

Running Head: CHILDHOOD TEASING AND LATER IDENTITY STYLE

Recollections of Childhood Teasing and Identity Styles of Young Adults

Cara S. Rolufs and Gerald R. Adams

University of Guelph

Abstract

This study examined the association between recollections of childhood teasing and identity style of young adults. In total, 288 university students were surveyed. The results indicated that the experience of being teased during childhood was not directly associated with identity style. However, support was found for an indirect association. In particular, higher levels of recollected teasing was associated with higher self-consciousness, low self-esteem, and an external locus control; which in turn were differentially associated with the three identity styles (avoidance, normative, informational styles). These findings suggest there may be a link between childhood teasing experiences and identity formation during adolescence and young adulthood.

Recollections of Childhood Teasing and Identity Styles of Young Adults

The formation of one's identity is a major event in adolescence, marking the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood. It involves a "synthesis of childhood skills, beliefs, and identifications into a more or less coherent, unique whole that provides the young adult with both a sense of continuity with the past and a direction for the future" (Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer, & Orlofsky, 1993, p.3). Research on identity has largely focused on the adolescent period during which identity construction takes place. Although the definition of identity stresses the importance of childhood experiences, research has generally neglected to look at the non-familial influence early life events have on self-identity development. In particular interest is the role of childhood teasing, a profound and complex phenomena that has long-term consequences for the individual (Bond, Carlin, Thomas, Rubin, & Patton, 2001; Cash, 1995; Crozier & Skliopidou, 2002; Duncan, 1999; Georgesen, Harris, Milich & Young, 1999; Gleason, Alexander, & Somers, 2000; Mynard, Joesph, & Alexander, 2000).

Past literature has failed to look at the relation between childhood teasing and identity formation, although teasing may have an important role for identity development. Erikson (1968) has stated that individuals who achieve identity formation will possess more self-certainty, social and self-assurance, psychological confidence, and a sense of well-being. On the other hand, severe identity confusion can manifest itself in overall shame, narcissism, continual self-testing (Erikson, 1968), conduct and hyperactivity disorders (Adams, Munro, Doherty-Poirer, Munro, Petersen, & Edwards, 2001) and crime and delinquency (Adams, et al., in press). Thus, it is important to discover childhood events that may precipitate the avoidance of identity issues.

A Look at Identity

In the past, identity has largely been measured in terms of Marcia's identity status-paradigm (Marcia, 1966). The different statuses are composed of two dimensions of identity: exploration and commitment. A crisis involves self-reported exploration and active examination of identity issues, and commitment relates to personal involvement in the beliefs, aspirations, and values that one acknowledges to hold (Berzonsky, 1989). Each identity status describes differing ways of negotiating identity issues. Those in the identity achievement status are engaging in exploration and searching, consider options and alternatives, and make commitments based on the process of self-construction. Berzonsky (1992) noted that these are often individuals who have personally experienced and resolved a crisis period of self-examination. Moratorium individuals are actively exploring and experiencing things, but have not arrived at a conscious commitment to self-selected goals, values, or ideologies. The focus of a moratorium is on seeking and self-construction. Foreclosed individuals express commitment that is often based on suggestions from others, especially their parents. There is no clearly identifiable period of exploration, testing, or experimentation. Adolescents whom are not currently exploring identity issues and evident low commitment are labeled diffuse, as they have not searched for personal or social identity and do not identify clear commitments to ideologies, values, or social roles (Adams et al., 2001; Berzonsky, 1989; Berzonsky, 1992; Marcia, 1966).

However, there has been constructive criticism of the use of identity statuses that indicated that perhaps a different method is a more reliable measure of identity (Berzonsky & Adams, 1999). Berzonsky (1992) proposed a social-cognitive identity model, which emphasizes differences in the approach to or avoidance of constructing and reconstructing one's identity. More specifically, Berzonsky (1992) proposes that the four statuses classified by Marcia's (1966) paradigm may be

associated with differences in the process by which personal decisions are made and problems are solved. For instance, identity achieved and moratorium individuals may use an information orientation. These individuals actively seek out, process, and evaluate relevant information before making decisions. The normative orientation, where individuals are concerned with conforming to the normative standards and prescriptions held by significant others (e.g. parents), is likely utilized by those who are foreclosed. In addition, the diffuse-avoidance orientation is commonly used by the uncommitted, diffuse individuals as it involves the tendency to delay and procrastinate until situational consequences and rewards dictate a course of action (Berzonky, 1992). Berzonky's identity styles are desirable to utilize as they highlight the *process* by which individuals negotiate personal problems, make decisions, and evaluate and utilize self-relevant information (Berzonky & Adams, 1999). For these reasons, this research project will use Berzonky's identity styles as outcome variables.

A Look at Teasing

Teasing is an experience that all people encounter in their lifetime. It is recognized by everyone, yet is extremely difficult to define. This difficulty persists because teasing is a complex and ambiguous event. Keltner, Young, Heerey, Oemig, and Monarch (1998) summarize it well when they explain that, "teasing criticizes yet compliments, attacks yet makes people closer, humiliates yet expresses affection" (p. 1231). The reasons for this may be the interplay of three components said to make up the teasing event: aggression, humour, and ambiguity (Shapiro, Baumeister, & Kessler, 1991). Teasing, like humour, is dependent upon the juxtaposition of mixed messages and metaphors (Hoover & Olson, 2000). Taken literally as a hostile message, it has the potential to hurt; however, when accompanied by various verbal and nonverbal cues the message is rendered harmless (Scambler, Harris, & Milich, 1998). Unfortunately, teasing in childhood is not

intended to be taken lightly and is generally a negative experience. It frequently involves pure verbal aggression without an attempt to use humour to 'soften the blow' (Scambler et al., 1998) and is solely hurtful (Martlew & Hodson, 1991). In addition, teasing by children is more likely to take the form of taunting, verbal abuse and insults, than is adulthood teasing (Scambler et al., 1998). Thus the current study will not attempt to delve into the positive aspects of childhood teasing, but focus on the negative forms that have the potential to influence how people define themselves and construct their identities.

