or symbolically in order, minimally, to dominate and perhaps damage or, maximally, to defeat and perhaps destroy the locus of attack" which can include the other person's "body, material possessions, self-concept, positions on topics of communication, or behavior " (p. 158). This definition is a functional meaning of aggression for several reasons: 1) it centers on the issues of communication as the observable behavior; 2) it includes both verbal and physical behavior, whereas earlier definitions did not; and, 3) this definition acknowledges that aggression can be expressed positively and negatively via a wide spectrum of behaviors.

Infante (1987a) distinguished between these four traits of his Verbal Aggression Model by identifying them as either constructive or destructive forms of communication. Aggressive behavior is defined as constructive if it encourages interpersonal communication satisfaction, and

increases the value of the dyadic relationship. Aggressive behavior constitutes destructive communication when it leads to relationship dissatisfaction, and at least one partner having negative opinions about himself/herself and the relationship as a whole. In addition to defining four personality trait components of the aggressive communication model, Infante (1987a) proposed two aggressive communication outcomes: (a) communication satisfaction; and (b) relationship satisfaction. These outcomes serve as the criteria to assess the constructive or destructive nature of aggression traits.

Teasing communication can also be divided into constructive and destructive forms. Teasing behavior constitutes constructive communication if it is used to strengthen interpersonal bonds and enhance relationship satisfaction. Conversely, teasing can be destructive if it is a means of conveying dissatisfaction or anger, and jeopardizes the relationship. Thus, three studies were designed to distinguish the nature of teasing, especially as constructive or destructive. Furthermore, the series of studies was intended to elicit the individual's tendency, or predisposition, to engage in a teasing style.

Research to broaden the concept of teasing communication requires a reliable and valid form of measurement. The current operationalizations of teasing communication are both limited and inconsistent. Researchers have failed to define the full spectrum of teasing communication behaviors, from the playful to the aggressive. Methodologically, the challenge is to describe, explain, and predict the various uses and consequences of teasing.

Although teasing is considered a type of communication message in both the aggression and idiomatic literature, researchers have failed to provide a full description of what constitutes teasing behavior. At present, there is no explanation of how to recognize or evaluate teasing. Current mechanisms for interpreting teasing communication, such as the verbal aggression scale (Infante & Wigley, 1986) and the Play Questionnaire II (Betcher, 1977) do not highlight a complete range of the distinctive characteristics of teasing.

The current measures afford a very narrow view of teasing communication. They do not attend to the different dimensions of teasing, and are not applicable to different situations. The development of a teasing instrument would provide a more functional measure of the construct. A trait-based teasing measure should prove useful to examine teasing within a variety of communication contexts. Thus, the following research question was posed:

RQ1: How can teasing communication be measured?

The preceding research has recognized verbal aggressions as a destructive form of communication, and personal idioms as constructive for relationships. Aggressive teasing is a concept similar to verbal aggression, in that it is destructive and is directed at harming the self-concept of others. Conversely, affectionate teasing is constructive, and is used as a means of expressing positive affect. Therefore, the following hypotheses were posited:

H1: Aggressive teasing will be related positively and significantly to verbal aggression.

H2: Affectionate teasing will be related indirectly to verbal aggression.

### **Method**

Three separate studies were conducted to develop and validate the Teasing Communication Scale (TCS). A pilot study was conducted to define and construct a model of teasing communication. A second study was devoted to developing the TCS instrument. The final study was employed to assess the reliability and validity of the TCS.

### Pilot Study: Defining Teasing Communication

A preliminary investigation was conducted to identify behaviors associated with the proposed dimensions of teasing communication. This initial examination broadly sampled teasing messages and situations. Based on the theoretical perspectives of verbal aggression and personal idioms, conceptual definitions of affectionate and aggressive teasing were created to clearly label the two areas of communication.

#### *Procedure*

The instructions for this study were minimal, so as to avoid limiting the responses. Respondents (N=34 undergraduate students) were provided with two general definitions, one explaining affectionate teasing and one explaining aggressive teasing. Based on these two descriptions, respondents provided five examples of each. Respondents were instructed that the examples could include a personal experience that was demonstrative of teasing, a hypothetical situation that illuminated a teasing behavior, or a phrase or behavior that could be associated with teasing.

