

**“I AM JUST TEASING YOU”: PARENTAL USE OF TEASING  
IN THE CONTEXT OF PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS**

by

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B.A., University of Minnesota, 1998

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF**

**MASTER OF ARTS**

in

**THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**School of Social Work and Family Studies**

**Family Studies**

**We accept this thesis as conforming  
to the required standard**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**

**August 2004**

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31 / 08 / 2004

Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

Title of Thesis:

"I am just teasing you": Parental use of teasing in the  
context of parent-child relationships

Degree:

Master of Arts

Year:

2004

Department of

Social Work and Family Studies

The University of British Columbia

Vancouver, BC Canada

### Abstract

Despite its common occurrence, teasing between parents and children has received very little empirical attention. This study explores the intentions behind parental teasing by scrutinizing types of parental goals. Analyses were also conducted to examine power dynamics in teasing interactions between parents and children, and moderating effects of parental attributions for children's behavior across different teasing contexts. The sample consisted of 52 parents with children between the ages of 3 to 5 years living in the U.S and Canada. Participants responded to written assessments of parental goals and parental power depicted in hypothetical teasing interactions across six different scenarios. Results indicated that parents teased their children to have fun or to obtain compliance or obedience. Also, teasing was used to enhance the parent-child relationship and to promote parental wishes or a particular agenda. These goals, however, varied by the context within which the teasing interaction occurred. Under some circumstances, the type of parental goal had an effect on the level of parents' assertion of power. Parents' attributions for children's behavior were found to modify the relationship between compliance/socialization goals and level of parents' assertion in only one situation. Findings are discussed within the context of existing research on parental goals and behaviour, as well as power dynamics in parent-child relationships.

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### **“I AM JUST TEASING YOU”: PARENTAL USE OF TEASING IN THE CONTEXT OF PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS**

Teasing is a common form of interaction between parents and children (Pawluk, 1989; Reddy, 1991; Albert, 1992; Reddy, Williams, & Vaughan, 2002; Keltner, Capps, Kring, Young, & Heerey, 2001). Teasing is incorporated in relationships between parents and children as young as 3 months of age (Reddy et al., 2002; Reddy, 1991). One of the earliest forms of teasing used by parents is the game of peek-a-boo (Warm, 1997). By accentuating their reappearance with a smile and gleeful “peek-a-boo!”, parents attempt to elicit laughter from their children. However, the game offers more than a playful exchange between parents and children. This early experience helps children to master objective permanence and object constancy (Warm, 1997).

As children’s understanding of intentions and expectations in others increases, parents’ teasing becomes more elaborate. For example, when parents pretend to take a child’s nose or to eat plastic food, their goal is not only to provoke laughter, but to suggest that they are capable of performing the impossible (Schieffelin, 1986). What is even more significant is that teasing sequences seem to become much more reciprocal (Eisenberg, 1986; Miller, 1986). The notion of reciprocity is of particular interest because of its implications with regard to peer relationships in the later years (Russell, Pettit, Mize, 1998). It has been suggested that reciprocal parent-child interaction would provide a kind of peer context, allowing children opportunities to experience, learn, and practice some of the skills that are involved in relationships with peers (Russell et al., 1998).

The importance of reciprocity is acknowledged in social exchange theory. Social exchange theorists claim that one imperative task for parents is to teach reciprocity to their children (Nye, 1979). Teasing may very well provide vital and unique opportunities for parents to do so through reciprocal exchanges. Indeed, Labrell (1994) argues that teasing interactions

offer parents the means to teach interpersonal communication skills, including methods for responding to others and coping with conflicts. Those children who are not afforded opportunities to practice these skills may be unable to effectively negotiate with peers or to respond positively to peer teasing. In fact, research has found that children who were unable to respond to teasing by peers were more likely to be isolated individuals, and more prone to suffer from loneliness and depression (Qualter & Munn, 2002).

Despite the developmental significance associated with parents' teasing of children, very little attention has been given to understanding the dynamics of teasing interactions between parents and children. The majority of teasing research has been overwhelmingly focused on peer or adult intimate relationships (e.g. see Keltner, Young, Heerey, Oemig, & Monarch, 1998). Although a few anthropological and psychological studies have examined teasing within the context of parent-child relationships, they rarely move beyond describing patterns of teasing. Very little is known about how and why parents and children tease each other. Indeed, an archival search revealed a paucity of research on parental use of teasing. Those few studies that examined teasing between parents and children did not investigate parents' perspectives or roles in the interaction. Instead, the focus of those studies was either children's reactions to teasing or understanding of teasing (e.g. Shapiro, Baumeister, & Kessler, 1991; Reddy, 1991). Given that teasing necessarily involves interaction and cannot be regarded as a single individual action, there is a need for further investigation of teasing which entails the understanding of parental perspectives.

The purpose of this study is to examine why parents tease their children. Specifically, this study explores the intentions behind parental teasing by scrutinizing the goal systems. A goal is regarded as an intended outcome of a sequence of behaviors (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), and



therefore reflects parents' drive to direct teasing behaviors. From this respect, an examination of parents' goals may reveal intentions for teasing their children. This study is particularly interested in types of goals that parents use during teasing interactions with their children.

With relation to parenting goals and teasing interactions, the concept of power will be investigated. Because the parental power alters the kinds of behaviors that parents enact (Baumrind, 1971; Maccoby & Martin, 1983), the ways in which parents tease children may be affected. Ultimately, the goals that parents attempt to endorse during teasing interactions with their children may influence the exertion of power. Thus, this present study will investigate the power dynamics in teasing.

Teasing is shown to vary across groups in its structural characteristics and functions. Although descriptions of teasing are rare in the literature, it is suggested that the explanation of teasing must focus on a certain cultural or subcultural groups (Miller, 1986; Schiefflin, 1986; Clancy, 1986; Cloes, 1977; Simmon, 1942). Hence, the specific focus of this study will be teasing that occurs in the interactions of parents and preschoolers. This particular group of parents and children are selected for three reasons. First, successful completion of the development tasks during a child's first 5 years are widely regarded as being crucial to healthy development (Erikson, 1950). Second, children spend a greater proportion of their first 5 years at home than they do once they begin kindergarten. Thus, parents are regarded as the major source of information and control (Olson & McCubbin, 1983). Lastly, in the first three to five years of life, children learn relationship expectations through interactions with their parents (Reddy, 1992). This may have an influence on the quality of future parent- child relationships (Lollis, 2003). These factors make this stage of the parent-child relationship a crucial period for understanding the effects of socialization on child development, and worth examining.

## Literature Review

### *What is Teasing?*

The definitional problem is one of the most well known reasons that teasing has not extensively investigated. While there is recognition that teasing is a form of communication between individuals (Shapiro et al., 1991), variation remains in the definition of teasing. There are three critical considerations that need to be taken into account when teasing is defined.

First, the definition of teasing should include both humorous and aggressive elements. Whereas some researchers identify teasing as a form of bullying and/or aggression (e.g. Boulton & Hawker, 1997; Roberts & Coursol, 1996; Lightner, Bollmaer, Harris, Milich, & Scambler, 2000), other scholars believe that teasing incorporates playful or humorous elements (Alberts, 1992; Drew, 1987; Shapiro et al., 1991; Pawluk, 1989; Reddy, 1991; Nakano & Kayano, 1993; Martin, 1989). Keltner et al. (2001), in their conceptual analysis and empirical review of teasing literature, criticize the “either /or” definition of teasing. Keltner et al. (2001) claim that not all kinds of humor/play and aggression can be classified as teasing. For example, unintended aggression or aggression that is carried out for purely hostile reasons (e.g. hitting someone with a hammer) is obviously not seen as an episode of teasing. Likewise, simple role-playing (e.g. children acting as ghosts) may be humorous or playful, but nonetheless is not likely to be viewed as teasing. Thus, it is important that the definition of teasing take into account a broad range of acts which include both humorous and aggressive elements.

Second, it is imperative to differentiate teasing from related practices such as bullying and joke telling. According to Keltner et al. (2001), the role of intention behind teasing and the use of off-record markers are two critical features that distinguish teasing from other related practices. In order for an event to be labeled as teasing, the act must be intended to have some

effect on the target. Further, such intentions need to be directed by one person toward another (Keltner et al., 2001). Even if joke telling or storytelling are intended to produce laughter, they do not fall within the domain of teasing since these types of play are not necessarily directed at a specific target.

Besides the intent of the teasing, the act needs to be accompanied by off-record markers. Whereas on-record communication and action is direct, honest, and to be taken literally, off-record markers violate these rules with a variety of tactics such as understatement or metaphors (Keltner et al., 2001). Off-record markers can be verbal (exaggeration, metaphor) or nonverbal (prosodic variation). Off-record markers help differentiate teasing from other behaviors that are often conflated with teasing. For instance, several researchers equate direct criticism or bullying with teasing (e.g. see Warm, 1997; Whitney & Smith, 1993; Georgesen, Harri, Milichi, & Young, 1999). These acts can involve the intent to humiliate others, and such intention can also involve a commentary directed at another individual. However, they lack or use very few off-record markers that signal that the commentary is to be taken in jest. When the actions do not involve off-record markers, they are more appropriately considered direct acts of hostility rather than teasing (Keltner et al., 2001).

Finally, the definition of teasing needs to encompass diverse behaviors across various contexts. Keltner et al. (2001) find that some researchers consider teasing to be specific to the context, sample, or phenomenon. Definitions that hinge on specific behavioral forms offer a limited view of teasing. For instance, definitions of teasing that refer only to verbal forms of teasing (e.g. teasing as verbal play) do not adequately characterize the teasing of young children or purely nonverbal forms of teasing. A better and more useful definition of teasing will at least

recognize the importance of nonverbal teasing, and the best definition will incorporate expression in both verbal and nonverbal forms.

An examination of the critical features of the definition of teasing reveals that an operational definition must include the following: a) both humorous and aggressive elements b) the intent of the teasing insofar as it is directed at a target, c) off-record remarks, and d) verbal as well as nonverbal behaviors. Through the integration of the aforementioned themes, the definition of the term teasing in this study is *an intentional provocation accompanied by playful off-record markers that together act to express feelings, beliefs, or reactions either verbally or nonverbally to a targeted individual*. To reduce the face-threatening potential of teasing, off-record marks are used to signal that the provocation is to be taken in part in jest. Some provocations may be painful or humiliating (e.g., making a sarcastic comment), whereas others involve fun and thrill (e.g., peek-a-boo). When parents and children share a fun and thrilling provocative experience, they may be able to use teasing as a means to express feelings, beliefs, or reactions without threatening the targeted individual. In fact, several scholars point out that teasing contains hidden messages or themes in that most teasing of young children is done affectionately (Eisenberg, 1986; Miller, 1986; Schiefflin, 1986; Ochs, 1986; Pawluk, 1989). This type of interaction emphasizes the prosocial functions of teasing, including affiliation, socialization, and conflict resolution (Eisenberg, 1986; Pawluk, 1989; Goodwin, 1990; Morgan, 1986; Ochs, 1986). Alternatively, when provocation is humiliating and painful, teasing may produce the opposite effect, resulting in negative or antisocial functions.

Whether or not the provocation produces a fun or painful reaction may be due in part to the goals parents have in teasing children. It is suggested that goals determine the aspect of the interaction parents are attempting to bring into the relationship, since goals determine the

primary criteria of value in an interaction (Dix, 1992). Further, several studies point out the association between parenting goals and parenting behaviors. Parenting goals are found to have a significant effect on parenting behavior (Hastings & Grusec, 1998; Chan, 2001; Kuczynski, 1984). For example, when parents act to promote goals that focus more on their own interests (e.g. seek immediate compliance) rather than those of children, parents' actions toward their children are more negative and punitive (Hastings & Grusec, 1998). As such, parenting goals influence how parents act toward their children. Hence, examining parenting goals will provide significant clues for understanding the intention behind teasing between parents and children.