The Direct Influence of Teasing on Identity

Much of the development of identity takes place in the context of social relations. Influential theorists, such as Harry Stack Sullivan (1953) and G.H. Mead (1934), have highlighted this fact, emphasizing the importance of interpersonal relations in the development of the self (Bukowski & Newcomb, 1983). Erikson (1968) also drew attention to the role of reciprocal interplay between individuals and their social contexts in the development of identity. In addition, Adams and Marshall (1996) raised the point that social processes influence the sense of self. Thus, those individuals involved in the research of identity have clearly emphasized the important role one's social context plays in the development of identity. Therefore teasing, as a social phenomenon, may play a role in the construction of the self. Teasing involves interactions between an initiator and a recipient, as well as (more often than not) an audience (Pawluk, 1989). In relation to identity formation, Mead (1934) proposed that people define themselves according to how they perceive others responding to them. Thus, it is highly probable that teasing will play a direct role in identity construction because it involves feedback from others, which is likely to become incorporated into an individual's sense of identity.

When considering the importance of social context in identity development, it is necessary to understand the features of the individual's milieu. Children's social environments consist of their parents, siblings, and peers. However, it is suggested that the most salient aspect of the child's context is their peers (Sullivan, 1953). Indeed, various researchers have stressed the influential role peers play in developing the "self" (Erikson, 1968; Mead, 1934). And perhaps because they are not intimate others, the opinions of those peers in the wider circle may appear objective, and therefore very difficult for a young person to discount or ignore (Giordano, Cernkovich, Groat, Pugh, & Swinford, 1988). If these opinions are negative, and are reflected by teasing of the individual, the implications for influencing identity development are quite significant. Unfortunately, peers are found to be the worst perpetrators of teasing (Cash, 1995). Thus the saliency of these individuals and the fact that they are among the most likely to tease, make them very likely to influence how one deals with identity issues. The current study will attempt to capture this fact by focusing on the recollections of teasing from one's peer group.

Teasing by peers has been linked with long-lasting negative outcomes such as low self-esteem (Rigby, 2000), body image dissatisfaction (Cash, 1995; Gleason et al., 2000), depression (Bond et al., 2001), posttraumatic stress (Mynard et al., 2000), and neuroticism (Georgeson et al., 1999). Therefore, it is evident that teasing has a profound influence on outcomes in later life. Thus, an argument can be made that teasing in childhood will directly influence identity formation that occurs during adolescence.

The Indirect Association of Teasing with Identity: Altered Emotional States

There may also be an indirect relation between teasing in childhood and later identity style through the mediating variables of self-esteem, self-consciousness, and locus of control. It is

proposed that being a victim of teasing as a child will be associated with altered emotional states, which will persist into adolescence and influence identity style.

Self-esteem. Self-esteem is thought to be one of the central factors affecting psychological well-being and social functioning. A healthy self-esteem is manifested in overall acceptance of oneself as a person and in feelings of worthiness and self-confidence (Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, Kaistaniemi, & Lagerspetz, 1999). Unfortunately, teasing usually incorporates some attribute of the individual, and a child's self-esteem is based on how they feel about their entire self. Literature has shown that increased teasing in childhood is associated with lower self-esteem (Casey-Cannon, Hayward, & Gowen, 2001; Gleason et al., 2000; Rigby, 2000). When negative teasing influences a child's self-esteem, this may result in lower psychological well-being and perhaps a lowered ability to deal with issues directly relating to the development of identity. Although research on identity styles and self-esteem is generally mixed, the review by Marcia et al. (1993) generally found less advanced identity statuses to be associated with lower self-esteem. Thus, the fact that low self-esteem as a result of teasing in childhood has been found to last into adolescence (Rigby, 2000), it is highly probable that this lower self-esteem can persist into late adolescence facilitating the use of a diffuse-avoidance identity style. It is not a far stretch to suppose that how you feel about yourself will ultimately influence all areas of your self, including development of a self-identity.

Self-Consciousness. Another important psychological variable concerning perception of the self is one's level of self-consciousness. Adams, Abraham, and Markstrom (1987) proposed that self-consciousness includes "an affective component where self-awareness is associated with a conscious process that includes an emotional state of discomfort and self-perceived exposure or vulnerability" (p. 293). It is highly possible that teasing could facilitate this feeling of discomfort and vulnerability, by the very nature of the perpetrator putting the victim in a difficult situation.

Pawluk (1989) believes that teasing involves “setting-up” the recipient to take a fall or to look foolish. This act puts the individual on the spot and requires that they respond or react to what is taking place (Pawluk, 1989). The set-up characteristic of teasing likely increases the child’s self-consciousness as all attention is placed upon them. The humor that accompanies teasing creates an uncertainty about how to behave and makes the target person a centre of attention and an object of laughter (Crozier et al., 2002).

Two self-consciousness dimensions have been developed: public and private (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). Private self-consciousness is defined by an awareness of one’s personal thoughts and feelings. The public aspect of self-consciousness involves an awareness of the self as a social object, or in more general terms, an understanding that others are aware of the self (Fenigstein et al., 1975). Mead (1934) argued that consciousness of the self develops when one becomes aware of another’s perspective and sees him or herself as a social object. In relation, Fenigstein et al. (1975) believes this recognition is the essence of public self-consciousness. Based on the differential findings about teasing and self-consciousness, we believe there is an association between being the victim of teasing and a public consciousness of self. Teasing provides the child with another’s perspective of him or herself. This combined with the fact that a teased child is constantly put on the spot is likely to create a high level of public self-consciousness.

