

# **From bite to nip: The dialogic construction of teases**

Clay Butler  
*Baylor University*

## **1. Introduction**

The reaction of the hearer plays a critical role in determining the meaning of an utterance within its context. Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998), building on Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974), refer to this process as a “next turn proof procedure”; the next turn in a conversation displays how the hearer interpreted the previous turn, which may or may not correspond to the meaning intended by the speaker of the original utterance. In either case, the subsequent turn will give the speaker a chance to accept or refute the hearer’s interpretation. Thus, meaning is negotiated and dialogically constructed in on-going conversation by interlocutors.

A tease is an example of discourse that is in large part defined by how it is received (Scarborough Voss, 1997). This paper describes the process by which a comment that is overtly a criticism becomes interpreted as a playful tease. Following Bateson’s (1972) analogy of monkeys at play, this paper describes the process by which what would normally denote a bite is transformed into denoting only a nip. Teases are a dialogically constructed speech act in which the uptake of the target of the tease plays a significant role (Drew, 1987; Tholander & Aronsson, 2002); what on the surface appears aggressive and critical, a bite, can be transformed to be playful and enjoyable, just a nip, by a suitable response.

This paper proposes that there is a preference for receiving teases playfully in some male discourse communities. While a number of responses is available to the target (for example, denial, retaliation, or ignoring the comment), a male in one of these communities who manages to reframe a potentially critical comment into a humorous or playful comment enhances his prestige in the group as one who can take a punch, as one who has entertainment skill in the teasing ritual, and as one who knows the covert signals of intimacy common in masculine discourse. After reviewing the current research on the social construction of teases, a few examples of playful responses to teases will be analyzed. Finally, some social functions of teases in male discourse will be discussed.

The dataset analyzed in this paper consists of an hour-long video recording of four college-age<sup>1</sup> male friends playing poker. The participants, all members of the same fraternity, meet regularly to play poker and have developed patterns of relating that are displayed in their discourse. Bert is the chief antagonist; he rarely misses an opportunity to harass another member of the group, and the other members respond with varying degrees of effectiveness. Stan, who is the newest and youngest member of the group, often seems unsure how to respond to Bert's teases. Fred and Mike, on the other hand, know very well how to play along.

The dialogue was transcribed following Jefferson's conventions<sup>2</sup> (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984) and analyzed following the pattern of Drew (1987), Tholander and Aronsson (2002), and (Boxer & Cortes-Conde, 1997).

## 2. Review

The social construction of teases in situated, on-going discourse complicates the formation of a succinct definition of what constitutes teasing. Pawluck (1989) regarded teases as comments that are both annoying, irritating, and goading, but in some way mitigated to be playful and humorous. Keltner, et al. (2001), after reviewing 58 empirical studies, developed a composite definition of a tease "as an intentional provocation accompanied by playful off-record markers that together comment on something relevant to the target" (p. 234). While Keltner, et al. maintain that off-record markers are required to differentiate teases from criticisms, the analysis for this paper suggests that off-record markers may be exceedingly subtle in some discourse communities.

The young men in the current study seem to rely more heavily on a shared expectation of what types of discourse commonly occur during their poker matches, than on overt contextualization cues within the discourse such as prosody, lexical and syntactic options, and formulaic expressions (Gumperz, 1982a). Rather than signaling the interpretive frame, which Tannen and Wallat (1993, p. 60) define as an interlocutor's "sense of what activity is being engaged in," the participants seem to already expect teasing to be an abiding activity of their regular poker matches. Thus, the teases in the current data set, in particular those given by Bert, are given with very few "off-record markers" such as lengthened vowels, higher pitch, pervasive laughter, or excessive exaggeration, as Strahle (1993) found. A possible motivation for this pattern is discussed in the concluding section.