#### *Parenting goals in Teasing*

Parenting goals are embedded in a parent's belief system (McGillicuddy-De Lisi & Sigel, 1995). Beliefs provide parents with the means for setting priorities, organizing information and experiences, facilitating the prediction of other people's behaviors, and guiding their own actions (McGillicuddy-De Lisi & Sigel, 1995). Beliefs, therefore, are used by parents for the basis of generating and setting goals for their children (McGillicuddy-De Lisi & Sigel, 1995). Accordingly, an investigation of parenting goals within the context of parent-child relationships will reveal parents' beliefs about their role in parenting, child-rearing values, and the nature of child development.

Numerous psychologists argue that most, if not all, action is purposeful and goal-directed (Brody, 1983; Marken, 1988, 1991; Power, 1973; Pervin, 1989). In teasing, investigators whose research focuses on individuals' response to teasing also suggest that recipients of teasing respond not to the acts per se but to the teaser's goals (Alberts, 1992; Jacobs & Jakson, 1983). If so, parenting practices will dictate that parents structure teasing in such a way that it promotes their goals. Hasting and Grusec (1998) consider that parenting goals are

“outcomes that parents hope to achieve during interaction with children” (p.465). Parenting goals consist of concerns, the underlying wants, needs, and issues that parents care about and may attempt to promote through interactions with their children (Dix & Branca, 2003). Although parents may not always be conscious of their own goals and the effect of intention on the outcome of teasing, it seems that parents use teasing to elicit an intended outcome or state to occur so that parents can promote their concerns or issues in a given interaction.

Parenting goals provide a drive that directs parents’ behaviors toward the desired outcome (Austin & Vancouver, 1996). The particular goal or concern promoted by parents at a given moment is influenced by several factors. For example, parents’ perception of possible actions and outcomes is an important aspect of parenting goals (Grusec, Goodnow, & Kuczynski, 2000). With regard to teasing, parents’ understanding of where their children currently stand in relation to a particular goal may be important. Since priorities and goals set by parents may vary by the developmental level of their children, the present study will maintain a narrow focus by examining the goals held by parents of preschool children.

No studies relating parents’ goals to their choices of teasing were found in a systematic literature research. However, indirect support can be found in several observational studies. Previous observational studies of interactions between adults (as parents) and children suggest two goals in the use of teasing: 1) to socialize compliance and 2) to play with and have fun with children (Boxer & Crot’s-Conde, 1997; Einsenberg, 1986; Miller, 1986; Schiefflin, 1986; Zink, 1988; Clancy, 1986; Loudon, 1970). Some teasing sequences are simply playful instances, while others incorporate underlying messages into the exchange. Both goals can fall into the category of socialization goals because parents use teasing interactions as a means to *teach* children how to obey and to play harmoniously with others. Although the two goals are not entirely distinct, to

view teasing from each perspective will provide a useful framework for understanding the complexity of interactions between parents and children.

### *Teasing as Discipline*

Miller (1986) asserts that when parents use teasing as a means of discipline, their child rearing beliefs are reflected in their actions. The typical teasing sequence in Miller's (1986) study begins with the caregiver issuing a challenge and the child responding with a counterclaim or nonverbal counteraction. For example, a mother seizes a doll that her child likes and claims, "This is my baby." The child assertively counterclaims that this is not the mother's baby. When interviewed, this mother says "teasing will make her (the child) want to learn on her own. It will encourage her to be independent. It makes her mad, gives me a chance to encourage her if she has trouble....." (Miller, 1986, p.203). Used in this manner, teasing may reflect the parent's attempt to instill strength and independence, to teach the child mechanisms for controlling hurt feelings and methods for self defense, and communicate the importance of asserting oneself when confronted by another individual.

Parents also use teasing as a means of controlling a child's behavior (Loudon, 1970; Schieffelin, 1986; Eisenberg, 1986). When parents tease as a way of redirecting a child's activity or securing his/her obedience, teasing conveys an underlying message concerning compliance. This is evident when a parent teases a child while attempting to get him/her to go to bed or brush his/her teeth. However, when immediate safety issues are involved, it is unlikely that a parent will use teasing as a means of controlling a child's behavior. For example, when a child behaves recklessly in front of a burning stove, parents are more likely to take direct action to prevent injury to their child than to use the situation as an opportunity for teasing. Without the need to

ensure immediate safety, parents appear to use teasing more often as a subtle instrument in controlling children's behavior.

Parents also use teasing to convey a message of disapproval and approval of certain behavior to their children. This can be seen when a parent warns a child by teasing that a witch or the bogeyman will come and take them away if they misbehave (Eisenberg, 1986). This type of teasing may ultimately generate intended outcomes through internalization. Take the example of a bogeyman, teasing is used as a reasoning technique for a child's misbehaviors. As the child begins to consider the reasons for being spirited away by the witch or bogeyman, he/she may also internalize parental beliefs, values, and attitudes.

Unfortunately, parents can use teasing in an intrusive and destructive manner. For instance, when parents use teasing to evoke compliance, they may exercise an unnecessarily degree of authority over their children. This undesirable result may happen within the context of discipline. Because discipline can signify parental control, parents may use teasing as a means of maintaining or increasing authority or power under the guise of play. Rosenberg (1997) found that children felt shame when their parents used teasing combined with power assertion, withdraw of love, or conditional approval. Individuals who are prone to feeling shame are at-risk for a number of maladaptive psychological symptoms and interpersonal coping styles, including depression (Lewis, 1984; Tangey, Burggraf, & Wagner, 1995), externalization of blame (Tangy, 1995), and low self-esteem (Lewis, 1992; Tangey et al., 1995). Parents who introduce more authority than necessary in controlling or teasing compliance may elicit aggressive and painful reactions to teasing in their children. In this regard, parental teasing resembles bullying and sarcasm (Albert, 1992), and probably does not result in a positive outcome for children.



Still, teasing can be a useful parenting tool. When combined with playful contextualization cues such as exaggerated head-shaking, parents can signal to their children that the conveyed messages are not to be taken too seriously, even within the context of discipline. In this manner, teasing, even for potentially challenging messages of compliance, creates a safe communication between parents and children (Eisenberg, 1986; Miller, 1986; Schiefflin, 1986). Zink (1989) recognized that humor, a variation of teasing, provides a way for individuals to point out others' mistakes without hurting feelings. In this respect, teasing provides parents with a valuable method for disciplining children. Moreover, Clancy (1986) believes that teasing plays a vital role in strengthening the effects of discipline. Since the emotions evoked by teasing are very real and powerful, one can use teasing to reinforce the emotions and reactions expected of children in and by the surrounding society. So long as teasing is not used in conjunction with love-withdrawal or in an intrusive manner, children may benefit by receiving instruction in values and skills necessary for functioning as members of a society.

#### *Teasing as Play Socialization*

Teasing is generally considered to be an important form of fun and amusement (Eisenberg, 1986). Parents tease children as part of fun and play (Eisenberg, 1986; Miller, 1986; Labrell, 1994; Di Pietro, 1981). This is evident when parents comment, "I was just playing" (Miller, 1986). Even when parents tease children for their own amusement, the child often participates in the fun (Eisenberg, 1986; Miller, 1986), indicating that the parental goal is simply shared enjoyment. Parents and children signify that teasing is a form of play through their communication in various ways (Alberts, 1992). Perhaps most obvious is the reciprocal laughter and smiles that accompany playful teasing (Eisenberg, 1986; Miller, 1986).

The importance of teasing where parenting is concerned is generally confined to asides in the literature, and not explicitly examined with regard to parent-child interactions. However, parents often seem to distinguish between playful and non-playful teasing. Parents who repeatedly initiate identical teasing exchanges with their children show by repetitiveness that the teasing is intended as play (Miller, 1986; Zink, 1989; Eisenberg, 1986). Also, playful teasing conversations with their young children is highly routinized, allowing children to interpret their parents' intention. (Eisenberg, 1986). Having participated in a very similar interaction on prior occasions allows the child to easily recognize their parents' intent and outcome of the current teasing episode. This type of teasing is referred to as ritualistic teasing (Handelman & Kapfere, 1972; Alberts, 1992; Pawulk, 1980; Miller, 1986). Based on past experience of playful teasing, parents and children may both expect to enjoy teasing as a positive exchange.

Utilizing ritualistic teasing as well as playful contextualization cues, the parental goal of having fun with a child will implicitly coincide with the goal of having the child participate in the teasing event (Eisenberg, 1986). For example, when a mother teases her daughter as a part of play, her goal is to encourage her child to act somewhat assertively, even against a parent. However, when the same mother uses teasing when disciplining her daughter, she does not expect the same response (Miller, 1986; Eisenberg, 1986). This indicates that while children are encouraged to challenge parents during teasing marked by play, such assertion is not allowed in other teasing contexts.

Likewise, research on teasing in verbal play indicates that parents encourage children to contribute or participate in constructing teasing episodes (Eisenberg, 1986; Miller, 1986). In fact, during play, parents and children often interact in a manner in which all participants jointly construct the play and shape the events that occur (Russell et al., 1998). As parents encourage

children to contribute in the constructing of teasing episodes, parents and children appear to negotiate about the teasing content (Miller, 1986; Eisenberg, 1986). Perhaps, this may reflect parents' allowance for children to shape the course of teasing interactions. By encouraging and allowing children to participate in the construction of teasing episodes, the interactions between parents and children seem to become much more reciprocal in playful teasing.

Having established the characteristics of playful teasing within the parent-child relationship, a question arises regarding parents' intention or goals behind the action: What is the intention behind a parent's desire to engage and encourage a child's participation in teasing? Since the interactions between parents and children differ between teasing-as-discipline and teasing-as-play, reciprocal teasing appears to hold significant meaning reflecting parental intent.

According to Russell et al. (1998), different types of parent-child interactions provide diverse learning opportunities. Several studies have reported that parent-child interactions occurring in a coaching context provide children with a heightened sense of protection, whereas parent-child interactions occurring in a play context offer opportunities for children to practice and elaborate upon interaction and social skills (Harup & Laursen, 1991; Russell et al., 1998). Similarly, it can be assumed that teasing is initially learned within safe contexts, in interaction with parents who will not react unfavorably nor retaliate cruelly (Zink 1989; Alberts, 1992). When teasing is incorporated as a playful enterprise, children may learn effective interaction skills through practice with their parents. Eisenberg (1986) believes that supporting children in the teasing interaction helps the children understand that teasing is a form of play and helps them learn to play along, enacting the role of self-defender. Alternatively, parents may use teasing in this context to socialize children and teach them methods and expectations for participation in interaction and reciprocation with others. Because parents allow and even expect counterteasing

from children in playful teasing, for instance, this may provide an opportunity for children to acquire and promote turn-taking and negotiation skills.

In addition, by encouraging more participation, parents may enhance children's ability to practice emotional regulation and recognition of others' affective states and skills that build competence in interactions with others. Russell et al. (1998) believe that these competencies in this skill area learned from parent-child interactions are transferred to child-peer relationships. Thus, the parental goal of having children participate in playful teasing has a significant implication for peer relationships.