Literature has also revealed that self-consciousness is related to identity style. Adolescence is said to be associated with ego processes that reflect a state of identity-consciousness (Erikson, 1968). Erikson (1968) theorizes that severe identity confusion is accompanied by a highly self-conscious and possibly destructive self-preoccupation. Indeed, Adams et al. (1987) found that diffused youths were significantly more self-focused and self-conscious than foreclosed or moratorium peers. These adolescents also tended to over-estimate the importance of the self-as-a-

target of attention by others (Adams et al., 1987), indicating a public bias in self-consciousness. For these reasons, this study hypothesizes that higher levels of public self-consciousness associated with recollections of childhood teasing will be connected to a diffuse-avoidance identity style.

Locus of Control. A third variable in our model for predicting identity style from childhood teasing is locus of control. This refers to the belief that individuals hold about the causes of events in their life, whether they are the result of internal sources, such as the person's actions and behavior (internal locus of control), or whether the events result from factors beyond the individual's control (external locus of control) (Halloran, Douman, John, & Margolin, 1999; Rotter, 1966). A study by Mynard and colleagues (2000) found that lower self-worth is associated with the experience of verbal victimization, strong external (unknown) locus of control orientation, and a weak internal locus of control orientation. Although their research does not attempt to directly link peer victimization and locus of control, their results suggest a relationship may exist. Verbal victimization by peers and locus of control may be linked by feelings of low self-worth. In addition, Mynard et al. (2000) indicated that those who experience peer-victimization experience powerlessness and helplessness. This study proposes an association between teasing and external locus-of-control, and it is believed that feelings of powerlessness and helplessness form the core of this relation. If a child goes to school everyday and faces teasing that they are unable to prevent, a belief that the events that occur in their life are beyond their control is highly likely. In fact, Scambler (1998) propose that children may feel at loss with respect on how to cope with being teased. The child's lack of power or ability to help them self in the teasing situation may facilitate an external locus of control that can last into adolescence.

An external locus of control has also been linked with the various identity statuses. Marcia and colleagues (1993) review of literature on identity revealed that identity achieved individuals

tend to have an internal locus of control and diffused individuals an external locus of control. It is proposed that diffused individuals are the least internalized because they have no firm identity and are defined by their circumstances (Marcia et al., 1993). Thus, our study proposes that those who have an external locus of control will be more likely to use a diffuse-avoidant identity style.

The purpose of this study is to develop a model for predicting identity style from a history of childhood teasing. Based on the theory and past research presented by the review of literature, four hypotheses were proposed:

1. Recollections of childhood teasing by peers will predict a diffuse-avoidance identity style in young adulthood.
2. Recollections of childhood teasing by peers will predict low self-esteem, high self-consciousness, and an external locus of control in young adulthood.
3. Lower self-esteem, high self-consciousness, and an external locus of control in young adulthood will each predict a diffuse-avoidance identity style in young adulthood.
4. The relation between recollections of childhood teasing and identity style will be mediated by altered emotional states (low self-esteem, high self-consciousness, and an external locus of control).

Figure 1 is a depiction of the model for predicting identity style from recollections of childhood teasing.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Method

Participants

Participants for this study were drawn from two sources: the University of Guelph's Subject Pool of introductory psychology students and a third year Family Relations and Human Development (FRHD) class. The majority of ($n = 195$) participants were obtained from the Subject Pool and 93 participants from the FRHD class, for a total of 288 participants. The sample consisted of 25 males and 260 females. Three participants' responses were not used in the current study because their questionnaires were incomplete. The participants' ages ranged from 17-29, and the average age was 19.6 years.

The target population for this research is late adolescence, as it is during this age that many gains in identity formation occur (Marcia et al., 1993) and identity styles become prevalent (Berzonsky & Adams, 1999). This is the age where the necessary cognitive, physiological, social, and experiential ingredients exist to make identity formation possible (Marcia et al., 1993).

Procedure

Participants from the Psychology Subject Pool signed up for the current study using the Experiment and Subject Pool Planner on the University of Guelph's Psychology webpage. Each participant chose a time slot to fill out the survey. Upon arrival to the session, all participants were seated and given a brief overview of the study stating the questionnaire format of the experiment, the time required for completion, and instructions for filling out the scantron sheet provided. A package to each participant, including the following: general description of study, consent form, survey, and scantron sheet.

Measurements

The questionnaire package handed out to each of the students included five scales in the following order: the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES) (Wylie, 1989), Self-Consciousness Scale (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1977), Internal-External Control Scale (I-E Scale) (Rotter, 1966), Identity Style Inventory (Berzonsky, 1992) (ISI3), and a revised version of the Perception of Teasing Scale (POTS) (Thompson, Cattarin, Fowler, & Fisher, 1995).

Self-Esteem Scale (SES). The Rosenberg SES consists of 10 items to assess overall self-esteem. Items were rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Items were positively and negatively coded. Some examples of these items are “I feel that I’m a person of worth, at least on an equal plane as others”, “I feel that I have a number of good qualities” and “I feel I do not have much to be proud of (R)”. Scores on the Rosenberg SES range from 10 to 40, with higher scores corresponding to higher self-esteem.

Self-Consciousness Scale. The Fenigstein et al’s (1977) Self-Consciousness Scale assesses the individual’s private and public self-consciousness, as well as level of social anxiety. It consists of 23 Likert-style questions, which are both positively and negatively coded. Each item is rated on a scale of 1 (Extremely Uncharacteristic) to 5 (Extremely Characteristic). Higher scores indicate a higher level of self-consciousness. 10 questions assess the participant’s level of private self-consciousness, with scores ranging from 10 to 50. An example of private self-consciousness is, “I’m always trying to figure myself out”. Seven questions assess level of public self-consciousness and the range of scores available is 7 to 35. “I’m concerned about the way I present myself” is an example from the public self-consciousness scale. A total of six questions were employed to assess an individual’s level of social anxiety, with scores ranging from 6 to 30. An example for this portion of the questionnaire is, “It takes me time to overcome my shyness in new situations”. The

three differing aspects of self-consciousnesses can also be combined to obtain a total self-consciousness score, which ranges from 23 to 115.