#### *Analysis*

For both affectionate and aggressive teasing, responses were coded and grouped by the researcher. First, responses were coded based on language, situational, and thematic similarities, and then were grouped. Examples of language similarities were “calling someone names to attack their [*sic*] personality or physical traits,” and “calling a person obscene or degrading names.” Similar situational responses described situations like “I tease my friend by always telling her she drives like an old lady,” and “I make fun of my best friend for being 21 but having the high pitched voice of a 12 year old.” Finally, thematically similar groups reflected evident themes such as “teasing about a mental or physical weakness to put them down,” or “making fun of someone because they [*sic*] think and talk slower than normal.”

According to grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the data suggested the categories of analysis. Affectionate teasing responses formed nine categories: (a) playfully making fun; (b) breaking the ice; (c) showing interest; (d) conveying enjoyment; (e) encouraging healthy relationships; (f) inside joking; (g) changing other person; (h) complimenting others; and (i) comforting others. These response categories served as the framework for item generation of the affectionate dimension of the TCS. Of the emergent categories, playfully making fun, conveying enjoyment, encouraging healthy relationships, and inside joking reflected conceptualizations of teasing apparent in the personal idioms literature. However, the other five categories indicate aspects of affectionate teasing not previously recognized.

Similarly, aggressive teasing responses comprised nine emergent categories: (a) boosting own self-esteem; (b) keeping others in line; (c) making others uncomfortable; (d) expressing disappointment; (e) attacking self-concept; (f) discrediting others; (g) name calling; (h) conveying opposite feelings; and (i) insulting other's immediate family/friends. These categories framed items for the aggressive dimension of the TCS. Of these categories, making others uncomfortable, attacking self-concept, name calling, and insulting other's immediate family and friends reflected previous conceptualizations of teasing as aggressive behavior. But here too, additional categories suggest that alternative or more complex conceptualizations of aggressive teasing exist.

Evidence of content validity emerged for the TCS in several ways. First, nine categories emerged for each dimension of teasing which suggests considerable breadth concerning the possible aspects and facets of both affectionate and aggressive teasing. Second, the emergent

categories were verified in the subsequent data collection that reiterated the same 18 categories. Finally, the emergent categories for both affectionate and aggressive teasing extended previous conceptualizations of these constructs, but at the same time introduced additional facets that reflect the greater expected complexity of affectionate and aggressive teasing.

### **Study One: Development of the TCS**

The purpose of Study One was to establish a trait-based measure of teasing communication. Based on the pilot study and existing scales in both literatures, a balanced set of items was generated to tap the specific types of behaviors associated with each dimension. Of a total of 40 items, 20 represented affectionate teasing, and 20 represented aggressive teasing. No negatively worded items were used to control for bias in the dimensions.

### **Respondents**

Respondents in Study One were 289 undergraduate students (39% male; 61% female) enrolled in communication courses at a large Midwestern university, with an age range from 18-57 ( $M = 20.4$ ;  $SD = 4.47$ ). The ethnic/racial composition was 85.5% Caucasian and 11% African American. Participants were volunteers who completed a department research requirement.

### **Procedure**

Participants in Study One completed a questionnaire packet, including a cover letter, a set of demographic questions, the Study One version of the five-point Likert-type TCS, and the Social Desirability Scale (Strahan & Gerbasi, 1972). Because people may exhibit social desirability in their responses to questions, an assessment of social desirability was warranted. The 10-item Social Desirability Scale (SDS) (Strahan & Gerbasi, 1972) was used to assess whether social desirability influences the respondent's perception of teasing.