Even though teasing used in play with parents seems to foster significant skills and competencies, it does not occur without the risk of evoking children's distress. Since parents themselves are afforded some sense of amusement from the interaction, teasing may be, at times, conducted at a level of complexity beyond children's understanding. Also, if teasing is repeated excessively, it will eventually escalate to the point where children are unable to recognize the exchange as playful, increasing the feelings of distress even to the point of tears (Eisenberg, 1986). Therefore, teasing in play requires incursions in the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD explains the difference between what children can accomplish on their own and what they can accomplish with the guidance of a more competent associate (Vygotsky, 1987). For teasing to be considered playful, it must occur within the context of a relationship that has an appropriate level of parental guidance. A child will only interpret and understand teasing as playful if it remains within the ZPD. Teasing that goes beyond a child's understanding due to the lack of parental skill in recognizing children's developmental level is considered merely antagonistic behavior.

*Power Dynamics in Parent-Child Teasing Interactions: Vertical vs. Horizontal Power*

For goals to be effectively carried into interactions, parents need to regulate their power. Accumulating research on the effectiveness of parental power-assertion indicates that exerting a certain degree of parental power and control influences the socialization outcomes on children (e.g. Baumrind, 1971; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Accordingly, when a parent uses teasing to obtain some socialization outcomes or effects, the process by which power is transacted during the interaction should be taken into consideration.

Kuczynski (2003) argues that the relationship context is crucial in understanding the power dynamics between parents and children. Here, relationships are considered to be the context that is composed of a series of interactions. Hinde (1979) distinguishes between an interaction and relationship by suggesting two people interacting for the first time do not have a relationship. The assumption of relationship as context suggests that a relationship is a building block for parent-child interaction (Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997). Unlike other types of relationships, the parent-child relationship is distinctive in its interactions because parents and children interact much more on a day-to-day basis than other partners in most other relationships and they share an abundant history of interactions (Lollis, 2003; Kuczynski et al., 1999; Kuczynski et al., 1997).

As parents and children accumulate a history of interactions, parents and children develop mutual expectations for how the other will behave, how they interact together, and what the other intends (Lollis, 2003; Maccoby, 2002). In other words, parents and children develop particular “scripts” in their interactions. Goffman (1974) argues that a script of activity will be perceived by its participants in terms of rules or keying. Keying is used to define rules or premises of the scripts (Goffman, 1974). Given the immense quantity of interactions, parents and

children seem to form their own ways of keying or interaction patterns. They may also build up rules that both parents and children understand, but not other people. By sharing scripts, parents and children may attempt to fit their actions to their understanding of what is it going on in interactions.

Lollis (2003) extends the argument that relationship context influences are not only the present interactions but also future parent-child interactions. Parents and children have anticipations of the future that are guided by *the goals* that they wish to achieve with each other (Lollis, 2003). It is the goals that help to guide parent and child behavior toward the achievement of an idealized outcome through interactions. "As such, goals are constructions that lead the development of a person or a relationship from the present into the future" (Lollis, 2003, p. 82). With the anticipation of interactions, and knowing that the relationships will persist beyond the present, parents may act in a way that promotes not only the immediate goals but also future goals (Dawber & Kuczynski, 1999). Teasing interactions between parents and children may not be the exception for this matter. The future course of the relationships may contribute to teasing interactions along with past and present experiences. With mutual expectations, shared scripts and goals, the relationship that parents and children form provides the foundations for their continuing day-to-day interactions including teasing.

How do power dynamics play a role in the relationship context, and eventually influence teasing interactions between parents and children? Several scholars in recent years suggest that power in parent-child relationships contain both vertical and horizontal elements (Russell et al., 1998; Kuczynski, et al., 1999; Kuczynski & Hildebrandt, 1997; Kochanska, 1997; Maccoby, 2003). The vertical relationship involves unequal distribution of power or authority, and interactions between parents and children are assumed to be complementary and asymmetrical

(Harup & Lorenz, 1991; Russell et al., 1998; Kochanska, 1992; Harach & Kuczynski, 1999; Kuczynski, 2003). In contrast, a horizontal relationship is characterized as having shared power, and interactions between parents and children are assumed to be reciprocal (Russell et al, 1998; Kuczynski, et al., 1999; Kuczynski, 2003; Kochanska, 1997). It is within these relationship contexts that power dynamics play a role in interactions. To understand how power is transacted during teasing interaction, it is important to discuss each type of power in depth.

Vertical qualities of power are most likely to appear in disciplinary contexts (Russell et al., 1998) in that parents attempt to exert more power when disciplining their children. When parents use teasing as a means of obtaining compliance or controlling children's behaviors, the interactions involve greater parental power or authority. Since discipline involves instruction of important values and beliefs of society, parents may expect children to be learners. However, parents may lower power if they perceive that their children become too upset. Also, past experiences of teasing interactions may help parents to know how much teasing children can handle. To promote disciplinary goals, parents may need to adjust power in interaction.

Contrary to the vertical type of power, horizontal qualities of power are most likely to be evident during play and least likely to be seen in a discipline context (Russell et al., 1998). When parents use teasing for fun or play, horizontal dimensions of power seem to emerge. In horizontal interactions, power is somewhat equally shared between parents and children (Russell et al., 1998). The notion of shared power may seem paradoxical since parents, in general, possess much more knowledge and ability than their children. However, parents and children can be said to share power when each make a contribution to the initiation and maintenance of interactions, when they make a joint decision, when they cooperate and negotiate, when they argue about rules and when they both enhance conflict (Russell et al, 1998; Kuczynski et al., 1999). In

playful teasing, parents seem to be aware of and accept that their children are active participants who contribute to the construct of teasing episodes (Miller, 1986; Einsenberg, 1986). Moreover, parents not only encourage children to participate more in teasing but also to negotiate more about the teasing content. In some instances, children seem to be allowed to even manipulate teasing to avoid unfavorable outcomes. (Miller, 1986; Einsenberg, 1986). As such, power is balanced between parents and children. Perhaps, parents may lower their power in order to share power with their children. Indeed, parents have been found to *cede power* to children in the interest of promoting the child's happiness, autonomy, and social skills (Maccoby, 2003).

It is important to note that granting or ceding power by parents does not mean that children are powerless. Children have the capacity to draw resources into the interaction with their parents. The evidence is found in a study done by Hildebrandt and Kuczynski (1998). In this study, children were asked about their ability to influence their own mother, their best friend's mother, or an unfamiliar mother in various situations. Children were confident that they could influence their mother more than mothers who are not their own (Hildebrandt & Kuczynski, 1998). Children base their influence attempts on the knowledge derived from their mothers' reactions in similar past situations. With other adult women, children did not perceive themselves as having such resources to use (Hildebrandt & Kuczynski, 1998). Certainly, the parent-child relationship context is an important source of children's power.

Another important aspect of the horizontal dimension of power is that even if parents and children share power, this does not necessary mean that they are absolutely equal. Because of asymmetry in the levels of knowledge between parents and children, and because of socializer versus socialized roles, a perfect balance or too much equality of power between parents and children could be dysfunctional (Russell et al., 1998). Thus, horizontal interactions occur in the



context of a relationship that has an appropriate level of parental authority and involves positive kinds of vertical qualities. Likewise, playful teasing allows children to challenge or countertease their parents, yet parents seem to monitor the action of their children. For example, if the teasing has gone too far, parents may change the course of action. In order to have fun, parents may need to exercise an appropriate level of control.

Nevertheless, parents can lose their control of power in some playful teasing. Playful teasing can escalate and go beyond children's understanding. To avoid these painful consequences, parents may count on cues. Parents may speculate how children feel at a particular moment if they are attentive to changes in facial expressions, voice tones, and gestures. This is similar to teasing that occurs in vertical interactions since cues may help inform parents what they are doing is not hurting children. Cues, therefore, seem to provide a crucial tool for assessing goals and the interaction process. As Dix (1992) suggests, parents constantly evaluate and modify goals as interactions proceed. If children show any sign of distress or of being upset during the interaction, parents may change their course of actions and start reevaluating goals. Depending on cues or children's reactions, parents may adjust their behaviors or even reconstruct goals during teasing interactions with their children.

#### *Interaction Effect of Attributions on Parental Goals and Levels of Parental Power*

Having established a link between parental goals and parental power in teasing interactions, it becomes important to consider the effect of other parenting variables that may affect the association. Parents' goals do not correspond to their behaviors in a one-to-one manner (Hasting & Grusec, 1998; Rubin & Mills, 1992; Dix & Branca 2003). One of the most investigated factors believed to influence the relationship between parental goals and behaviors is parents' attributions for children's behavior (Dix & Grusec, 1985; McGillicuddy-De Lisi &

Sigel, 1995; Dix & Branca, 2003; Grusec & Unger, 2003; Hasting & Grusec, 1998; Rubin & Mills, 1992). Attributions (explanations people construct for social experiences) largely determine how individuals perceive and react to experiences (Shaffer, 1994). Parents' attributions, therefore, are explanations used to infer the cause of children's behavior in given situations. Although no studies have examined how parental attributions for children's behavior influence the link between parental goals and parental power in teasing interactions, indirect support was found in studies of maternal self-efficacy and controllability, as well as in the literature on parental goals and behaviors.

The effect of parents' attributions for children's behavior on level of power assertion has been examined in studies of maternal self-efficacy conducted by Bugental and her associates (Bugental, Lyon, Lin, McGrath, & Bimbela, 1999; Bugental, Blue, & Cruzcosa, 1989; Bugental & Happaney, 2001). These studies are noteworthy because they assess the relationship between parental attributions and parents' use of coercive power in ambiguous situations. Findings of these studies suggest that mothers' use of coercive power is particularly salient when children's actions are ambiguous, that is when the intention of children's behavior is unclear (Bugental et al., 1989; Bugental et al., 1999). Because of unpredictability that comes in ambiguous situations, mothers in Bugental et al.'s (1989, 2002) studies are likely to attribute negative intention to the children's behavior. Since teasing is widely recognized as an ambiguous act (Shapiro et al., 1991; Keltner, et al., 2001; Albert, 1992; Martin, 1989; Pawluk, 1989), it is possible that the ambiguity of teasing heighten the relationship between attributions for children's behavior and parental power assertion.

For teasing, ambiguity plays a role in the affective contrast between humor and aggression (Shapiro et al., 1991). There are various ways in which parents' attributions for

children's behavior influence their levels of power. For example, if parents attribute the teasing behavior of their children to aggression (a negative intention), then parents may raise their power level. On the other hand, if parents attribute the teasing behavior of their children to just being funny (a positive intention), it is likely that parents will lower their power level. However, as discussed previously, parents' power exertion also depends on their intended goals. In the course of pursuing their goals, parents constantly gather information about the extent to which the goal is being achieved (Dix, 1992). Hence, selective attributions may be influenced by the type of goal selected by the parent, which in turn may influence the level of parental power exerted in a given situation.

Hasting and Grusec (1998) found that parental goals were related not only to behavior but also to attributions made for children's actions and to emotions felt by parents, which supports the idea that parental attribution influences both goals and level of power. For instance, if a parent has a goal focused on compliance, he/she will be much more likely to use *power-assertive* behavior (Hasting & Grusec, 1998). If a parent attributes the cause of a child's misbehavior as deliberate and dispositional, he/she might feel upset and annoyed (Hasting & Grusec, 1998). Thus, with regard to teasing, goals may influence the level of parental power assertion indirectly by affecting parents' cognition, such as casual attributions for their children's actions.