Locus of Control Scale. The I-E Scale assessed whether the participant's locus of control is internal or external. There were 29 questions in total, including six filler items to make the purpose of the questionnaire ambiguous. Each question had a choice of two options, one representing an internal and the other an external locus of control. Students were asked to choose which statement they believed to be most true. The participant's scores were calculated by totalling the number of external choices they make. Scores range from 0-23, with higher scores indicating an increased external locus of control. An example of a question from the I-E Scale is "(a) In the long run people get the respect they deserve in this world (internal); (b) Unfortunately, an individual's worth often passes unrecognized no matter how hard he tries (external)".

Identity Style Inventory (ISI3). Berzonsky's (1992) revised Identity Style Inventory (ISI3) examined the participant's identity style. This measure has 30 statements, with 10 examining each identity style: information orientation, normative orientation, and diffuse-avoidance orientation. Examples of statements representing the three different identity styles are respectively: "I've spent a great deal of time thinking seriously about what I should do with my life", "I've more-or-less always operated according to values with which I was brought up", and "I'm not really sure what I'm doing in school; I guess things will work themselves out". Participants answered using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all like me) to 5 (very much like me). Higher scores on the various identity styles indicate more accordance with that particular style. Although the original ISI3 includes a measure of commitment, the current study did not.

Teasing Scale. The Perception of Teasing Scale (POTS) was used to assess childhood teasing. Several modifications to the scale were made. Instead of using the term "people", "peers" was

substituted in each of the questions. In addition, several questions were altered to include more general teasing about weight. Inquiries about appearance-related teasing (other than weight), sexual development, and teasing about being too smart were also added, for a total of 12 questions. The first part of each question assesses the frequency of teasing events (1-12). Response options range from 1 (never) to 5 (very often). Higher scores indicate that the participant had experienced a higher frequency of teasing. Examples of these items are, "Peers made fun of you because of your weight", as well as, "Peers made fun of you for being too short or too tall". The second part of the questions (1a-12a) was employed to determine the effects of each teasing event by having the participants rate how upset they were by the teasing event ("how upset were you"). These items range from 1 (not upset) to 5 (very upset), with higher scores indicating that the participant was more upset by the teasing event. This measure provided three teasing scores: the frequency of teasing, the effect of teasing, and a total teasing score. The frequency of teasing score was calculated by adding up the answers to questions 1-12. The effect of teasing score was determined by adding the scores for questions 1a-12a. The range of scores for both the teasing frequency and teasing effect measures is 12-60. The total teasing score was calculated for each participant by adding up their responses to each question. The range of scores for the total teasing scale is 24-120. This particular teasing score was utilized as the predictor variable in the current study.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Data from 284 completed participant questionnaire packages were obtained and included in this analysis. Three questionnaires were excluded from the analysis because they were uncompleted. Prior to examining the relations among variables, the data were examined for outliers, of which none were found. The data for males and females on each measure were compared using *t* tests. It was found that this sample of males and females differed significantly on the measure of social anxiety. However, social anxiety was a non-significant mediating variable in the developed model, so any differences will not mitigate the major findings of the study. In addition, this gender difference is not generalizable due to the very small number of males in this sample ($n=33$). Thus, the data for males and females were collapsed for each of the variables. Descriptive statistics for each of the variables can be found in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1 here]

Reliability estimates were computed for each measure. The measure for teasing, the predictor variable, utilized three scores: the effect of teasing ($\alpha = .80$); the frequency of teasing ($\alpha = .74$), and a total teasing score ($\alpha = .87$). The reliabilities for each of the mediating altered emotional state variables were adequate. The alphas computed for the self-consciousness scale were as follows: total self-consciousness = .81, private self-consciousness subscale = .63, public self-consciousness subscale = .82, social anxiety subscale = .80. The measure for self-esteem yielded an alpha of .88, and the locus of control scale an alpha of .65. The alphas for the outcome variables were somewhat lower (informational identity style = .67, normative = .62; and diffuse = .65), however, these internal consistency findings were very similar to those found by Berzonsky (1989). Overall,

internal consistency was judged adequate, although corrections for reliability were used in all the structural equation analyses.

Main Analyses

Direct model: The association between recollections of childhood teasing and identity style in young adulthood

The current study sought to examine whether being teased in childhood would directly predict the use of the diffuse-avoidance identity style in young adulthood. This first hypothesis was not supported. No significant relations were found between the experience of being teased and either of the three identity styles. The results revealed that teasing was nonsignificantly correlated with the informational identity style ($r = .073, p > .05$), the normative identity style ($r = -.019, p > .05$), and the diffuse-avoidance identity style ($r = -.006, p > .05$) (see Table 2). Therefore, it appears that recollection of being teased as a child is not associated with the use of any particular identity style.

The association of childhood teasing and altered emotional states

The second hypothesis stated that childhood teasing by peers would predict high self-consciousness, low self-esteem, and an external locus of control in young adulthood. Correlations in Table 2 indicate that recollections of teasing are positively associated with self-consciousness measures: private self-consciousness ($r = .168, p < .01$), public self-consciousness ($r = .247, p < .01$), and social anxiety ($r = .161, p < .01$). Thus, as the frequency and effect of teasing increases, so does the likelihood of developing private and public self-consciousness, as well as experiencing social anxiety. Teasing accounted for 2.8% of the variance in private self-consciousness, 6.1% in public self-consciousness, and 2.6% in social anxiety. In addition, there was a negative correlation between teasing and self-esteem, $r = -.287, p < .01$, indicating that as the frequency and effect of teasing increases, the participants' level of self-esteem decreased. In addition, teasing is positively correlated with an external locus of control, $r = .161, p < .01$. Teasing accounted for 8.3% of the

variance in self-esteem, and 2.6% of the variance in locus of control. These correlations confirm the hypothesis that increased frequency and negative affect from childhood teasing contribute to increased levels of private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness, social anxiety, as well as lower self-esteem, and an external locus of control.