### **Study One Results**

One objective of Study One was to determine a factor structure and whether it was stable. A principal components factor analysis (PCA) with orthogonal varimax rotation was employed because affectionate and aggressive teasing are conceptualized as mutually exclusive and independent dimensions. Kaiser's Measure of Sampling Adequacy was .90 (Bartlett's Test of Sphericity,  $X^2 = 4866.46$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Two criteria to interpret the PCA results were employed. First, items with eigenvalues that loaded at least .60, with no secondary loading above .40, were accepted unconditionally. Second, items that loaded at least .50 on one factor and no higher than .30 on any other factor were also retained. In the context of an exploratory investigation, a less conservative standard of 50/30 may be warranted (McCroskey & Young, 1979). Such 50/30 loading items were included particularly for conceptual relevance. A scree plot further validated the PCA results (eigenvalue  $\geq 1.0$ ). This analysis revealed 8 factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0, which accounted for 58.5% of the total variance. Of the 8 factors, only 3 contained two or more items and produced acceptable reliabilities. The scree plot also suggested that a 2 or 3 factor solution was acceptable.

Subsequent to the PCA, an item analysis determined which items constituted a reliable scale of optimal length. The examination incorporated inter-item and corrected item-total correlations and influence of item retention and extraction on overall alpha level. Extreme and redundant items were eliminated based on a criterion of  $\geq + .80$  Cronbach's Alpha level.

Two distinct factors, with strong Cronbach's alpha reliabilities (.89 and .84), corresponded with the proposed dimensions of affectionate and aggressive teasing. However, the analysis also produced a third factor with questionable reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .69). This

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factor appeared to relate to using teasing to change others. However, the stability of the two-item factor structure was called into question because of the lower reliabilities. Thus, a subsequent PCA with orthogonal varimax rotation forced items into a two-factor solution. Therefore, this potential third dimension was excluded from further analysis. This potential third factor merits possible attention in future research.

The two-factor solution accounted for 46.5% of the variance. The first factor consisted of items representing affectionate teasing, and accounted for 31.6% of the variance. Eighteen of the twenty items generated for the affectionate dimension loaded on this factor. Based on the 60/40 rule of item acceptance, 13 items were retained. Cronbach's alpha levels were examined to further yield a 13-item factor that constitutes the affectionate factor. The summated 13-item scale had an alpha of .89 ( $M = 40.18$ ,  $SD = 9.29$ ).

The second factor consisted of items representing aggressive teasing. This factor accounted for 14.9% of the variance. Twelve of the 20 items written for the aggressive dimension had their highest loading on this factor. Based on the 60/40 and 50/30 rules for item selection, 7 items were retained. All 7 items retained contributed to the Cronbach's alpha .84 ( $M = 8.79$ ,  $SD = 3.00$ ) for the aggressive factor.

Individual items representing the affectionate and the aggressive factors correlated with the respondent's summated scores on the 10-item Social Desirability Scale. Although Strahan and Gerbasi (1972) reported Cronbach's alphas ranging from .59 to .70, the alpha (.52,  $M = 46.58$ ,  $SD = 5.98$ ) fell below that range. The two-tailed Pearson Product-Moment correlation revealed 15 items that correlated (range = .12-.29) significantly with respondents' social desirability scores, but correlations suggested a weak relationship.

Both dimensions appeared related to social desirability, so further analysis of the TCS dimensions was necessary. To assess the impact of social desirability on respondents' self-reports of teasing, the summated score on the social desirability scale was regressed on each of the twenty items retained in the initial factor analysis to produce partial correlated residuals. The results indicated that although there were several significant correlations between social desirability and teasing behavior, the factor structure of the TCS developed in Study One was not influenced by social desirability.

### Testing Inter-Factor Relationships

Two-tailed Pearson Product Moment correlations assessed the relationships between the affectionate and aggressive factors, using summated factor scores. The two factors were correlated positively and significantly ( $r = .44$ ,  $p = < .01$ ). This result indicates that although considered conceptually distinct, the factors may overlap. This finding merits additional attention and was revisited in the validation study. However, the factor analysis of residuals correlated considerably less ( $r = .29$ ) than the initial inter-factor correlation ( $r = .44$ ). The moderate correlation between factors may have been inflated due to the presence of social desirability.

Thus, a 20-item version of the TCS produced 13 items that reflect affectionate teasing, and 7 items that reflect aggressive teasing, with acceptable reliabilities, and the items appeared free from social desirability bias. Based on the results of Study One, a second study was conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the TCS.