### *Hypotheses and Research Question*

The association between parental goals and teasing has been investigated by very few researchers whose findings are primarily based on observational studies (see Miller, 1986; Eisenberg, 1986; Schieffelin, 1986; Loudon, 1970). Goals described in these studies were derived from researchers' observations, rather than what parents thought. Parental motivation for initiating teasing encounters with their children remains unclear. While it may be that parents

tease their children in hopes of having fun or achieving disciplinary and socialization goals, it may be that parents have other goals in mind. Therefore, the present study investigated the following hypotheses and research questions.

Hypothesis 1 Parents identify goals for teasing as compliance, socialization, and fun (or play).

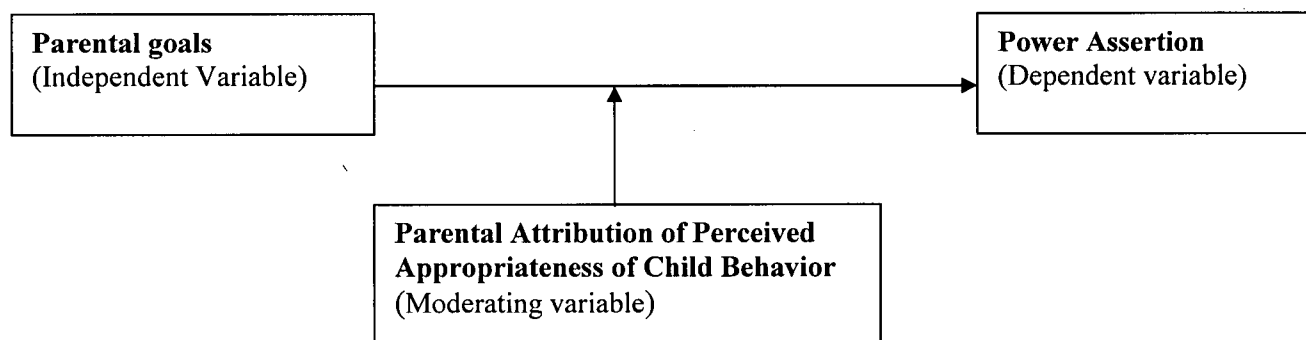
Research Question 1: In addition to the goals of compliance, socialization, and fun (or play), are there any other goals involved in parental teasing of children?

Hypothesis 2: Parents' goals of fun, compliance, and socialization during teasing vary by context. Parents will tend to endorse fun as a goal in playful situations; compliance and socialization goals will be endorsed more often when circumstances require obedience for safety or prudential reasons.

Research Question 2: If parents have other goals for teasing, do those goals differ according to whether the interaction occurs in a setting that is playful or one that requires obedience for safety or prudential reasons?

The use of parental power in teasing will be examined together with their goals. Dix (1992) suggested that parental goals influence their behavior indirectly by affecting parents' attribution for their children's actions. If parents perceive that their children are behaving inappropriately, then they will adjust the goals. Depending on those adjusted goals, it is speculated that parents may change the level of power exercised. Figure 1 displays these relationships.

Figure 1. Teasing power dynamics model



The Teasing power dynamics model (Figure 1) suggests the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 3: Parents' goals have a direct effect on the level of parental power assertion.

Specifically, parents' goal of fun will be negatively associated with their desire to use an assertion of power to change children's behavior. Parents' goals of compliance and socialization will be positively associated with the desire to use power assertion actions to change their children's behavior.

Hypothesis 4: Attributions for the appropriateness of the child's behavior have a moderating effect on the relationship between parental goals and the level of power that parents use. Higher levels of power assertiveness are more likely to be associated with compliance and socialization goals when parents perceive that their children's behavior is inappropriate in teasing interactions. In contrast, lower levels of power assertiveness are more likely to be associated with a goal of having fun when parents perceive that their children's behavior is appropriate in teasing interactions.

## Method

### *Sample*

Fifty-two parents (43 mothers and 9 fathers) with children between the ages of 3 to 5 years participated in this study. Participants came from a pool of parents who had expressed interest in taking part in research in response to recruitment done at the University of British Columbia daycare centers in Canada ( $n=42$ ) and at a daycare center in the United States ( $n=10$ ). A series of  $t$  tests were conducted to ensure that parents in Canada and in the United States did not differ in age, marital status, education level, and current employment status. No significant differences were found across all these variables.

The mean age of participating parents was 37.5 years old ( $SD=6.02$ , range of 27 to 55 years) and mean age of their children was 3.9 years old ( $SD=0.60$ ). The majority of parents were married and living with their partners (81%) and did not have previous child-rearing experience (73.1%). Parents in this study were well educated. Four percent reported high school as their highest degree; 17.2 percent reported some post/community college or post-secondary education; 50 percent had either completed coursework toward a university degree or had earned a university degree; and 28.8 percent had attained graduate degrees. Thirty-six percent ( $n=19$ ) of parents were not employed outside of the home, 31 percent ( $n=16$ ) were employed part-time and 33 percent ( $n=17$ ) were employed full-time. In terms of ethnicity, the majority were self-identified as Canadian ( $n=25, 51\%$ ). In decreasing frequency, the other participants reported Asian ( $n=10, 20\%$ ), European ( $n=6, 12\%$ ), and American ( $n=4, 8\%$ ). The remaining were from a variety of backgrounds ( $n=4, 8\%$ ). Three participants did not respond to the question regarding ethnicity.

Since participants were homogenous with respect to education levels and living arrangements, there was reduced chance of variability in detecting different characteristics related to parenting. Therefore, it was not necessary to incorporate any control variables into this study.

### *Procedures*

Permission to advertise the study was granted by the administrators at the daycare centers. Administrators then asked teachers to assist in recruiting parents. The initial study plan included the use of personal interviews to supplement information gathered from the questionnaires. Interviews were carried out with 10 parents of 3- to 5-year-old children. Unfortunately, after several weeks of recruitment, this researcher was unable to secure a sufficient number of interview participants. The busy schedules of parents of 3- to 5-year-old children generated problems associated with scheduling interviews and seemed to interfere with their ability and decision to participate in the study. In order to achieve an adequate sample size, interviews were replaced with short written answers on the distributed surveys. Letters to advertise the study were again approved by administrators. Administrator distributed letters to all parents of children registered in the daycare centers (see Appendix A).

Each questionnaire contained instructions for completing the survey and a pre-addressed, stamped envelope (see Appendix B). Parents were instructed to complete the survey at a time convenient to themselves. Parents were informed that returning the completed questionnaires indicated their consent to participate in this study, and parents were provided the right to terminate filling out the survey at any time. Parents were assured of confidentiality, and parents were also informed that there were no anticipated risks for participants. Following the completion of questionnaires, parents were asked to mail the finished surveys using the pre-

addressed, stamped envelopes provided with the questionnaires. The overall response rate of survey distributed in this way was 43%.

The answers obtained from participants using the short essay format and the interviews were compared. Participants' responses to the short essay and interview formats were almost identical. Some parents provided more detailed answers in the short essay format than those responding to interviews. Therefore, the format was incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire. Responses from parents administered the survey using both methods are included in this study.

### *Measures*

#### *Demographic information*

Parents were asked to self-report their age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, education level, current employment status, age and gender of their children, and residential arrangement with their children (see Appendix C).

#### *Hypothetical Teasing Scenarios*

Since no published studies have as yet examined parental teasing, hypothetical scenarios of parent-child teasing episodes were created based on Zink's (1988) findings about humor between parents and their children. Two pilot studies were planned to empirically test the initial hypothetical teasing scenarios. The first pilot study was conducted with 11 parents of various age groups and cultural backgrounds residing in both Canada and United States. This was done to assess whether the content of scenarios represented teasing contexts that were fairly common to parents and were easily identifiable situations in terms of their daily life experiences. As a result, three scenarios were dropped from the survey and the wording of some scenarios, as well as questions, were changed. For the second pilot study, five parents living in Canada were asked to



evaluate the content of the revised scenarios and questions. All five parents commented that the scenarios were easy to understand and the content of scenarios represented common teasing interactions to parents of 3 to 5 year old children.

Hypothetical scenarios have been used in parenting research (Dix & Grusec, 1983; Dawber & Kuczynski, 1999; Hasting & Grusec, 1988; Grusec & Kuczynski, 1980) as a means for providing meaningful and unambiguous contexts for parental self-reports of cognition and behavior. There is evidence that scores of parental behaviors derived from mothers' responses to hypothetical scenarios predict observed behavior in a laboratory situation (Grusec, 1994). Considering the variety of conditions and circumstances that can be depicted through scenarios, hypothetical methods facilitate exploration of parents' intentions in a broader context than is possible through the use of observational methods. In addition, since the term "teasing" can be perceived negatively by some parents (Lighter, Bollmer, Harris, Milich, & Scambler, 2000; Zink, 1988), hypothetical scenarios enable parents to report answers without provoking negative feelings regarding teasing.

Six hypothetical scenarios describing teasing interactions between parents and children were used to assess parental goals in teasing. The first scenario focuses on the socialization aspects of teasing:

*A 4-year-old child is about to leave the dinner table, but dirty dishes are left on the table. When her mother notices that, she grins and says to her child, "My dear Princess Jennifer, would you like me to take your dishes to the counter or could you please possibly do it yourself?"*

The second scenario is more concerned with the fun aspect of teasing:

*A father is playing ball with his 5-year-old son as usual. The child throws a ball that hits his father's arm. The father isn't hurt, but he reacts by trying to be funny and screams "Yeow!" as if he has been hurt.*

The third and fourth scenarios and the fifth and sixth scenarios were paired in that the content of the teasing interactions were identical but the interactions occurred in different settings. The third and fourth scenarios describe a teasing interaction where a child mimics her mother and calls her father in a manner used by her mother. This teasing interaction takes place in both a playful situation and under circumstances requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues.

### ***Playful situation***

*A 4-year-old girl hears her mother calling the girl's father "Honeeey!" in an exaggerated tone.*

*The child and her father are playing hide-and-seek. When the child finds her dad, she is very excited. The father also enjoys being found. Now it is the father's turn to find his child. As the father looks for his child, he can hear that his child is giggling.*

*When the father finds her, the child imitates her mother by saying "Honeeey!" while laughing.*

### ***Circumstance requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues***

*A child is in a department store with her mother and father. While they are in the men's clothing section looking for shirts for her father, the child starts giggling and hides under the clothing racks. The father hears his child giggling and notices that she is hiding as if she is expecting to be found. The father says, "Come here right now, we are not playing hide-and-seek in a department store!" with a firm voice. But the child is still giggling and hiding. The father raises his voice and says "Stop playing now". As the father walks toward to his child, she becomes more excited. When the father finds her under the clothing racks, the child laughs and imitates her mother by saying to her father "Honeeey!".*

The fifth and sixth scenarios describe a teasing interaction where a child plays with a stick while his mother is nearby. Again, this interaction occurs in both a playful situation and under circumstances requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues.