The function of teasing is considered in the current analysis within Goffman's theory of face (1959; 1967; 1971). Social actors attempt to present a public self-image consistent with the role, or line, they are currently tending. Attributes and actions that support that line are advanced, while those that are inconsistent with the line are avoided or downplayed. In this vein, a tease is only partly defined by the intentions of the speaker (Searle, 1979); a tease can only be felicitous if the target and/or the audience ratify the preferred line of the teaser.

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<sup>1</sup> Stan is 19 years old, Fred is 20 years old, and Mike and Bert are 22 years old. Pseudonyms are used for all participants.

<sup>2</sup> See the Appendix for an explanation of the transcription conventions.

Face-work occurs as interactants attempt to form their comments appropriately to advance their current line. For example, a particularly biting tease may advance an aggressive line, while a more playful tease may advance a supportive, friendly line. The targets of the teasing, on the other hand, have the double challenge of recognizing the nature of the comment and formulating a response in rapid sequence. As will be discussed in detail later, targets have a variety of available responses, and their choice of response will advance their own line and serve a significant role in determining the ultimate force of the comment. Teases may also occur before an audience who may contribute to the negotiation of its meaning by laughing, contributing commentary, or by remaining silent.

Each participant not only advances his or her own line, but also the corresponding lines of the other participants. Consider an example of a tease that is taken seriously by the target. Even if the teaser intended to advance a public face of someone who is friendly or playful, the target's serious response supports a line for the teaser as someone who is critical or abusive. At the same time, while the target's serious response may have been an attempt to mitigate the unflattering line advanced by the tease, the target has also potentially created a new and equally unflattering line corresponding to someone who is thin-skinned or overly sensitive. These face moves can be further negotiated by subsequent comments by the interactants or by the comments of audience members.

This paper will focus on the response made by the target of the tease and the strong preference for a certain type of response in some masculine discourse groups. Several studies have described the broad range of strategies available for responding to a tease (Drew, 1987; Keltner et al., 2001; Mooney, Creeser, & Blatchford, 1991; Pawluk, 1989; Shapiro, Baumeister, & Kessler, 1991; Tholander & Aronsson, 2002).

Drew (1987) analyzed teases directed at a minor norm violation of the target, for example, boasting, complaining, or exaggerating, and received by the target in a somewhat serious way, what Drew terms a "po-faced" response (p. 219). Based on his data set of mixed-gender, adult friends, Drew categorized responses as either rejecting or not rejecting the proposition of the tease. Drew identified three responses that rejected the proposition: (1) laughter that signaled recognition that the proposition was not serious, (2) laughter that co-occurred with an overt rejection of the proposition (e.g., through denial or by giving an explanation), and (3) laughter that was followed later by a rejection of the proposition. Although the majority of responses were po-faced, Drew identified two responses that left the target's view of the proposition ambiguous: (1) play along with the tease by supplying a related humorous comment, and (2) ignoring the comment as though it had never been given.

Like Drew, Tholander and Aronsson (2002), who looked at teases among mixed-gender child groups at school, found that most targets responded with some degree of seriousness to the criticism within the tease. Instead of delineating responses between their rejection or non-rejection of the tease's proposition, Tholander and Aronsson categorized responses along a continuum from "defensive work" to "offensive work" (p. 566), any of which may reflect a serious or playful receipt of the tease depending on other factors in the context. They categorize defensive responses as *accounts*, which contain excuses or justifications for the target's norm violation, and *denials*, in which the target rejects the assertion that he or she violated a norm. Their offensive responses include *play along*, in which the target continues the criticism of his or her actions in a playful way; *retaliation*, in which the target counterattacks the teaser, and *proactive work*, which recognizes a norm has been violated and attempts to redress it before it is commented

upon. In the middle of the continuum are the *minimal responses*, such as laughter and gestures that provide ambiguous clues to the target's perspective on the tease.