### Study Two: Reliability and Validity of the Teasing Communication Scale

#### Respondents

The researcher recruited 219 undergraduate student participants enrolled in communication courses at a large Midwestern university (39.3% male, 60.7% female.)

Participant age ranged from 18-49 years ( $M = 22.35$ ;  $SD = 5.76$ ); and ethnic/racial composition of the sample was mostly Caucasian (79%), with 14.6% African American, 1.4% Hispanic, 1.4% Asian, .5% Native American, and 3.2% other.

### Procedure

Similar to Study One, students received extra credit for completing the questionnaire packet, which took approximately one hour. All respondents were assured that their participation was voluntary, and that their responses would be anonymous and confidential. Respondents completed the TCS developed in Study One, the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (Infante & Wigley, 1986), and a series of demographic questions on age, gender, and ethnic origin.

### Results

The validated version of the TCS consisted of 20 items. Principal components factor analysis (PCA) with orthogonal (varimax) rotation (Kaiser's Measure of Sampling adequacy = .89; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity,  $X^2 = 2044.8$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). The PCA produced two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0, accounting for 50.6% of the total variance.

Items in the first factor reflected affectionate teasing, and accounted for 33.5% of the total variance. Thirteen items were retained for the affectionate teasing factor on the affectionate factor. Results from a reliability analysis indicated that two items ("I poke fun at people to build a rapport with them" and "When I feel close to a person I tease them to show affection") damaged the alpha considerably (i.e., .71). Thus, these two items were excluded from the final summated factor (see Table 1). The 13-item summated scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .88 ( $M = 34.40$ ,  $SD = 8.07$ ).

The second factor consisted of 7 items reflecting aggressive teasing, and accounted for 17.1% of the total variance. Reliability analysis indicated that no items detracted from the scale alpha. The 7-item summated scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .87 ( $M = 9.40$ ,  $SD = 3.93$ ) (see Table 1).

The factor analysis in Study Two produced a reliable and multidimensional TCS. The validated version of the TCS consisted of 18 items in 2 dimensions (affectionate and aggressive). Two-tailed Pearson Product Moment correlations revealed a positive and significant correlation between affectionate and aggressive teasing ( $r = .27$ ,  $p < .01$ ), suggesting a moderate relationship between these dimensions (Cohen, 1988; deVaus, 2002).

**Table 1**  
Factor Loadings Study Two

| Item   | Factor 1<br>(Aff) | Factor 2<br>(Agg) |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|
| I like to poke fun at people in order to lighten their mood.         | .80 <sup>a</sup>  | .00               |
| I tease other people to let them know I enjoy interacting with them. | .78 <sup>a</sup>  | .16               |
| I use teasing as a way of bringing up funny moments and reminiscing. | .77 <sup>a</sup>  | -.00              |

**Table 1** (Continued)

| Item  | Factor 1<br>(Aff) | Factor 2<br>(Agg) |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|
| I tease people to be light-hearted and playful.   | .65 <sup>a</sup>  | .00               |
| I tease others as a way of complementing them.  | .64 <sup>a</sup>  | .29               |
| When a person is depressed or unhappy I use teasing to cheer them up.                   | .63 <sup>a</sup>  | -.00              |
| I joke with other people about experiences we have shared to bring use closer together. | .60 <sup>a</sup>  | .00               |
| I use teasing as a way of expressing positive feelings about the relationship.          | .59 <sup>a</sup>  | .12               |
| I kid around with people in order to help them feel more relaxed in the conversation.   | .59 <sup>a</sup>  | .00               |
| I make fun of other people when I know it will be amusing to both of us.                | .58 <sup>a</sup>  | .17               |
| One way I give a person attention is to kid them about their personal quirks.           | .57 <sup>a</sup>  | .30               |
| I tease other people to lower their self-confidence.                                    | .00               | .82 <sup>b</sup>  |
| I poke fun at people in order to damage their self-image.                               | .15               | .81 <sup>b</sup>  |
| I poke fun at people in order to intentionally hurt their feelings.                     | .00               | .80 <sup>b</sup>  |
| I like poking fun at people's personal problems to embarrass them.                      | .00               | .77 <sup>b</sup>  |
| I purposely tease people to embarrass them in front of others.                          | .12               | .72 <sup>b</sup>  |
| I try to make others upset by mocking the people who are close to them.                 | .17               | .64 <sup>b</sup>  |

Table 1 (Continued)

| Item   | Factor 1<br>(Aff) | Factor 2<br>(Agg) |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|
| When my teasing hurts others I feel better about myself. | .00               | .62 <sup>b</sup>  |

Note. Items followed by the superscript a or b represent items that were included in the summated affectionate and aggressive dimensions, respectively.