The association of altered emotional states and later identity style

Informational identity style. This investigation examined the differential associations of self-consciousness, self-esteem, and locus of control on the informational and normative identity styles, although no predictions were made. The informational identity style was found to be significantly correlated with high private self-consciousness ($r = .468, p < .01$), low social anxiety ($r = .188, p < .01$), high self esteem ($r = .176, p < .01$), and the use of an internal locus of control ($r = -.170, p < .01$). Public self-consciousness was not significantly correlated with the informational identity style: $r = .068, p > .05$. A substantial portion of variance was observed between private self-consciousness and informational identity style, accounting for 21.9% of the variance.

Normative Identity Style. The normative identity style was found to be significantly correlated with self-esteem, $r = .186, p < .01$. That is, higher self-esteem is associated with the use of the normative identity style. Private and public self-consciousness, social anxiety, and locus -of-control were not significantly correlated with the normative identity style: $r = .035, p > .05$; $r = .103, p > .05$; $r = .065, p > .05$; and $r = -.105, p > .05$, respectively. Therefore, it can be concluded that self-esteem is the best predictor of the normative identity style in this model, accounting for 3.5% of the variance.

Diffuse avoidance identity style. The third hypothesis predicted that low self-esteem, high levels of self-consciousness, and an external locus of control in young adulthood would each predict

a diffuse-avoidance identity style in young adulthood. This hypothesis was only partially supported by the analysis. It appears that higher levels of social anxiety ($r = .136, p < .05$), decreased self-esteem ($r = -.171, p < .01$), and an external locus of control ($r = .243, p < .01$) are significantly correlated with the diffuse identity style. Levels of private and public self-consciousness were not significantly correlated with a diffuse identity style: $r = -.015, p > .05$; $r = .089, p > .05$, respectively. It appears that only an external locus of control significantly contributes to the likelihood of having a diffuse-identity style, accounting for 5.9% of the variance.

Indirect model: Mediating altered emotional states

It was hypothesized that the relation between childhood teasing and identity style will be mediated by altered emotional states (low self-esteem, high self-consciousness, and an external locus of control). To investigate this hypothesis, we used a linear structural equation modeling procedure (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1989). Three steps were taken to establish the overidentified model (refer to Figure 2). In Step 1, we identified each of the variables that had significant predictive value, resulting in a just-identified model. In Step 2, all nonsignificant ($p > .05$) pathways were trimmed, which produced an over-identified model, $\chi^2 = (13, N = 184) = 24.47, p = .027$, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.05, goodness of fit = 0.98, adjusted good of fit = 0.94. In the third step, based on modification indices, the association between locus of control and informational identity style was included to establish the best final fit, $\chi^2 = (12, N = 184) = 17.16, p = .144$, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .04, goodness of fit = .99, adjusted goodness of fit = .95. Consistent with the indirect association hypothesis, recollection of childhood teasing is related with each of the altered emotional states in young adulthood (private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness, social anxiety, external locus of control, and self-esteem). Further, various altered emotional states are associated with the three identity styles, partially

supporting the hypothesis. It was found that both private and public self-consciousness were associated with the informational identity style. In addition, public self-consciousness and self-esteem were associated with the normative identity style, whereas only locus of control was associated with the diffuse-avoidance identity style. Perhaps the more important finding, is that the over-identified model is best at predicting the use of the informational identity style, with private and public self-consciousness accounting for 28.6% of the variance in this particular style. In contrast, only 6% of the variance in the normative identity style was accounted for by social anxiety and self-esteem, and 5.6% of the variance for the diffuse-avoidance identity style was accounted for by locus of control.

Discussion

Despite the large amount of literature surrounding identity formation, little research has studied the influence of non-familial childhood experiences on an individual's later identity style. Thus, the current study sought to examine the association between recollection of childhood teasing from peers and one's later identity style. It was hypothesized that being teased in childhood would directly predict the use of the diffuse-avoidance identity style in young adulthood. Our results, however, indicated that teasing was not predictive of any of the identity styles, suggesting that this early childhood experience does not directly connect with the use of a particular identity style. In light of the research on identity formation, it is not surprising that no direct association was found. Identity is a multi-faceted construct, such that many different factors contribute to its development, including various experiences and contexts. Erikson (1968) stressed the importance of considering the effects of one's social environment on identity development. This social environment can consist of many different arenas, such as those of the family, peer groups, school, work and religion (Berzonsky & Adams, 1999). Although the largest part of a child's social world is their peers (Sullivan, 1953), other social contexts will also play a role in identity development. In addition, the identity orientation that an individual actually employs can depend on, "a diversity of factors, including contextual demands, environmental consequences, personal involvement, cultural and social expectations, and stylistic preferences (Berzonsky, 1992, p.785). Therefore, teasing from peers is unlikely to directly influence one's later identity style because of the numerous variables that are involved in its composition. However, teasing is an important social phenomenon that affects children in vast and enduring ways (Rigby, 2000; Cash 1995; Gleason et al., 2000; Bond et al., 2001; Mynard et al., 2000; Gleason et al., 2000), and therefore is likely to influence one's later identity style in indirect ways.

Childhood Teasing and Self-Consciousness, Locus of Control, and Self-esteem

A second major purpose of the current study was to examine whether childhood teasing has an indirect association with an individual's later identity style. In order to test this hypothesis, the association between childhood teasing and various emotional states in young adulthood were examined. In support of the second hypothesis, it was found that childhood teasing significantly predicted increased levels of public and private self-consciousness, social anxiety, and an external locus of control, as well as lowered self-esteem in young adulthood.

Fenigstein et al. (1975) developed a measure to examine individual differences in self-consciousness. One element of this self-awareness is said to be private self-consciousness, a process whereby a person's attention is turned inward, and the individual becomes aware of their personal thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values and moods (Fenigstein et al., 1975; Schlenker & Weigold, 1990). This awareness of the self is likely to be facilitated by teasing that centers on the child's internal abilities, such as intellectual performance (Scambler et al., 1998), competence (Gleason et al., 2000), and pointing out deficiencies (Pawluk, 1989). The teasing situation brings a child's personal attributes to their attention, which may afford the child the opportunity to reflect upon these attributes, engaging in the process of discovering his/her internal thoughts and feelings. It is also possible that when a child receives large amounts of teasing from their peers, they are more likely to become introspective and reflect upon why they might be the object of the tease, as well as how they feel about these interactions. Thus, it is highly probable that children who are teased excessively will likely become more self-focused. The teasing situation provides the child with an opportunity to become aware of how they think and feel about various situations.