The current study differs from Tholander and Aronsson in a number of ways. First, the inclusion of females in their groups may have led the males to accommodate (Giles & Powesland, 1975) to female norms requiring more "affiliative moves" (Tholander & Aronsson, 2002, p. 581) to follow teases or to female norms requiring more overt "off-record markers" (Keltner et al., 2001, p. 235) than would normally occur in a group of only males. Lampert and Ervin-Tripp (2006), citing Crick et al. (1999) and Harris and Knight-Bohnhoff (1996), comment on the differing views of aggressive behavior between males and females and the former's reluctance to be aggressive toward females due to social norms stigmatizing such behavior.

Second, in the case of Tholander and Aronsson, their informants were students in an institutional classroom and, therefore, were brought into their discourse group involuntarily by school authorities. The nature of their relationships was most likely less intimate than the group of young men in the current study, who were already friends and voluntarily met to engage in their preferred recreation. Pawluk (1989, p. 154) asserts the nature of the relationship to be critical in distinguishing a criticism from a non-serious tease, saying, "it may be that it is not so much what is said or how it is said, but who says it that determines whether the teasing will be treated seriously or lightly." Last, due to the dynamics of mixed-gender versus single-gender groups and the higher affect of the informants in the current study, it is not surprising that while Tholander and Aronsson found a majority of responses to be po-faced, the current study found the majority of responses to play along with the tease.

### **3. Data Analysis**

The teasing in the data set is almost constant, with 34 instances of teasing in the 52 minutes of transcribed data. In trying to categorize the types of responses in light of Drew (1987) and Tholander and Aronsson's (2002) categories, the researcher found 22, or 65%, to be playing along with the teaser. Eight of the responses were either a minimal response, such as a chuckle without any comment or a silent ignoring of the comment. Four responses were po-faced in that the target responded with denial, an explanation, or agreement.

Three of the four po-faced responses and seven of the eight minimal responses were made by Stan, who is clearly the least proficient in the ritual teasing common in this group of friends. Stan manages to play along some of the time, but his minimal responses seem to occur when he cannot think of a clever or witty response, and "opting out" (Brown & Levinson, 1987) seems the safest response. His po-faced responses generally invite further teasing or derision, thus highlighting the inappropriateness in this group of serious responses to teases. Stan's situation is analyzed in-depth in Butler (2006).

The first two examples contain po-faced responses to teases that are either corrected directly or more coercively corrected by additional teasing. In Dialogue 1, Fred responds seriously to Bert's tease, and Bert immediately corrects Fred's interpretation by declaring his intentions were playful.

Dialogue 1: *Po-faced Response Corrected Directly* (04Poker 5:16)<sup>3</sup>

- 1 Stan Call  
2 Bert Two sixes  
3 Stan °Oh darn° – three aces  
4 Fred Oh SHIT HA HA ha ha he's-  
5 Bert → °Watch the cussing we're being recorded°  
6 Fred ← sorry [ ha ha ha  
7 Bert [ >I'm kidding I'm kidding< it's a joke  
8 Fred ← This is my normal jargon

When Fred shouts, “SHIT” in line 4, Bert teases him as though he is using unacceptable language. Fred, sensing the possible norm violation, accepts the comment as serious (line 6) and apologizes. Bert quickly clarifies his comment as “kidding” (line 7), and Fred reforms his response following the more acceptable strategy of playing along, “This is my normal jargon” (line 8). This moment in the conversation is, not surprisingly, followed by Mike teasing Fred about his use of the word “jargon.”

Dialogue 2 shows Stan responding seriously to an initial tease by Bert, which draws even more teasing from Mike and Fred.