### **Aggressive Teasing**

The conceptualization of the aggressive teasing dimension derived from the Verbal Aggression Model posited that aggressive teasing should relate positively and significantly to verbal aggression. A one-tailed Pearson Product-Moment correlation tested this hypothesis. Aggressive teasing correlated positively and significantly with verbal aggression ( $r = .57, p < .001$ ). Thus, Hypothesis One was supported substantially. This result solidifies the theoretical grounding of aggressive teasing.

### **Affectionate Teasing**

Hypothesis Two, that affectionate teasing scores should be indirectly related to verbal aggression, was tested with a one-tailed Pearson Product-Moment correlation. Affectionate teasing correlated positively and significantly with verbal aggression ( $r = .23, p < .001$ ), a moderate relationship.

### **Discussion**

These studies represent initial steps in creating a measure of teasing communication. The Teasing Communication Scale (TCS) was developed as an instrument to measure a person's communication predisposition to use affectionate and aggressive teasing. Results suggested that the final 18-item version of the TCS has a strong two-factor structure, and initial reliability.

The results of Hypotheses One and Two have implications for the continued study of teasing communication. The fact that both affectionate and aggressive teasing were related positively to verbal aggression, underscores the inherently aggressive quality of teasing communication. These findings suggest that teasing is a subset of aggressive behavior because of the locus of target, regardless of the function or intentionality of the specific teasing message. The desired affectionate or aggressive effect of a teasing message does not mediate the innate aggressive nature of the behavior itself. Rather than disproving the framework of teasing proposed in this study, these results reveal the complexity of the conceptualization of teasing as it has been positioned with the verbal aggression and personal idioms literature.

The findings of Study One and Two provide the impetus to conceptualize a model of teasing communication. A model of teasing will allow for an interactionist perspective in conceptualizing teasing. The Teasing Communication Model (TCM) integrates personality traits, a relational perspective (giving consideration to both source intentions and receiver perceptions), and relational outcomes.

The Teasing Communication Model (TCM) posits that the constructive dimension of the model is comprised of 1) the personality trait of attachment style; and, 2) the communication

predisposition for affectionate teasing. Conversely, the destructive dimension of the model encompasses 1) the personality trait of hostility; and, 2) the communication predisposition for aggressive teasing. Findings in Study II suggested that the dimensions of affectionate and aggressive teasing are correlated. It is possible to infer, then, that teasing could be inherently aggressive. If so, then the affectionate and aggressive dimensions of the model should relate to one another as well as to verbal aggression. To clarify whether and how these dimensions are related, it is crucial to identify the communication source's motive or intention to tease. The source intention component of the model represents the sender's objective or purpose for conveying affectionate or aggressive teasing.

The second part of the model introduces the component of receiver perceptions, because the degree to which teasing is interpreted as affectionate or aggressive is a function of the receiver's perception of the teasing communication. In other words, regardless of what type of teasing the source intended, the receiver's interpretation of the communication determines if it functions appropriately as affectionate or aggressive (both as mode and outcome). This interpretation, receiver's perception of teasing, is guided by the receiver's definitions or sense of relational and situational appropriateness.

The final component of the proposed teasing communication model is relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction moderates perceptions of relational and situational appropriateness. In other words, how satisfied partners are in the relationships will determine what communication is relationally and situationally appropriate. The greater the relationship satisfaction, the more likely it is that the breadth and depth of what is appropriate or tolerated will expand. Future research should work to strengthen relationships posited in the Teasing Communication Model, while also examining the influence of receiver perceptions.