### ***Playful situation***

*A mother and her 4-year-old son, Bob, are playing with a toy together. When the mother offers a toy to Bob, Bob takes it slowly with a smile on his face. As the mother notices Bob's smile, she also starts smiling. Now Bob wants to give it back to his mother. As his mother is about to take it, Bob suddenly withdraws the toy. Now Bob is very excited. This exchange between Bob and his mother is repeated again. When Bob withdraws the toy for the third time, he is giggling and says, "Take it, take it mommy!"*

### ***Circumstance requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues***

*Bob finds a stick in the yard. He uses it to bang on the door. The mother warns him stop banging but he keeps banging on the door and the noise becomes louder. Bob is giggling while banging on the door. Finally the mother comes up to Bob and says, "Stop banging on the door right now. That isn't nice. Give me that stick, Bob." Bob grins as he slowly shows the stick to his mother. Just as his mother is about to take it away from him, Bob abruptly withdraws the stick. The mother raises her voice and says, "This isn't play. Give it to me now." Bob withdraws the stick again. Bob is still giggling and says, "Take it, take it mommy!"*

### ***Parenting Goals***

For the each of hypothetical teasing situations, participants were asked to consider goals that the parent in each scenario had in mind (see Appendix D). Each survey participant was given a list of pre-generated goals, describing a variety of possible goals for parent-child interactions. Twelve pre-generated goals were derived from previous parental goal studies (Hasting & Grusec's, 1998; Dix & Branca, 2003). Those goals included: 1) get the child to behave properly right away, 2) make the child happier, 3) help the child get along better in life, 4) teach the child that it is possible to work out a situation in a mutually satisfying way of dealing with the problem, 5) have a good time together, 6) maintain/enhance a loving and trusting relationship with the child, 7) be amusing, fun, and stimulating, 8) follow family routines (eating, health, cleanliness), 9) display proper manners, 10) gain respect from the child, 11) want to understand the child's point of view in a given situation, and 12) want to promote both the

child's and parent's happiness. Each goal was rated using a 5-point Likert-style scale, with response options ranging from "not much" to "a lot".

For the purpose of statistical analysis, these twelve goals were grouped conceptually into six categories (Dix & Branca, 2003; Hasting & Grusec, 1998): Compliance (get the child to behave properly right away, follow family routines, and display proper manner), Fun (have a good time together and be amusing, fun, and stimulating), Socialization (help the child get along better in life, teach the child that it is possible to work out in a mutually satisfying way of dealing with the problem), Parent-centered (gain respect from the child), Child-centered (make the child happier and want to understand the child's point of view in a given situation), and Relationship-centered (maintain/enhance a loving and trusting relationship with the child and want to promote both a child's and parent's happiness).

Note that only one item was used in measuring the Parent-centered goal. Thus, Cronbach's alpha for the Parent-centered goal was not calculated. Averaged Cronbach's alphas for the six categories were .63 for Compliance, .80 for Fun, .66 for Socialization, .33 for Child-centered, and .80 for Relationship-centered goals. Cronbach's alphas for each goal category across all scenarios are presented in Appendix E.

#### *Parental Power Assertion*

Recall that the third and fourth scenarios and the fifth and sixth scenarios were matched with regard to teasing interactions but the interactions took place in different contexts. These hypothetical scenarios were used to examine the levels of power assertion that parents exercise during the teasing interactions.

As previously stated, parents are more likely to exert power when seeking to obtain compliance from their children, and least likely to do so when they are playing with their

children (Russell et al., 1998). Since the levels of power that parents exercise vary by the context of a given situation, this study investigated parental power assertiveness levels during teasing episodes in playful situations as well as in circumstances requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues.

Participants were asked to rate the scenario parent's level of desire to change the child's behavior. Participants selected a stem from two choices: The stem was worded in two ways: "I think the father/mother might wish to change the child's behavior because...." or "I think the father/mother might not wish to change the child's behavior because....". Response choices for both stems were on a 5-point Likert-style scale ranging from "not much" to "a lot." Participants were also asked to provide a short explanation for their selected answers. The short answers from the explanation were used to verify the respondents' use of the Likert-type scale assessing power assertion. The selection of the stem of the item was checked against the score on the Likert-type scale along with short answers. Participants' short answers regarding the parent's desire to change or not change the child's behavior were coded into vertical or horizontal power schemes. Overall, there was 84% agreement between the selection of the stem of the item and the score of the Likert-type scale along with short answers.

The coding of vertical and horizontal power was derived from Harach and Kuczynski's (1999) study. This coding system was employed because it was developed inductively to reflect parents' reports of the vertical and horizontal components in parent-child relationships.

Word choice and intention were used to code participants' responses. If a response showed more than one theme, it was coded twice. Vertical power was considered present if participants reported any of the following themes: 1) Obedience/Compliance: parent requests compliance and obedience, 2) Respect / Authority: parent is or expects to be treated respectfully,

3) Respect for property, 4) Safety (security): provision of security and protection, 5) Ignoring/Withdraw: parent ignores or moves on to a next topic and activities, 6) Parent's agenda: parent wants to fulfill his/her own wish or agenda. 7) Concerns for future: parent wants/tries to teach a child values, societal rules, or important lessons for the child's future benefit, and 8) Reasoning: parent uses reasoning to explain the situation or the consequences of a child's behavior.

Horizontal power was assumed to be present when parents reported any of following themes: 1) Companionship: parent/child have fun and play in activities that they enjoy, 2) Communication: parent and child share feelings or ideas with the others; communicate with each other, 3) Validating: parent recognizes child's role in activities and encourages participation, 4) Affection: intimacy, showing close relationship, 5) Empathy: parent wants/tries to understand child's point of view and feelings; wants to promote child's happiness.

A Cohen's kappa coefficient was used to calculate the reliability of two independent coders for 50 completed questionnaires (1 participant did not answer any questions; 2 participants skip some of short answers; 1 participant gave answers that were uninterpretable). Cohen's kappa for the overall agreement between coders was .88.

#### *Parental Attributions for the Child Behavior*

Parents' attributions for the child behavior were examined by using paired hypothetical teasing scenarios. For the paired hypothetical teasing scenarios, participants were asked to rate the appropriateness of the child's response to his/her parent. A 5-point Likert-style scale with response options ranging from "not appropriate" to "very appropriate" was used. Participants were again asked to provide a short explanation for their selected answers. The stem of the item was worded in two ways: "I think the child's behavior toward his/her mother or father is

appropriate because..." or "I think the child's behavior toward his/her mother or father is not appropriate because....". These short answers were used to verify the respondents' use of the Likert-type scale assessing parental attributions for the child behavior. The selection of the stem was checked against the score on the Likert-type scale. Overall agreement between the selection of stem of the item and the score on the Likert-type scale was 96%.

## Results

Preliminary analyses involved testing for gender differences in the means of all variables. Several studies on humor and teasing point out that there are gender differences in teasing (Keltner et al., 2001; Lampert, 1996; Eisenberg, 1986). Men are believed to be more likely to tease (Eisenberg, 1986), and to use more aggressive forms of provocation than women (Gleason & Greif, 1983). Results of the  $t$  tests between mothers and fathers on all variables demonstrated that mothers and fathers did not differ in the choice of parenting goals, the levels of attribution of perceived appropriateness, and power assertiveness.

### *Hypothesis One: Parenting Goals*

Based on previous observation studies (Miller, 1986; Eisenberg, 1986; Schieffelin, 1986; Loudon, 1970), it was hypothesized that parents identify goals for teasing as compliance, socialization, and fun. As shown in Table 1, participants expressed greater concerns for the goal of obtaining compliance in the socialization context and situations requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues. For socialization goals, the highest rating was seen in the socialization context. However, participants rated the socialization goals relatively high in both playful situations and in situations requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues. As for the fun goals, participants expressed greater concern in playful situations, but showed least concern in the situations requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues.



Table 1.

*Mean and Standard Deviation of the Importance of the Six Parenting Goals for Each Scenario*

Type of Parenting Goals	Scenario					
	Socialization (1)	Playful (2)	Playful (3)	Obedience/Safety (4)	Playful (5)	Obedience/Safety (6)
Compliance						
<i>M</i>	3.65	2.23	2.32	3.94	2.35	3.95
<i>SD</i>	.95	.98	1.13	.79	1.07	.85
Fun						
<i>M</i>	3.88	4.14	4.44	1.57	4.24	1.50
<i>SD</i>	.94	1.05	.97	.77	.99	.86
Socialization						
<i>M</i>	3.69	2.88	2.99	2.98	3.12	3.17
<i>SD</i>	1.04	1.05	1.25	1.04	1.24	1.07
Parent-centered						
<i>M</i>	3.43	2.62	2.78	3.85	3.02	3.69
<i>SD</i>	.76	.96	1.18	1.27	1.29	1.25
Child-centered						
<i>M</i>	3.17	2.98	3.81	1.79	3.76	1.74
<i>SD</i>	.80	.98	.84	.84	.88	.89
Relationship						
<i>M</i>	3.98	3.78	4.26	2.76	4.04	2.73
<i>SD</i>	.93	.94	.83	1.05	.90	1.14

*Note.* Numbers in brackets indicate the order of scenarios used in the questionnaire

#### *Research Question One: Other Parental Goals in Teasing*

In addition to goals of compliance, socialization, and fun, it was speculated that parents might have other goals in mind when they tease their children. As Table 1 indicates, a high rating of parent-centered goal was presented in the circumstances requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues. In playful situations, participants were more likely to report the goal focused on a relationship was reported. These results were not found in the socialization setting, where

means of all goals were rated relatively high, suggesting that, in those situations, participants were equally concerned with all goals (see Table 1).

*Hypothesis Two: Fun, Compliance, and Socialization Goals by Context.*

Hypothesis 2 proposed that parents' goals for fun, compliance, and socialization during teasing vary by the context of the interaction. It was postulated that parents would tend to endorse goals for fun in playful situations, whereas goals for compliance and socialization would be endorsed more often in circumstances requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues. This hypothesis was tested using a series of paired *t* tests. The scores of parents' goals were paired across scenarios of playful situations and circumstances requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues. The differences between the pairs of scores for each scenario were calculated separately for fun, compliance, and socialization goals. There were 2 sets (scenarios 3 and 4 portrayed mimicking a mother, and scenarios 5 and 6 portrayed playing with a stick) of paired *t* tests for fun, compliance, and socialization goals.

The results of the series of *t* tests are displayed in Table 2. For both fun and compliance goals, differences were found between a playful situation and circumstances requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues. This result was found in both sets of scenarios. For socialization goals, no differences were found between the two situations. Therefore, socialization goals are not included in the subsequent discussion of analysis.

With regard to parents' endorsement of fun goals in playful settings and compliance goals in those settings requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues, the results were consistent with the hypothesis prediction. For fun goals, mean differences between the two situations were significant (see Table 2), in that parents' fun goals were higher in playful situations ( $M=4.45$ ;  $SD=.96$ ) than in situations requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues

( $M=1.58$ ;  $SD=.78$ ) in the scenario describing a child mimicking a mother. Likewise, fun goals were significantly higher in playful situations ( $M=4.24$ ;  $SD=.99$ ) than in circumstances requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues ( $M=1.50$ ;  $SD=.86$ ) in the scenario involving a child playing with a stick. For compliance goals, mean differences between the two situations were also significant; parents' compliance goals were higher in situations requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues ( $M=3.90$ ;  $SD=.76$ ) than in playful situations ( $M=2.33$ ;  $SD=1.12$ ) in the scenario depicting a child mimicking a mother. In the scenario portraying a child playing with a stick, compliance goals were significantly higher in situations requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues ( $M=3.95$ ;  $SD=.85$ ) than in playful situations ( $M=2.35$ ;  $SD=1.07$ ).

Table 2.