Dialogue 2: *Po-faced Response Corrected with Additional Teasing* (04Poker 8:46)

- 1 Stan Is this the deck that you guys normally use for poker?  
2 ((brief, incidental talk by Fred and Mike))  
3 Bert → No, usually uh we don't use cards we just [ use our hands  
4 Stan ← [ no, I'm saying  
5 like this pair of this deck of cards cause it's well shuffled  
6 Mike → It is?=  
7 Fred → =It's well shuffled? ((mocking tone))  
8 Stan ← I I mean tha: [ t it-  
9 Fred → [ What's something that it's “well shuffled”?  
10 Bert → You ((to Fred)) just shake your head and nod, dude

Bert (line 3) seems to have misunderstood Stan's question (line 1) and might have become the object of teasing had Stan not tried to explain himself (lines 4-5). The simple act of explaining or clarifying a comment after a tease is not allowed in this group. Teases are a form of play, and some form of play is the most appropriate response. Notice how the teasing spreads to Mike (line 6) and Fred (line 7) after Stan's po-faced reply to Bert. When Stan tries again to explain himself (line 8), Bert realigns the group to exclude Stan by directing his comment about Stan (line 10) to Fred. Stan drops out of the conversation immediately after this point as Mike says something, and Bert and Fred tease him for a while.

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<sup>3</sup> The arrows in the dialogues follow Tholander and Aronsson's (2002) notation in which “→” indicates a tease and “←” indicates a response.

Serious-sounding teases followed by playful responses flow smoothly throughout the data, while serious responses seem to stumble and draw additional teases designed to correct the norm violator. Thus, more established members initiate new members into their accepted routines and ways of relating. The following analysis describes five realizations of the play-along type of response: faux agreement, self-deprecating, clever twist, redirection, and dissolution of the cooperative frame. The responses discussed here are not intended to be comprehensive, but exemplary of the types preferred in the discourse community being studied.

### 3.1. *Faux Agreement*

In Dialogue 3, Bert, Mike, and Stan are discussing whether their conversation will be “transcribed” or “translated.” The instructions read to them before starting the session said their talk would be recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for the mechanisms involved in normal conversation.

Dialogue 3: *Faux Agreement* (04Poker 5:59)

- 1 Fred I I I’m staying out of this pseudo-intellectual conversation just so I
- 2 don’t appear too stupid
- 3 Bert → Too late, man=
- 4 Fred ← =Yeah, I opened my mouth

In line 1, Fred ironically says he will not comment on the current topic because he is afraid he might “appear too stupid.” However, his statement seems to at least be a tacit acknowledgement of ignorance. Bert, the serial antagonist in the group, teases Fred about the inconsistency of his statement, and Fred plays along by showing faux agreement with Bert’s tease about his appearing stupid. The agreement is certainly feigned because the quickness and cleverness of the response would be inconsistent with a diminished intellect. By playing along, Fred manages to claim the opposite line asserted for him in Bert’s tease.

### 3.2. *Self-Deprecating*

Dialogue 4 features Bert again teasing Fred, this time for overstating the amount of money Fred lost in the previous hand.

Dialogue 4: *Self-Deprecating* (04Poker 13:36)

- 1 Fred Well, I just lost, like – almost a buck
- 2 (2.5)
- 3 Bert Was it a buck? No it was 50 cents worth
- 4 Fred Ah, that’s right fifty and a – (oh well)
- 5 Bert → that’s OK – I’ll take more from you this time
- 6 Mike °So nice°
- 7 Fred ← As long as I beat my 35 minute mark of last Thursday night
- 8 All ((laughter))

Fred commits a norm transgression by exaggerating the amount lost in the previous hand, which is notable because it seems to ask for pity from his competitors, not a line projecting masculine strength and control. Bert calls Fred's attention to his exaggeration (line 3) and then advances his own line by asserting his ability to take even more money from Fred in the next hand (line 5). Faced with such an unflatteringly weak image of himself, Fred paradoxically claims strength by mentioning another recent failure (line 7), thus showing he can take another, harsher punch and be unphased: While he is losing money in this match, last Thursday he lost it even faster. Fred's self-deprecating response suggests the very resilience lacking in his original exaggeration. Fred may be a terrible poker player, but he demonstrates his claim to the masculine ideal by announcing his disregard for his own pain in repeatedly losing.