This investigation marks a first attempt to understand and more fully conceptualize teasing communication. Several limitations likely influenced this study. In this study, self-reported behaviors were measured to make initial assessments of teasing communication. This decision limited the results. Self-reported data only provide a person's perception of their own behavior, and it has been demonstrated that a person's self perception of his/her own behavior may differ greatly from other's perceptions of that same behavior. Asking people to identify their teasing behaviors taps only their interpretation. This suggests discrepancies between source intentions and receiver perceptions. Basing conclusions on self-reported data alone only identifies a person's intentions behind the teasing message. A receiver's perspective would help to illuminate how teasing messages are interpreted, and their impact on the relationship.

The dynamic qualities of relationships provide valuable insight into teasing communication behaviors. The nature and quality of relationships may have major implications for teasing communication. Since norms and unwritten rules govern relationships, it is necessary to distinguish between the different types of relationships which people can have, as the climate within social/ interpersonal relationships differs from work or family relationships. These distinctions may determine the appropriateness, acceptability, and usefulness of teasing. Examining specific types of relationships might further illuminate the role of teasing communication.

The stages of a relationship may also be a major influence on teasing communication behaviors. Analysis of relationship stages focuses on perceptions, attributions, and behaviors that contribute to relationship development (Clark & Reis, 1988). Examining teasing communication across stages of relationships could help to explain issues of commitment, attraction, and

maintenance. Affectionate teasing may lead automatically to higher commitment and attraction, whereas aggressive teasing leads to lower commitment and attraction. Or, perhaps the use of teasing is a unique maintenance strategy that is relationship specific. Various relationship issues should be assessed in the future.

One limitation in this study is its narrow cultural perspective, which was predominantly European American. Although a trait based construct suggests that communication behavior is an inherent personality characteristic, cultural norms can be influential. The development of the TCS and the conceptualization of the Teasing Communication Model is trait based. However, the general application of the TCS is derived from the cultural understanding that teasing in general is an acceptable communication behavior. This premise must be tested.

Another limitation in this study is that the TCS only focuses on verbal expressions of teasing. This is a major shortcoming in the study of teasing communication. Personal idioms research indicates that verbal teasing is closely related to other forms of play such as pro-social and anti-social physical play, games, and gestures (Baxter, 1992; Bell & Healy, 1992). This implies that the verbal component of affectionate teasing would have a corresponding nonverbal aspect as well. The literature on verbal aggression also recognizes nonverbal communication as a form of aggression. Research indicates that nonverbal emblems represent one possible message of verbal aggression (Infante, 1987; Infante & Wigley, 1986). High verbal aggressives demonstrate a greater tendency towards using teasing and nonverbal emblems than other message types (Infante et al., 1992). This would suggest that aggressive teasing could also be expressed through nonverbal communication. Clearly, teasing communication is not limited to verbal expressions. Nonverbal communication represents a significant means for expressing affectionate and aggressive teasing. Therefore, future examination of teasing communication must take into account a nonverbal component.

This initial investigation makes several theoretical contributions to the field of communication. First, the Teasing Communication Scale draws attention to the understudied topic of teasing. Since teasing is a prevalent behavior in our society, it is important to bring it to the forefront and recognize the impact it has on communication and relationships. The TCS synthesizes two bodies of literature, personal idioms and verbal aggression, to start to understand teasing behavior. Increasing the cohesiveness of the relevant communication literature not only enhances our understanding of teasing, but of personal idioms and verbal aggression theory as well. The TCS provides researchers a way to begin measuring teasing communication within a variety of different contexts. It also provides a means for assessing people's teasing in relation to other variables.

The contributions of this study go beyond the communication discipline and recognize the value of the application of teasing communication. Teasing represents a type of communication that is prevalent in a variety of social contexts. The possible impact of teasing on people and their relationships makes it a topic of great importance. From the extant literature, we know that teasing is recognized as both positive and negative types of communication. Through personal experience, we know that teasing is a part of many relationships, and can impact our perceptions of ourselves and those around us. Establishing a valid and reliable version of the TCS will provide practitioners with an instrument to learn more about the role teasing communication plays in shaping our self perceptions and interpersonal relationships. The TCS

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draws attention to the significance of teasing, and generates greater insight into this communication phenomenon.

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