*Paired t test for Parenting Goals by Context (Scenario)*

Paired Variables	<i>M Differences</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>t (df)</i>
<i>Scenario: mimicking a mother</i>		
Playful & Obedience/Safety		
Compliance	-1.56 (1.24)	-8.93 (49) ***
Fun	2.86 (1.20)	16.11 (50) ***
Socialization	.00 (1.20)	.00
Parent-centered	-1.02 (1.63)	-4.41 (49) ***
Relationship	1.51 (1.12)	9.56 (49) ***
<i>Scenario: playing with a stick</i>		
Playful & Obedience/Safety		
Compliance	-1.60 (1.15)	-9.80 (51) ***
Fun	2.74 (1.23)	16.11 (51) ***
Socialization	-.06 (1.46)	-.28 (51)
Parent-centered	-.67 (1.12)	3.10 (51) ***
Relationship	1.31 (1.19)	7.88 (51) ***

Note. \*\*\* $p<.001$

*Research Question Two: Other Parental Goals by Context.*

Research Question 2 stated that if there were other goals in teasing, these goals differed according to context. As revealed by the findings of Research Question 1, relationship goals and parent-centered goals were identified. Assessing only the matched scenarios, paired *t* tests were conducted to determine whether these goals differ by setting. As shown in Table 2, relationship goals were significantly higher in playful situations ( $M=4.27$ ;  $SD=.83$ ) than in circumstances requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues ( $M=2.76$ ;  $SD=1.04$ ) in the scenario describing a child mimicking a mother. Likewise, relationship goals were significantly higher in playful situations ( $M=4.04$ ;  $SD=.90$ ) and circumstances requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues ( $M=2.73$ ;  $SD=1.14$ ) in the scenario involving a child playing with a stick.

For parent-centered goals, mean differences between the two situations were significant in that parent-centered goals were higher in situations requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues ( $M=3.85$ ;  $SD=1.27$ ) than in playful situation ( $M=2.78$ ;  $SD=1.18$ ) in the scenario depicting a child mimicking a mother. In the scenario portraying a child playing with a stick, parent-centered goals were also significantly higher in circumstances requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues ( $M=3.69$ ;  $SD=1.25$ ) than in playful situations ( $M=3.02$ ;  $SD=1.29$ ).

*Hypothesis Three: Direct Effect between Parental Goals and Power Assertion*

It was hypothesized that parents' goal of fun would be negatively associated with their desire to use power assertive action to change a child's behavior; whereas parents' goals of compliance and socialization would be positively associated with their desire to use power assertive action to change a child's behavior. A series of regression analyses were conducted to test this hypothesis. Parental goals were entered into the regression equation with parental power assertion as the dependent variable. This regression was repeated for each of the following goals:

fun, compliance, and socialization. All regressions were repeated for each scenario. The results are summarized in Tables 3, 4, and 5. These tables also present tests of moderating effect proposed in Hypothesis 4 which will be discussed in the next section.

As outlined in Table 3, a significant negative relationship between the fun goal and the parental power assertion was found only in the playful situation involving a child playing with a stick. A negative but not significant relationship between the fun goal and the parental power assertion was found in the playful situation of a child mimicking a mother. In the setting requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues (both a child mimicking a mother and a child playing with a stick scenarios), fun goals were not significantly associated with parental power assertion.

For compliance goals, several significant positive relationships were found, as presented in Table 4. In the playful situation involving a child mimicking a mother, the compliance goal was a significant predictor of level of parental power assertion. Also, the predictive relationship between the compliance goal and level of parental power assertion was significant in the playful situation portraying a child playing with a stick. Under circumstances requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues, the compliance goal was a significant predictor of level of parental power assertion in the setting describing a child playing with a stick. No significant relationship between the compliance goal and level of parental power assertion was found in the situation depicting a child mimicking a mother.

With regard to socialization goals, no regressions revealed significant positive relationship (see Table 5).

Table 3.

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Predicting Parental Power Assertion From Fun Goals and Parental Attributions*

Scenario and Parental Goal	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$F$	$df$
<i>Playful: mimicking a mother (N=46)</i>					
Step 1					
Fun	-.20	.12	---	2.91	2,44
Attribution	-.24	.14			
Step 2					
Fun x Attribution	-.15	.14	.02	2.35	3,43
<i>Obedience/safety: mimicking a mother (N=49)</i>					
Step 1					
Fun	.01	.07	---	1.88	2,47
Attribution	-.27				
Step 2					
Fun x Attribution	-.09	.08	.01	1.36	3,46
<i>Playful: playing with a stick (N=48)</i>					
Step 1					
Fun	-.30**	.51	---	24.93***	2,46
Attribution	-.52***				
Step 2					
Fun x Attribution	-.01	.51	.00	15.68***	3,45
<i>Obedience/safety: playing with a stick (N=44)</i>					
Step 1					
Fun	.08	.21	---	5.43**	2,42
Attribution	-.50*				
Step 2					
Fun x Attribution	.20	.24	.03	4.29**	3,41

Note \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 4.

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Predicting Parental Power Assertion**From Compliance Goals and Parental Attributions N*

Scenario and Parental Goal	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$F$	$df$
<i>Playful: mimicking a mother (N=46)</i>					
Step 1					
Compliance	.60***	.43	---	18.85***	2,44
Attribution	-.21				
Step 2					
Compliance x Attribution	-.08	.44	.01	11.26***	3,43
<i>Obedience/safety: mimicking a mother (N=49)</i>					
Step 1					
Compliance	.25	.14	---	3.66*	2,47
Attribution	-.29*				
Step 2					
Compliance x Attribution	.13	.15	.04	2.67	3,46
<i>Playful: playing with a stick (N=48)</i>					
Step 1					
Compliance	.24*	.49	---	22.45***	2,46
Attribution	-.58***				
Step 2					
Compliance x Attribution	.60	.50	.00	14.83***	3,45
<i>Obedience/safety: playing with a stick (N=44)</i>					
Step 1					
Compliance	.36***	.30	---	10.28***	2,42
Attribution	-.42**				
Step 2					
Compliance x Attribution	.33**	.39	.10	10.36***	1,41

Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 5.

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Predicting Parental Power Assertion**From Socialization Goals and Parental Attributions*

Scenario and Parental Goal	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$F$	$df$
<i>Playful: mimicking a mother (N=46)</i>					
Step 1					
Socialization	.20	.12	---	2.96	2,44
Attribution	-.30*				
Step 2					
Socialization x Attribution	-.10	.13	.01	2.10	3,43
<i>Obedience/safety: mimicking a mother (N=47)</i>					
Step 1					
Socialization	.21	.06	---	1.48	2,45
Attribution	-.10				
Step 2					
Socialization x Attribution	-.10	.07	.01	1.12	3,44
<i>Playful: playing with a stick (N=48)</i>					
Step 1					
Socialization	.09	.45	---	18.93***	2,46
Attribution	.64***				
Step 2					
Socialization x Attribution	.00	.45	.00	12.35***	3,45
<i>Obedience/safety: : playing with a stick (N=44)</i>					
Step 1					
Socialization	.22	.25	---	6.83**	2,42
Attribution	-.43**				
Step 2					
Socialization x Attribution	-.30*	.34	.09	6.91***	3,41

Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$



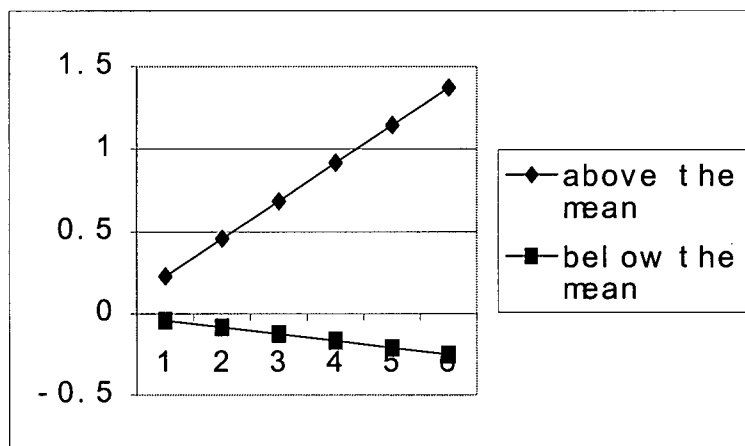
*Hypothesis Four: Moderating Effects of Parents' Attributions*

It was hypothesized that attributions for the appropriateness of children's behavior would have a moderating effect on the relationship between parental goals and the levels of power that parents use. To test these hypothesized relationships, a hierarchical regression was conducted. Before computation, all individual predictors were centered. These predictor variables were then entered into the regression equation followed by the interaction (product) term. This was done separately for fun, compliance, and socialization goals. All regressions were repeated for each scenario.

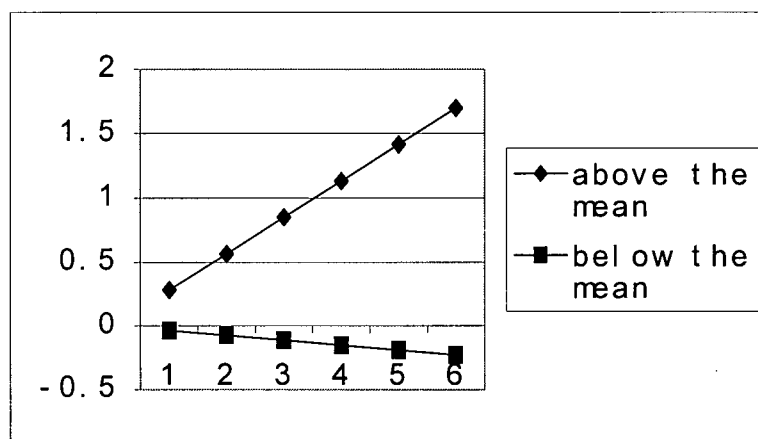
Two interactions significantly predicted the levels of parental power assertion in the circumstances requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues involving a child playing with a stick. Parental attributions for the appropriateness of child behavior significantly moderated the relationships between the compliance goal and level of parental power assertion, and between the socialization goal and level of parental power assertion.

Baron and Kenny (1986) suggest that there are different ways in which a moderator can change the effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable. To examine how parental attributions might moderate the relationships between goals and level of parental power assertion, follow-up regression analyses were performed following the procedure presented by Aiken and West (1991). The new moderator variables were computed by subtracting the standard deviation from the centered variables (attribution of children's behavior), so as to create variables that were above and below the mean of the moderator variable. The sizes of the slope were compared, and the slope of the lines is depicted in Figure 2 and 3 for above and below the mean of the moderator.

*Figure 2.* Moderating effect on socialization goals and parental power assertion in situations requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues (child playing with a stick scenario)



*Figure 3.* Moderating effect on compliance goals and parental power assertion in situations requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues (child playing with a stick scenario)



As Figure 2 and 3 demonstrate, significant moderating effects on the relationships between compliance ( $\beta = .28, p < .01$ ) and socialization goals ( $\beta = .40, p < .05$ ) and level of parental power assertion were found only if the scores of parental attributions were above the mean of the slope. If the scores of parental attributions were below the mean, no significant relationship between compliance/socialization goals and level of parental power assertion was found.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine why parents tease their children by analyzing the types of goals used in teasing interactions. Analyses were also conducted to examine the power dynamics in teasing interactions between parents and children, and moderating effects of parental attribution for children's behavior across different teasing contexts. The results of the present study offered confirmatory evidence for existing research on parental goals and teasing, and additional information to the field of parent-child relationships.

Findings of this study provide confirmatory evidence for the parental use of teasing in disciplinary and playful contexts. In situations requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues, parents teased their children as a means of obtaining compliance. In contrast, when situations were playful, parents' intention behind teasing was to have fun with their children. These results were consistent with previous observational studies of teasing between parents and children (Miller, 1986; Eisenberg, 1986; Schiefflin, 1986).