One feature of teasing notably lacking in Dialogues 3 and 4 are the contextualization cues (Gumperz, 1982b) that would normally alert the participants to interpret the statement with a non-serious frame. The teases discussed so far are given very earnestly, and the shared schema contains very little overt marking, such as exaggerated intonation, laughs, or winks (Attardo, Eisterhold, Hay, & Poggi, 2003; Eisenberg, 1986). As Schieffelin (1986) notes, teasing creates tension due to the unstable nature of the many possible frames at work; the conversation may at any moment be heading in any number of very different directions. The lack of contextualization cues in the current data seems to force the participants to rely on the nature of their relationship and shared expectations within the frame to interpret the teases playfully.

### 3.3. *Clever Twist*

Mike is the target of teasing by Bert and Fred in Dialogue 5, which occurs near the end of the match. Mike is almost out of money and is complaining about his bad luck.

Dialogue 5: *Clever Twist* (04Poker 41:00)

- 1 Mike        Alright – I can be in for – two more rounds – assuming no one raises
- 2 Bert        → Well, you can always bring in more chips if you want to=
- 3 Mike        =Yeah (1.0) [ This sucks.
- 4 Fred        →                    [ We don't mind taking your money.
- 5 Mike        Ha ha yeah.
- 6 Bert        → I have no problem with that.
- 7 Mike        It's like it's teasing me. It's just like just as when it's giving me a little
- 8                glimmer of hope that I'm going to have a good hand, and even if I do=
- 9 Stan        ((sneezes))
- 10 Mike        =someone [ always one ups me
- 11 Fred        [Have you won yet?
- 12 Mike        One
- 13 Fred        I've won like two or three I think
- 14 Mike        But one of them was like a – three or four dollar pot
- 15 Fred        Yeah ha that's right
- 16 Mike        Half of it was mine=
- 17 Fred        =ha yeah
- 18                (1.5)

- 19 Bert → But Mike's not bitter about it  
 20 Mike ← No, it's all good. It's all in the name of science

Mike commits several norm violations in this exchange. He starts in line 1 by announcing that if anyone raises, that person will be responsible for taking him out the game. Bert (lines 2 & 6) and Fred (line 4), instead of offering mercy, offer him further loss of money, and, by analogy, loss of his claim to the masculine ideal. In lines 7, 10, 14, and 16, Mike repeatedly complains about his predicament, an attitude Gough and Edwards (1998) identified as projecting weakness or softness in masculine discourse. Fred sympathetically allows Mike to vent, but in line 19, Bert ends the "troubles talk" (Tannen, 1990, p. 53), which he likely hears as non-masculine, by teasing Mike for complaining too much. In line 20, Mike seems to recognize the poor line he is projecting and attempts to reclaim a better public face by providing a clever twist to Bert's tease: Mike announces his willingness to take the loss to serve humanity.<sup>4</sup>

Emphasizing the ritual nature of teasing (L. M. Harris, Gergen, & Lannamann, 1986; Labov, 1972), Eder (1990, p. 75) says participants "challenge each other to come up with a better, more clever response." Bert's recognition that Mike's complaints could be heard as bitterness challenged Mike to give an equally insightful reply. In his response, Mike shows his quick wit, diffusing his earlier complaints and re-establishing his claim as someone who can take it.

### 3.4. Redirection

The final two response strategies are playful continuations of the tease that do not necessarily show agreement with the proposition of the tease as was the case in the previous examples. These examples show the target framing the comment within the context of play by responding with more play-frame discourse. In Dialogue 6, Bert and Fred are bemoaning another hand lost to Stan.