Higher recollection of teasing in childhood was also found to predict public self-consciousness in young adulthood. This aspect of self-consciousness involves a general awareness

of the self as a social object that has an effect on others, as well as an understanding that others are aware of the self (Fenigstein et al., 1975). Almost half of the questions that assessed public self-consciousness dealt with the awareness of one's physical appearance, by inquiring on how concerned the person is with the way they look, how aware they are of their appearance, and whether one of the last things they do before leaving the house is looking in the mirror (Fenigstein et al., 1975). Publically self-conscious individuals are very concerned about their appearance, and believe appearance is important for smooth social interaction (Miller & Cox, 1982). Thus, a large component of public self-consciousness has to do with an awareness of one's physical appearance. Interestingly enough, the most common topic of childhood teasing is that of physical appearance (Cash, 1995; Crozier et al., 2002; Georgesen et al., 1999). When a child is teased about how they look, he/she becomes aware of another's perspective and sees him/herself as a social object. In addition, this negative teasing is likely to make the child feel negatively about his/her physical appearance, which will increase their public self-consciousness. Therefore, it is likely that the relation between childhood teasing and an increase in public self-consciousness is mediated by an individual's consciousness of their physical appearance and how it appears to others.

A third component of self-consciousness is that of social anxiety, where an individual experiences discomfort in the presence of others. The results of this study indicated that increased recollection of teasing was associated with higher levels of social anxiety in young adulthood. This coincides with past research that found higher levels of peer victimization (including verbal teasing) are related to higher levels of social anxiety in childhood (Craig, 1998; Walter & Inderbitzen, 1998) and adulthood (McCabe et al., 2000; Roth, Coles, & Heimberg, 2002). Social anxiety is closely linked with an individual's level of self-consciousness; public and private self-consciousness refer to a process of self-focused attention, and social anxiety refers to a reaction to this process. For

instance, when an individual becomes publically self-conscious, they may evaluate themselves and become apprehensive, creating social anxiety (Fenigstein et al., 1975). Therefore, it is possible that when a child is teased about their personal appearance or attributes, they may become anxious during situations where these characteristics are drawn to the attention of others and they fear evaluation. In fact, the experience of teasing causes the child to become the center of attention and, consequently, a target. Teasing involves “setting-up” the child to take a fall or appear foolish (Pawluk, 1989), and the victim is often made fun of for the amusement of others (Georges et al., 1999). In addition, the humour that accompanies teasing creates a situation of uncertainty on how the child should behave (Crozier et al., 2002). Roth et al. (2002) suggest that the children who are teased come to view the world as a dangerous place, leading to a heightened awareness of anxiety symptoms. When one considers the implications of teasing for how a child feels in social situations, it is very easy to understand why this experience is associated with increased levels of social anxiety. The current study adds greatly to current research by examining the association between childhood teasing and each of the dimensions of self-consciousness as private and public self-consciousness have never been linked with teasing before.

The current study also hypothesized that childhood teasing would predict an external locus of control, an association never suggested in research to date. This prediction was supported by the current study. Locus of control refers to the beliefs that an individual has about the causes of events in their life, and whether these events result from one’s actions and behavior (internal locus of control), or from factors beyond the individual’s control (external locus of control) (Halloran et al., 1999; Rotter, 1966). We suggest that the association between childhood teasing and an external locus of control would be mediated by feelings of powerlessness and helplessness. Research studying the phenomena of bullying helps to provide some insight into how this process occurs.

Bullying is a type of aggression where one child is repeatedly exposed to harassment and attacks by one or several other pupils (Salmivalli et al, 1999). In bully situations there is an imbalance of power and the victim is often incapable of defending him/herself against the aggressor. In general, bullying does not take place between equals, as a weaker peer is often selected as the target of harassment (Salmivalli et al., 1999). Bullying situations are very similar to those of teasing where the child experiences psychological, social, and emotional discomfort (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001). Hence, the power imbalance that occurs in teasing situations, where a child is more vulnerable than the perpetrator (Hoover & Olsen, 2000), may instill an external locus of control because of the child's inability to control the teasing.

It was also hypothesized that higher recollections of teasing in childhood was associated with low self-esteem in young adulthood. The results of the current study supported this hypothesis, which is consistent with past research on teasing (Casey-Cannon et al, 2001; Gleason et al., 2000; Rigby, 2000) and bullying (Duncan, 1999). Self-esteem is thought of as the self-evaluation made by each individual, and as the general attitude a person holds about himself or herself (Baron, Byrne, & Watson, 2001). Teasing almost always focuses on the attributes of a person, portraying them in a negative fashion. This negative evaluation will permeate how a child ultimately feels about him/herself, consequently decreasing their self-esteem.

The association between altered emotional states and identity style

Informational identity style. No predictions were made in regards to the informational identity style, but several important results were found. The current model (refer to Figure 2) is best at predicting the use of the informational identity style. It was found that higher levels of public and private self-consciousness were associated with the use of the informational identity style. At first glance, this finding contrasts with past research by Adams and colleagues (1987) where individuals

utilizing the informational identity style were significantly less self-conscious. However, this may be the result of varying definitions of self-consciousness. Adams and colleagues' (1987) definition referred to self-consciousness as the willingness of an individual to reveal one's self to others. However, Fenigstein et al.'s (1975) measure of private self-consciousness evaluates very different qualities than that of Adams et al. (1987), by focusing on one's awareness of internal thoughts and feelings. Therefore, the findings of the current study do not necessarily conflict with that of Adams et al. (1987) because of the differential definitions of self-consciousness. Besides the current study, no research to date has evaluated the association of Fenigstein and colleagues' (1975) measures of self-consciousness (private, public, social anxiety) and identity style.