The idea that parents tease their children to have fun or experience a good time together has important implications for teasing research. Since teasing research has been predominantly focused on the "darker side" of teasing, teasing has been labeled as "problematic," "painful," and even a "mean" act (e.g. see Lighter et al., 2000). Very little empirical attention has been given to the playful and affiliative aspects of teasing. Results of the present study indicate that teasing is not always a negative experience, especially if it occurs within a playful context. Interestingly, parents seemed to acknowledge the positive effects of teasing. Further investigation is needed to examine the positive effects of teasing interactions between parents and children.

It is noteworthy to add, however, that parents' intentions behind teasing vary by context. Parents were less likely to require compliance in playful teasing situations. Parents were also less

likely to report teasing to have fun in situations requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues. These results support a contextual perspective of parenting, which suggests that parents flexibly and adaptively choose different parental strategies according to the requirement of a particular situation (Kuczynski & Hildebrandt, 1997). This stands in contrast to a long-standing approach on parenting styles. The underlying assumption for the parenting style approach is that parents are believed to unthinkingly choose strategies of discipline regardless of situational context or the nature of a child's characteristics or behaviors (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Recently, several other researchers have also questioned the parenting style approach, arguing instead that effective parenting involves moment-by-moment decision making (Kuczynski & Dawber, 1999; Grusec & Ungerer, 2003; Maccoby 2003). The results of the present study support this claim, in that parents do seem to take into account the context of a situation when deciding what actions to take with their children.

The study also replicates evidence for previous parental goals studies (Dix & Branca, 2003; Hasting & Grusec, 1998; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Similar to these studies, a large number of parents in this study expressed aims other than having fun and compliance goals. In situations requiring obedience for safety or prudential issues, parents appeared to tease their children to obtain compliance and to meet parents' wishes or agendas. This finding is not surprising in light of the link between parent-centered goals and parental behavior. To fulfill their own needs, parents are more likely to be punitive and controlling when dealing with a child in some situations because of increased feelings of annoyance and frustration (Hasting & Grusec, 1998).

In contrast, during playful situations, parents seemed to tease their children to have fun and to enhance the quality of their relationship. A mother of 4-year-old female child expressed

the opinion that the father in one scenario teased his child because “the father-daughter has a close relationship where laughter plays a role.” Moreover she believed that it is appropriate to tease in playful situations because it is a reflection of “loving and caring relationships.” By sharing a pleasurable experience with their children through teasing, parents may foster closer and more harmonious bonds with their children. This finding is both novel and imperative in expanding the existing research of parental goals. Because most of the research on parental goals is focused on socialization and compliance, very few published studies of parenting goals include fun (Hoffman, 1988; West, 1988) and relationship-centered goals (Hasting & Grusec, 1998; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Considering that warm and nonpunitive behaviors are typically linked to positive child-rearing outcomes (Maccoby & Martin, 1983), it is essential that researchers move beyond the current paradigm of socialization and compliance goals to examine the more positive aspects of parental goals.

Results of this study add critical new empirical evidence to the literature in the field of parent-child relationships, especially with respect to power dynamics of parent-child relationships by documenting the power dynamic in teasing interactions between parents and children, and its association with parental goals. Consistent with Russell et al.’s (1998) argument, horizontal qualities of power are more likely to appear during playful teasing situations. Parents were reported to lower their levels of power assertion in the interest of having a good time (fun) with children. Further support was found in the written reports from parents. Several parents’ comments implied that the elements of horizontal power depicted in the playful scenarios might elicit parents to lower their levels of power assertion in playful teasing situations. For instance, the father of 4-year-old son rated the level of power assertion in the playful teasing situations as lower because “it shows reciprocity and sharing” As discussed

earlier, reciprocity is regarded as the core element of horizontal qualities of power (Russell et al., 1998). These findings provide evidence for horizontal power during playful teasing interactions between parents and children.

In contrast, vertical qualities of power dynamics seem to exist in the teasing interactions where obedience for safety or prudential issues is required. When parents used teasing as a means of obtaining compliance, parents were reported to raise their levels of power assertion. Given the power-assertive component inherent in behavioral control, higher levels of parental power can be found to promote disciplinary goals. This finding is consistent with Russell et al.'s (1998) illustration of vertical power.

The relationship between the power assertion and goals can be explained by how parents feel in the interactions. Parents' emotions have been linked to differences in their parenting behaviors (Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986; Dix Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989). Dix (1992) argues that parents' emotions are related to goals in ways that influence how they react to their children during interactions. Since fun goals reflect parents' desire to have positive involvement with their children, the experience of positive affective states may encourage parents to lower their power assertion levels. Conversely, concern for attaining compliance may elicit negative emotions, which in turn increase parental level of power assertion.

Although the association between fun/compliance goals and level of power assertion were significantly supported in the teasing situation where the child plays with a stick, no significant relationships were detected in another scenario where the child mimics her mother and calls her father "honey." One possible explanation for the lack of expected significant relationship between fun goals and level of power assertion is due to the content of teasing illustrated in this scenario. Calling a parent by an adult pet name could be perceived to be

inappropriate behavior for a child by some parents. For example, a mother of 5-year-old son wrote, "calling him honey is not appropriate either, not in the context of play." Although these parents understood that the teasing occurred under playful circumstances, they reported wanting to assert their power during the exchange. This finding is unexpected; however it actually supports the notion that constructive horizontal qualities of interactions occur within the context of a relationship with appropriate levels of parental authority (Russell, et al., 1998). In the case of the playful teasing situation where the child calls her father "honey," parents might feel the need to exercise an appropriate level of control because they perceived that the teasing has gone too far.

The failure to find a significant relationship between compliance goals and level of power assertion seems to be due to sample characteristics. Parents in the current study have attained a higher level of education, which has found to be associated with greater use of reasoning techniques in child-rearing (Deković & Gerris, 1992; Pears, 2003). In fact, approximately 20% of parents in this study commented in the written report that they would explain to or teach their children about the appropriate time and place for teasing. The use of reasoning has been found to be associated with parents exercising mild control over their children (Hasting & Grusec, 1998). Thus, even if parents set compliance goals, they may not require immediate obedience from their children. Parents in this study first described a desire to explain the situations to their children. In so doing, parents exercised a mild level of power assertion in comparison with those parents who required immediate obedience from their children. This difference may account for the lack of a significant relationship between compliance goals and level of power assertion in the present study findings.



Lastly, it is important to mention that no significant relationship was found between socialization goals and level of parental power assertion in any situation. A possible explanation for this result may be due to the concept of socialization used in the measurement. For most parents, "socialization" can encompass a broad range of goals. Even in playful situations, parents seemed to be aware of the socialization aspect of teasing for fun. For instance, the mother of a 4-year-old female child wrote:

Because they are both having fun, she (mother) might want to suggest that after several turns it would be fun to be able to get the toy and also have a turn.

The study participant recognized the fun aspect of teasing in playful situations. At the same time, she wanted to use the opportunity to socialize the child to take turns when playing with another person. It may be that parents are concerned with socialization as a goal so often that it becomes incorporated into other types of goals. This may make it harder to detect significant statistical relationships when socialization goals are involved.

The relationship between parental goals and level of parental power assertion in the teasing interactions was further examined by assessing the moderating effect of parental attribution for children's behavior. Only two significant moderating effects of parental attributions were detected through analysis of the data. In the situation where a child bangs the door with a stick, a higher level of parental power assertiveness was associated with compliance and socialization goals only if parents perceived that the child's behavior in the teasing interactions was inappropriate.

The lack of other significant moderating effects of parental attributions in the study is not consistent with suggestions made by Rubin, Miller and Rose-Kransor (1989) who proposed that variability in parents' attributions accounts for different behavior being used to reach goals. The

relative absence of significant moderating effects of parental attributions might be due to the following reasons. First, a small sample size reduces the power to detect significant effects (Bohrnstedt & Knoke, 1994). Had a greater number of participants been involved, the present study might have been able to detect more significant effects.

Second, the validity of the measurement tool used to test power assertion might have negatively influenced study findings. Parents' written comments provided especially crucial clues for understanding the reason that ratings of power assertion might not be the most appropriate measurement tool. By examining participants' written answers with regard to the question of power assertion, it became clear that the wording of the questions was not specific enough for parents to be able to provide adequate responses. Parents probably needed to know whether or not it was important to change the scenario child's behavior right away, since it seems that the immediacy or distal feature of goals influences level of parental power in teasing interactions. Kuczynski (1984) demonstrated how parents' long-term goals were associated with a higher level of parental nurturance, while short-term goals were related to a higher level of power assertiveness. This finding implies that the immediacy and distal feature of parental goals affect the level of parental power assertion in interacting with children. Thus, the types of goal parents intend to promote, as well as how soon parents want to promote them, seems to influence the degree of parental power assertion exerted during teasing interactions.

Finally, the failure to detect significant moderating effects of parental attribution for children's behavior on power assertion and goals may be simply due to the lack of background information about the children in the scenarios. Approximately 50 % of parents commented in the written reports that deciding whether the child behavior is appropriate or not appropriate depended on the abilities, characteristics, and intentions of the child in the scenarios. Contrary to

their own children, parents did not have a template from which they could make decisions about the appropriateness of the children's behavior in the scenarios. Lollis (2003) argues that a parent's response to a child's present behavior is, to a great extent, an accumulation of how the child has behaved in the past. Thus, parental attribution for children's behavior seems to reflect the influence of past experiences with children. Without having the basis of knowledge about the children in the scenarios, parents in this study might have had a hard time deciding the appropriateness of the children's behavior. In turn, this might reduce the effects of parental attributions for the children's behavior.

#### *Limitations and Implications for Future Research*

As with any study, this study is not without its limitation. Besides the concern for the validity of parental power assertion scale, further measurement limitations are imposed by the parental goal scale. Specific concerns relate to the validity and reliability of parent-centered goals and child-centered goals. Recall that the items of child-centered goals and the parent-centered goals were derived from Hasting and Grusec's (1998) study. Although Hasting and Grusec (1998) validated the items of child-centered goals, a low Cronbach's alpha for the child-centered goals was found in the present study across all scenarios. This is problematic since the probabilities to detect Type 2 errors become low when the alpha levels are decreased. Future research is needed to validate items of child-centered goals, especially the item, "make the child happier". It seems that this particular item overlaps with other parental goals such as socialization goals. If parents are concerned with their children's needs, they may try to facilitate outcomes that are favorable to children, but that does not necessarily please their children (Dix, 1992). For the child's benefits, parents must teach, comfort, discipline, and play with children even if they do not want to act in these ways. Thus, the item, "make the child happier", can be

part of other parental goals. This may be a part of reason why the child-centered goal subscale had the low Cronbach's alpha level.

Another concern regarding the validity and reliability of parental goal scale is parent-centered goals. Because the parent-centered goals were assessed by using the single item, the ability to detect significant results might be affected. With more items, additional significant findings might have found.

Another limitation with regard to this study concerns the applicability of results. Recall that the majority of parents have only one child. It is possible that a somewhat different pattern of results may have emerged if the sample consisted of multiparous parents. Furthermore, most parents in this study have attained high levels of education. This is problematic because the study sample did not include a significant number of parents who have lower education levels. Miller (1989) found that parents who have lower education levels tend to use more aggressive forms of teasing since they want to teach their children to be "tough." This may not be true of parents who have attained higher levels of education. Thus, it is uncertain whether the results of the study would be applicable to a wider range of parents.

It is also important to note that the sampling techniques of this study also bias the sample in terms of participant characteristics. Because subjects volunteered to complete questionnaires and were willing to spend 20 to 25 minutes answering questions, these individuals may differ in significant ways from those parents who declined to volunteer. For example, participants may be more comfortable with divulging information concerning their relationships with their children, and they may also be more interested in exploring parenting techniques, which limits the applicability of the findings of this study.