Dialogue 6: *Redirection* (04Poker 16:52)

- 1 Fred A lot of money for Stan right there  
 2 Stan Yeah  
 3 (4.0)  
 4 Bert → Well, you're ((to Fred)) the idiot that kept raising it, then folded=  
 5 Mike =[ ((laughter))  
 6 Fred ← =[ WELL I HAD A GOOD HAND DEALT TO ME  
 7 (5.0)  
 8 Fred ← This was no limit. (2.0) °He probably wouldn't have gone if he'd  
 9 asked me°  
 10 Bert He ((Stan)) still doesn't get it

As in Dialogue 3, Bert is teasing Fred about his poor poker skills. Fred's raising Stan caused their loss to be worse than it had to be (line 4). Fred initially offers a po-faced response by explaining why he raised Stan (line 6), but after some reflection (line 7)

<sup>4</sup> Mike's comment in line 20 of Dialogue 5 seems to be about the presence of the camera and the fact that they were participating in research.



decided to try a more playful strategy by redirecting the focus of the teasing to Stan as someone who is even more clueless about the game (line 8). Even though Stan's growing pile of chips provides evidence to the contrary, he is an easy target because he is a newer member and less proficient with the ritual teasing ubiquitous in the group's conversation. Fred's response in line 8 shows both a faux agreement with Bert's tease (i.e., take a punch) and an ability to tease someone else (i.e., give a punch), both of which advance his line of strength and aggression. In redirecting the focus of their ire on Stan, Fred also reframes his relationship with Bert as an alignment in opposition to Stan (Bruxelles & Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2004; Gordan, 2003). Bert ratifies Fred's alignment move by offering his own tease of Stan in line 10.

### 3.5. *Dissolution of Cooperative Frame*<sup>5</sup>

Dialogue 7 starts with another complaint by Mike about his poor luck in the game so far.

#### Dialogue 7: *Dissolution of Cooperative Frame* (04Poker 6:25)

- 1 Mike        You know what's sad is I've been dealt a pair in my hand both times  
 2                and had nothing to work with  
 3 Fred        What, [ a pocket pair? ]  
 4 Bert        →        [ you ga-        ] you gotta pair  
 5 Mike        I got a pair of eights the first time and a ten a-  
 6 Bert        → ten?=  
 7 Mike        ← =what?=  
 8 Bert        =ten=  
 9 Mike        =what?=  
 10 Bert        =ten=  
 11 Mike        =what?=  
 12 Bert        =ten  
 13 Fred        Go ahead. It just goes to show a pocket pair is not all it's cracked  
 14                up to be

As in Dialogue 5, Fred takes up Mike's topic by asking a follow-up question (line 3), validating Mike's conversational turn. Also reminiscent of Dialogue 5, Bert will have none of it. In line 5, Mike dysfluently mixes up his words. Instead of saying "a pair of tens," he starts to say "a ten (of pairs)," but catches and pauses to self-correct. Before he can restart, Bert jumps on his error with a possible insinuation of cheating (line 6): any player holding ten of the same type of card is certainly cheating. Mike's response (line 7) does not challenge Bert's proposition, but the cooperative frame guiding the conversation that allowed Bert to make the tease.

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<sup>5</sup> The term "cooperative frame" is used here in order to index both the idea of frames (Goffman, 1974; Tannen & Wallat, 1993), in which conversational partners align to certain assumptions and roles and then actively orient to the alignment as they negotiate meaning (e.g., Bert can ask questions that Mike has to answer because Bert has status in the group), and the Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975), in which conversational partners are presumed to be cooperating with the currently accepted direction of the conversation.

Not too dissimilar to an argument among four-year-olds, Mike's response continues the frame that says this is play by pulling Bert into a childlike contest of wills, not rhetoric. Assuming Mike's contribution to be relevant and supporting the line he wishes to present, it is possible he is expressing a masculine identity by displaying a willingness to baldly ignore social norms. Gough and Edwards (1998) and Tomsen (1997) identify the rule-breaking of prevailing norms as characteristic of masculine discourse. Unreasonable, irrational, or outlandish comments that provoke laughter are relatively common examples. Thus, Mike may be refuting a tease about his incompetence with a playful display of his disregard of prevailing conversational norms, and consequently, his freedom from societal dictates in general. In Dialogue 7, Mike is not incompetent; he is an anarchist.