It is not overly surprising that private self-consciousness is highly predictive of the informational identity style. Privately self-conscious persons closely examine their beliefs and feelings (Fenigstein et al., 1975), which is very characteristic of informational identity style users, who actively seek out, process, and evaluate relevant information before making decisions (Berzonsky, 1992). In addition, Adams and Marshall (1996) state that the primary mechanisms stimulating transformation in identity include self-awareness, self-focusing, and self-consciousness that are due to incongruent thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Identity achieved individuals have experienced identity crises, during which they explore alternatives and experience a corresponding subjective discomfort, leading to an evaluation of attitudes, values, and behavior (Adams et al., 1987). Thus, high levels of private self-consciousness may contribute to the appearance of identity crises, which facilitate the use of informational identity styles. The decisions made using this identity style are not based on the values and norms of other individuals, like that of normative identity style users, nor avoided like those using the diffuse-avoidant style (Berzonsky, 1989), but are based on the individual's personal involvement. It has also been stated that the privately self-

conscious person has a desire to appear autonomous and construct and protect an identity as an independent individual (Schlenker & Weigold, 1990). Perhaps this desire to appear autonomous drives the privately self-conscious person to pursue the informational identity style, where the individual takes it upon him/herself to consider different sources of information and does not base their decisions on others. This in turn is likely to contribute to the desired image of autonomy, which privately self-consciousness individuals hope to achieve.

The current study also found that increased public self-consciousness is associated with a decrease in the use of the informational identity style. Adams and colleagues (1987) hypothesized that adolescents who are reluctant to reveal information about themselves (presumably due to the fear of being evaluated) would have more difficulty completing the identity formation process and becoming identity achieved. It is also likely that individuals who are publically self-conscious are less likely to engage in active consideration of various alternatives in decision-making for fear of social disapproval. Individuals with high levels of public self-consciousness are very concerned with how they are seen by others and are attentive to the overt, external aspects of the self (Buss, 1980; Schlenker & Weigold, 1990), which is very uncharacteristic of the informational identity style. Perhaps individuals who have undergone the identity process have developed a sense of self that engenders an anticipation of approval by others (Adams et al., 1987), and thus may be more likely to negotiate issues surrounding their identities.

The informational style was also significantly predicted by low levels of an external locus of control (and in effect high levels of internal locus of control). Therefore, individuals who believe they have power over the events that occur in their lives are more likely to use the informational identity style. This finding is consistent with past research (Berzonsky, 1989). It is likely this

association occurs because identity achieved persons have constructed their own identities (Marcia, 1993) and thus tend not to rely on external influences.

Normative identity style. Individuals who utilize the normative identity style are primarily concerned with conforming to the prescriptions and expectations of significant others and reference groups (Berzonsky, 1992). The current study found that increased levels of public self-consciousness significantly predict the use of a normative identity style. Existing literature on the normative identity style has not linked its' use with any of the self-consciousness dimensions. The discovered association is likely to occur because of the publically self-conscious person's preoccupation with how they appear to others and their concern with themselves as social objects (Fenigstein et al., 1975). In turn, this preoccupation with one's public self will increase the likelihood of using a decision-making style that complies with the standards of others. In addition, publically self-conscious individuals are concerned with cooperation, dependence, and getting along by going along (Schlenker & Weigold, 1990). The goals and principles that they use to regulate their conduct take into account the desires and expectations of others (Carver & Schieier, 1985). Individuals high in public self-consciousness are very aware of how others perceive them, and may adjust their decisions to coincide with those whom are important to them. Therefore, attributes of a publically self-conscious person are likely to contribute to the use of a normative identity style, where the primary objective is to coincide with important others.

One's level of self-esteem also predicts the use of the normative identity style. The results of this study indicate that self-esteem is positively related with the use of the normative identity style. This finding meets with mixed evidence from past research. In contrast to the current findings, Berzonsky and Adams (1999) suggest that foreclosed individuals (who are found to use the normative identity style; Berzonsky, 1992) should have lower self-esteem than those who are

identity achievers or moratoriums (Berzonsky & Adams, 1999). In addition, Salmivalli et al. (1999) believe that when an individual possesses a healthy or genuine high self-esteem, they will have feelings of worthiness and acceptance of him/herself. Intuitively, it would seem that an acceptance of oneself would not lead to a decision-making style that considers only the values and norms of others. Instead, it would make sense that a high level of self-esteem would allow the individual to develop an identity style that would engage the self in the decisions regarding one's identity. Also in contrast to this finding, Marcia (1993) believed that foreclosed individuals should have low self-esteem because they have not undergone the differentiation process between one's personal attributes and ego ideal standards, leading to unrealistically high ego ideals.

However, some research gives light to reasons why a high level of self-esteem is associated with the normative identity style. Marcia (1993) believes that foreclosed individuals adopt a lifelong 'game plan' set out for them by their parents or similar authority figures. When looking to the future, the foreclosed individual sees him/herself as trying to live up to the prearranged set of ideals, occupational plans, and interpersonal forms. Their self-esteem is contingent upon the extent to which they fulfill the tasks given them (Marcia, 1993). Therefore, the extent to which the individual conforms to the values and beliefs of important others, they are likely to have a higher self-esteem. In support of this theory, it has been found that foreclosed women have higher self-esteem than moratorium and diffusion women (Marcia, 1993). Future research should examine the different processes behind the association between self-esteem and the normative identity style, as current research presents mixed findings.