Lastly, the type of data collected in the present study poses the limitations. Despite using various contexts in examining parental use of teasing, all of the teasing episodes included in this study involved verbal forms of teasing. The questionnaire format precluded the use of nonverbal forms of teasing, due to the difficulties associated with illustrating such teasing in scenarios. Observational studies would allow respondents to list nonverbal forms of teasing, and would also provide a more in-depth examination of teasing interactions.

Despite these limitations, this study reveals a number of different avenues for future research on teasing between parents and children. The finding that parents use teasing for having a good time together with their children and for enhancing their relationships with their children will help to orient teasing researchers to the importance of positive and constructive aspects of teasing. Moreover, future research should investigate the long-term goals and short-term goals in relation to parental use of teasing, and its association with power dynamics. Since a variety of behaviors are linked with specific goals (Hasting & Grusec, 1998), identifying such features may help advance in understanding of parenting behaviors. Ultimately, it would be interesting to examine how the parental use of teasing is altered in relation to the developmental changes of children's abilities. As developmental changes evoke changes in the dynamics of socialization (Collins & Madsen, 2003), investigating the gradual changes of parental use of teasing may provide clues for its implication in socialization.

Results of this study allude to an important implication for future research on child development. To date, no studies have been conducted to examine the means by which the parent-child relationship plays a role in fostering peer skills. This study offers a first step towards providing insight into this concept. As the parents' comments point out, when teasing is incorporated into a playful enterprise, opportunities become available to teach children methods

and expectations for participation in play and reciprocation with others. Russell et al. (1998) argued that horizontal qualities of parent-child relationships facilitate and encourage children to acquire peer skills. The present study demonstrates a means to being investigation of this notion. It will be necessary to examine the relations between horizontal qualities of parent-child relationships and peer skills development more closely. Advances will be made if future research investigates which horizontal qualities of the parent-child relationship influence children's peer skills and the mechanism involved.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the complexity of teasing interactions between parents and children. The common phrase, "I am just teasing you" is not as simple as it sounds. Parents consider a number of various factors when teasing their children. This study sheds light on some aspects of the intricate nature of parent-child teasing interactions. More research is undoubtedly required before this common, yet profound, phenomenon is completely understood.

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Appendix A  
Advertising Letter

Dear Parent

Do you have fun with your children? Do you use humour while parenting? If so, I am in need of your help!

I (Rena Miyazaki) am a Master's student in the School of Social Work and Family Studies at the University of British Columbia. I am conducting the study called the Parenting Humour Study. I would really appreciate it if you could take some time to fill questionnaire out for me. \When you are done, you can mail it back using the pre-addressed, pre-stamped envelope provided.

The study invites mothers or fathers of children between the ages of 3-5. Participation will only take 15-20 minutes, and it is completely confidential.

Again, I want to thank you for your time, and any consideration you may give me by helping.

Yours sincerely

Rena Miyazaki

## Appendix C

## Demographic Information

Before beginning, please take some time to tell us about yourself. Thank you.

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your gender?

☐ Female

☐ Male

3. What is your current marital status? (Please check the best response)

☐ Never married

☐ Living with partner

☐ Married, living with partner

☐ Married, not living with partner

☐ Legally separated, widowed, divorced

4. What is your ethnicity? \_\_\_\_\_

5. What is your highest educational level? (please check one)

☐ High school diploma

☐ Some post-secondary education/community college

☐ Post-secondary diploma

☐ Some university education

☐ Bachelor's degree (i.e. B.A, B.Sc.)

☐ Graduate degree (Masters and Ph.D)

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Are you currently employed?

☐ Yes (if yes, please indicate the following)

☐ Full time employed

☐ Part time employed

☐ No

7. Please provide the age, sex, and residential status of your children:

a)	Age: _____	Sex: _____	Resides with you?	Yes	No
b)	Age: _____	Sex: _____	Resides with you?	Yes	No
c)	Age: _____	Sex: _____	Resides with you?	Yes	No
d)	Age: _____	Sex: _____	Resides with you?	Yes	No

## Appendix D

## Questionnaire

## Scenario 1

A 4-year-old child is about to leave the dinner table, but dirty dishes are left on the table. When her mother notices that, she grins and says to her child, "My dear Princess Jennifer, would you like me to take your dishes to the counter or could you please possibly do it yourself?"

Using the following scale of

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

How much do you think the mother in this situation might want to...

1. get the child to behave immediately

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

2. make the child happier

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

3. help the child get along better in life

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

4. teach the child that it is possible to work out a mutually satisfying way of dealing with the problem

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

5. have a good time together

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

6. maintain/enhance a loving and trusting relationship with the child

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

7. be amusing, fun, and stimulating

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

8. display proper manners

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

9. follow family routines (eating, health, cleanliness).

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

10. gain respect from the child

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

11. want to understand the child's point of view in this situation

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

12. want to promote both the child's and parent's happiness

Not Much			Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5	

## Scenario 2

A father is playing ball with his 5-year-old son. The child throws a ball that hits his father's arm. The father isn't hurt, but he reacts by trying to be funny and screams "Yeow!" as if he has been hurt.

How much do you think the father might want to...

1. get the child to behave immediately

Not Much			Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5	

2. make the child happier

Not Much			Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5	

3. help the child get along better in life

Not Much			Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5	

4. teach the child that it is possible to work out a mutually satisfying way of dealing with the problem

Not Much			Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5	

5. have a good time together

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

6. maintain/enhance a loving and trusting relationship with the child

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

7. be amusing, fun, and stimulating

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

8. follow family routines (eating, health, cleanliness).

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

9. display proper manners

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

10. gain respect from the child

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

11. want to understand the child's point of view in this situation

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5



12. want to promote both the child's and parent's happiness

Not Much			Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5	

### Scenario 3

A 4 year-old girl hears her mother calling the girl's father "Honeeey!" in an exaggerated tone.

The child and her father are playing hide-and-seek. When the child finds her dad, she is very excited. The father also enjoys being found. Now it is the father's turn to find his child. As the father looks for his child, he can hear that his child is giggling. When the father finds her, the child imitates her mother by saying "Honeeey!" while laughing.

How much do you think the father might want to...

1. get the child to behave immediately

Not Much			Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5	

2. make the child happier

Not Much			Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5	

3. help the child get along better in life

Not Much			Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5	

4. teach the child that it is possible to work out a mutually satisfying way of dealing with the problem

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

5. have a good time together

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

6. maintain/enhance a loving and trusting relationship with the child

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

7. be amusing, fun, and stimulating

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

8. follow family routines (eating, health, cleanliness).

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

9. display proper manners

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

10. gain respect from the child

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

11. want to understand the child's point of view in this situation

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

12. want to promote both the child's and parent's happiness

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

Please complete the following sentences:

I think the child's behavior toward her father is / is not appropriate because

---



---



---



---

I think the father might/ might not wish to change the child's behavior because

---



---



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## Scenario 4

A child is in a department store with her mother and father. While they are in the men's clothes section looking for shirts for her father, the child starts giggling and hides under the clothing racks. The father hears his child giggling and notices that she is hiding as if she is expecting to be found.

The father says, "Come here right now, we are not playing hide-and-seek in a department store!" with a firm voice. But the child is still giggling and hiding. The father raises his voice and says " Stop playing now". As the father walks toward to his child, she becomes more excited. When the father finds her under the clothing racks, the child laughs and imitates her mother by saying to her father "Honeeey!".

How much do you think the father might want to.....

1. get the child to behave immediately

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

2. make the child happier

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

3. help the child get along better in life

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

4. teach the child that it is possible to work out a mutually satisfying way of dealing with the problem

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

5. have a good time together

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

6. maintain/enhance a loving and trusting relationship with the child

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

7. be amusing, fun, and stimulating

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

8. follow family routines (eating, health, cleanliness).

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

9. display proper manners

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

10. gain respect from the child

Not Much		Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5

11. want to understand the child's point of view in this situation

Not Much			Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5	

12. want to promote both the child's and parent's happiness

Not Much			Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5	

Please complete the following sentences:

I think the child's behavior toward her father is / is not appropriate because

---

---

---

---

I think the father might/ might not wish to change the child's behavior because

---

---

---

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## Scenario 5

A mother and her 4-year-old son, Bob, are playing with a toy together. When the mother offers a toy to Bob, Bob takes it slowly with a smile on his face. As the mother notices Bob's smiles, she also starts smiling. Now Bob wants to give it back to his mother. As his mother is about to take it, Bob suddenly withdraws the toy. Now Bob is very excited. This exchange between Bob and his mother is repeated again. When Bob withdraws the toy for the third times, he is giggling and says "Take it, take it, Mommy!".

How much do you think the mother might want to...

1. get the child to behave immediately

Not Much			Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5	

2. make the child happier

Not Much			Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5	

3. help the child get along better in life

Not Much			Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5	

4. teach the child that it is possible to work out a mutually satisfying way of dealing with the problem

Not Much			Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5	

5. have a good time together

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

6. maintain/enhance a loving and trusting relationship with the child

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

7. be amusing, fun, and stimulating

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

8. follow family routines (eating, health, cleanliness).

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

9. display proper manners

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

10. gain respect from the child

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

11. want to understand the child's point of view in this situation

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5



12. want to promote both the child's and parent's happiness

Not  
Much

1

2

Somewhat

3

4

A Lot

5

Please complete the following sentences:

I think the child's behavior toward his mother is / is not appropriate because

---

---

---

---

I think the mother might/ might not wish to change the child's behavior because

---

---

---

---

## Scenario 6

Bob found a stick in the yard. He uses it to bang on the door. The mother warns him stop banging but he keeps banging on the door and the noise becomes louder. Bob is giggling while banging on the door. Finally, the mother comes up to Bob and says, "Stop banging on the door right now. That isn't nice. Give me that stick, Bob". Bob grins as he slowly shows the stick to his mother. Just as his mother is about to take it away from him, Bob abruptly withdraws the stick. The mother raises her voice and says, "this isn't play. Give it to me now". Bob withdraws the stick again. Bob is still giggling and says "Take it, take it Mommy!"

How much do you think the mother might want to.....

1. get the child to behave immediately

Not Much			Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5	

2. make the child happier

Not Much			Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5	

3. help the child get along better in life

Not Much			Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5	

4. teach the child that it is possible to work out a mutually satisfying way of dealing with the problem

Not Much			Somewhat		A Lot
1	2	3	4	5	

5. have a good time together

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

6. maintain/enhance a loving and trusting relationship with the child

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

7. be amusing, fun, and stimulating

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

8. follow family routines (eating, health, cleanliness).

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

9. display proper manners

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

10. gain respect from the child

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

11. want to understand the child's point of view in this situation

Not Much		Somewhat	A Lot
1	2	3	4
			5

12. want to promote both the child's and parent's happiness

Not  
Much

1

2

Somewhat

3

4

A Lot

5

Please complete the following sentences:

I think the child's behavior toward her father is / is not appropriate because

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I think the father might/ might not wish to change the child's behavior because

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## Appendix E

Table 6

*Cronbach's Alphas for Goal Categories*

Type of Parenting Goals	Scenario					
	Socialization (1)	Playful (2)	Playful (3)	Obedience/Safety (4)	Playful (5)	Obedience/Safety (6)
Compliance	.49	.70	.84	.43	.81	.52
Fun	.67	.87	.95	.69	.94	.69
Socialization	.71	.67	.78	.46	.86	.53
Child-centered	.38	.60	.39	.40	.28	.65
Relationship	.79	.86	.78	.74	.83	.78

*Note.* Numbers in brackets indicate the order of scenarios used in the questionnaire