#### 4. Conclusion

The current data set shows a preference for teases to be received playfully. In the group being observed, po-faced responses were dispreferred and often elicited more critical comments from the other participants. One theory with potential to describe the system operating in this group is face theory (Goffman, 1967). The teasing exchanges allow the participants to enact their preferred public self-image and ratify each other's successful displays. When a member of this group is targeted with a tease and responds in the appropriate play frame, he enhances his self-image as someone who can take a punch, as someone who has entertainment skill in the teasing ritual, and as someone who knows the covert signals of friendship common in this group's discourse.

Morgan (1996) discusses the importance of "being able 'to take it'" (p. 111) in the construction of masculine identity. Teasing is a way of testing another's resiliency in adversity. Like the monkeys in Bateson's analogy, the young men in the current study use teasing to strengthen each other in the safe confines of sparring with friends. If an important social function of teasing is the development and display of strength, a po-faced response to a tease could easily be interpreted as crying, sulking, or asking for help, while a play-along response could be used to index a more hardened, durable, heroic identity (see Evaldsson (2002) for a similar conclusion in relation to gossip telling). In this sense, teasing resembles what Kochman (1983) observed with verbal dueling, "It is a process that works to raise thresholds of tolerance and endurance by learning to take what is normally serious *as* play, until it can, more comfortably, *become* play" (p. 334, italics in the original).

Teasing also serves an entertainment function similar to humorous discourse in general. The cutting, biting content of a tease in the current data set seems to be considered less important by established, in-group members than its aesthetic, entertainment value. Finding the right response to a tease in rapid sequence "requires more elaborate perspective taking than crude denials or 'serious' accounts" (Tholander & Aronsson, 2002, p. 585), but breaking the expected play frame advances a dispreferred line at the very moment when a target is offered the opportunity to advance a preferred line and get his or her share of the "big laugh."

Last, teasing is often an avenue for signaling intimacy in groups that suppress or disallow overt markers of affection. The fact that "off-record markers" communicate that the provocation is intended to be "affectionate" (p. 235) partially explains their absence in the current data set. While the young men seem to share a close friendship, marking that relationship publicly might violate their accepted norms of behavior. Instead, teasing is an acceptable strategy for locating the nature of the relationship. Eisenberg (1986, p. 193)

says, “That it is ‘safe’ to tease a particular individual indicates that a special relationship exists.” Pawluck (1989, p. 154) makes a similar statement when she asserts that “The common adage that ‘you only tease the ones you love’ may, in fact, be interpreted as ‘if they love you they must be teasing.’” Thus, the young men seem to signal their affection covertly with statements that are overtly critical and biting.

The challenges in a teasing episode are numerous. As Keltner et al. (1998, p. 1231) note, “Teasing is paradoxical. Teasing criticizes yet compliments, attacks yet makes people closer, humiliates yet expresses affection.” The challenges of the target are particularly difficult. The current study describes a context in which the target of a tease not only has to interpret the criticism using a play frame that is generally unmarked, but has to form a response within a narrow range of strategies or risk harming the public self-image he or she intends to project.

## Appendix

Transcription conventions (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984)

→	(right arrow)	tease
←	(left arrow)	response to tease
[	(brackets)	overlapping utterances
=	(equal sign)	contiguous utterances
(0.0)	(seconds & tenths of seconds)	intervals of time between utterances
-	(dash)	short untimed pause or speech that is cut off
◦	(degree sign)	talk that is quieter than the surrounding talk
:	(colon)	lengthened vowel
ABC	(capital letters)	talk that is louder than surrounding talk
<u>abc</u>	(underline)	stressed or emphasized speech
><	(greater than/less than)	talk delivered at a quicker pace than surrounding talk
((	(double parentheses)	details that are difficult to transcribe
(	(single parentheses)	transcriber’s best guess

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Department of English  
 Baylor University  
 One Bear Place #97406  
 Waco, TX 76798  
 Clay\_Butler@baylor.edu