

The Teasing Questionnaire—Revised: measurement of childhood teasing in adults

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Abstract

This study examined the reliability of the Teasing Questionnaire—Revised (TQ-R) and the relations between recalled childhood teasing and current psychological distress. Three hundred and three undergraduate college students were administered the TQ-R, Beck Depression Inventory-II, Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale, Social Phobia and Anxiety Inventory, and UCLA Loneliness Scale. A sub-sample was administered the TQ-R two weeks later. Test-retest reliability of the TQ-R ranged from moderate to strong for the TQ-R scores. Internal consistency for the TQ-R scores ranged from acceptable to good. Intercorrelations among factors were moderate suggesting that the factors measure related but distinct teasing domains. The TQ-R Total Score and Appearance, Performance, and Social factors were related to later psychopathology with correlations of a moderate effect size. Implications of these findings and areas for future research are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Over the past three decades, there has been a significant increase in research examining the effects of childhood teasing on later psychological functioning

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(McCabe, Antony, Summerfeldt, Liss, & Swinson, 2003; Olweus, 1991, 1993; Roth, Coles, & Heimberg, 2002; Roth & Storch, *in press*; Storch, Roth, et al., 2004). Teasing is a specific type of bullying or peer victimization defined as verbal taunts about a wide range of personal and social factors, including: appearance, performance, academic achievement, family background, and social behavior (Storch, Roth, et al., 2004). Although the majority of children are teased at some point during childhood, it is widely recognized that being a victim of frequent teasing may impact children's social functioning and psychological adjustment, and escalate into more serious forms of aggression (Galdston, 1984).

Given its aggressive and pejorative nature, it is easy to imagine how teasing may be related to serious adjustment problems. Childhood is a time when beliefs about oneself and the world develop; being teased may contribute to the development of negative views about oneself and others (Roth, Fresco, & Heimberg, *in press*; Roth & Heimberg, *in press*). As well, teasing may result in the avoidance of social interactions which are perceived to have a high likelihood for being teased. The use of avoidance as a mechanism for avoiding potentially negative social interactions in childhood may stabilize and have deleterious effects on adult interpersonal functioning. Supporting this theory, cross-sectional studies have linked higher levels of childhood teasing to higher levels of social anxiety (Craig, 1998; Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004; Storch, Nock, Masia-Warner, & Barlas, 2003; Walter & Inderbitzen, 1998), depressive symptomatology (Callaghan & Joseph, 1995; Craig, 1998; Neary & Joseph, 1994; Storch, Nock, et al., 2003), and lower levels of social acceptance and social competence (Callaghan & Joseph, 1995).

Childhood teasing has also been shown to have long-term effects on psychosocial adjustment. Adolescent teasing victims have high levels of body dissatisfaction and eating disturbance in adulthood (Grilo, Wilfley, Brownell, & Rodin, 1994; Rieves & Cash, 1996; Schwartz, Phares, Tantleff, Dunn, & Thompson, 1999; Thompson, 1996). For example, in a sample of obese adult females, Grilo et al. (1994) found physical appearance related teasing during childhood to be negatively correlated with self-evaluations of appearance and positively correlated with body dissatisfaction. Schwartz et al. (1999) found that negative parental feedback regarding appearance was associated with poorer body image for women, and lower overall psychological functioning for men. In a sample of teenage females, Fabian and Thompson (1989) found that females who overestimated their body sizes were more likely to have been teased about appearance during childhood, more likely to report current depressive symptoms, have lower self-esteem, and higher rates of eating disturbance than females who did not overestimate their body size. Childhood teasing has also been related to later problems with depression (Fabian & Thompson, 1989; Matsui, Kakuyama, Ysuzuki, & Onglatco, 1996; Olweus, 1993; Roth et al., 2002; Storch, Roth, et al., 2004) and anxiety (Roth et al., 2002; Storch, Roth, et al., 2004). Matsui et al. (1996) found that recalled teasing during junior high school was associated with current scores of self-esteem and depression in a sample of Japanese male university students.

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