Diffuse-avoidant identity style. The focus of this study's hypothesis was on predicting the use of the diffuse-avoidance identity style, a decision-making style that involves procrastination and delay until the individual's circumstances dictate a course of action (Berzonsky, 1992). It was

suggested that high levels of self-consciousness, an external locus of control, and low self-esteem would predict the diffuse-avoidant style. Results indicated that the primary predictor of the diffuse-avoidant style was an external locus of control. This is consistent with past research, which suggests that diffusions have an external locus of control because they lack a firm identity and are defined by their circumstances (Berzonsky, 1989; Marcia, et al., 1993). In addition, a diffuse-avoidant allows external events to dictate one's course of action (Berzonsky & Adams, 1999). Therefore, it is possible that when an individual believes that the causes of life events are beyond their control, they neglect to pursue identity issues because they do not believe it will benefit them. These people may prefer to let external circumstances guide their decisions because they believe their actions fail to control personal outcomes.

It is likely that private self-consciousness did not predict the use of the diffuse-avoidant identity style because of the introspective and self-awareness this type of self-consciousness employs. A diffuse-avoidant individual does not engage in the process of self-reflection when making decisions, instead relying on procrastination techniques and allowing external circumstances to guide their choices. Thus, it is not surprising that private self-consciousness was not associated with this identity style.

The same follows for the predictive value of public self-consciousness for diffuse-avoidant style. Those who are publically self-conscious are primarily concerned with how they appear to others, which is not characteristic of the diffuse-avoidant person. This type of individual does not appear to be overly concerned about how others perceive them, as evident by their reliance on situational demands and not referent others for decision-making (Berzonsky & Adams, 1999). The primary concerns of the public self-conscious and diffuse-avoidant individual appear to be very different, which could account for their lack of association.

The third hypothesis also suggested that low self-esteem would predict the diffuse-avoidant identity style. Results indicate that a low self-esteem is correlated with a higher usage of diffuse-avoidant style, although it was not a significant predictor in the overall model. Thus, the association between self-esteem and the diffuse-avoidant identity style did not reach significance when controlling for the other variables in the model.

Limitations of the Study

Although this investigation provides many relevant and previously undocumented findings, it has several limitations that should be noted. First, is the retrospective, self-report nature of the design, where individuals are asked to recall their memories of teasing in childhood. This type of research is problematic because it is possible that individuals reconstruct their memories. Thus, the recalled accounts may not be an accurate portrayal of the actual teasing experience. A longitudinal design that measures a child's experience with teasing, and then later assesses the same individual on various attributes is likely to be a more reliable approach to this field of study. It should also be noted that the data are based on self-report data that is subject to problems regarding deliberate falsification and self-presentation tactics.

A second weakness of this study is its' inability to find information about gender differences due to the low number of male participants. Although it was not my primary goal to research these differences (but instead to find general trends), it is an important drawback of the study. Understanding how teasing differentially influences both genders is an important area of research (Gleason et al., 2000) and future research should seek to examine these gender differences.

Third, the correlations are small in magnitude, suggesting that other factors may contribute more to the variance in self-consciousness, self-esteem, and locus of control than childhood teasing. The same holds for the variance explained in the three identity styles by the altered emotional states.

An exception to this is the moderate amount of variance explained in the informational identity style by private and public self-consciousness, as well as locus of control, which is a major strength of the study.

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Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

Scale	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
Age	19.79	1.41	284
Teasing Effect	26.25	8.63	284
Private SC	33.63	4.64	284
Public SC	24.57	4.94	284
Social Anxiety	19.45	5.15	284
Self-Esteem	32.01	5.00	284
Locus of Control	12.50	3.54	284
Informational	36.67	5.36	284
Normative	28.87	4.67	284
Diffuse-Avoidance	26.20	5.27	284

Figure 1

Model for Predicting Identity Style from Childhood Teasing

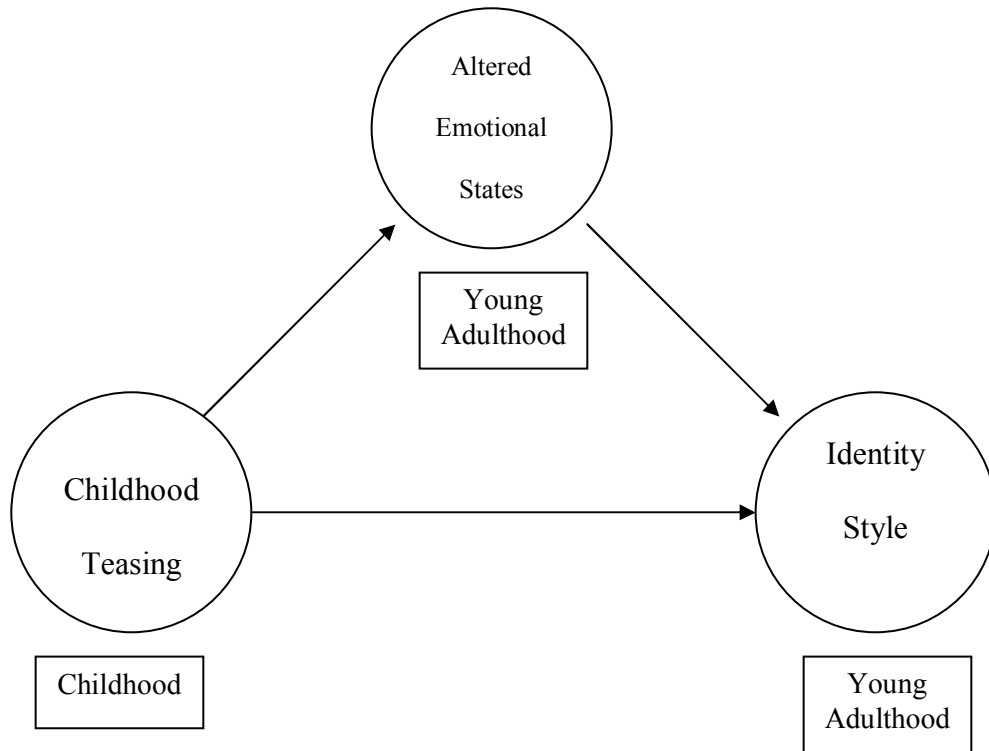


Figure 2

Overidentified Model

