Effects of relationships with friends on reactions towards teasers
-from the perspective of emotions toward teasers and for maintaining a relationship-

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ABSTRACT. Reactions to teasing in everyday situations were investigated by focusing on emotions towards teasers and needs for maintaining a relationship. A questionnaire was administered to Japanese university students (N=150, 71 men and 79 women, mean age=19.29 years old, SD=1.38). Covariance structure analysis developed a causal model of teasing reactions, which indicated that emotions toward teasers, including trust and independence, suppressed adverse reactions to teasing. On the other hand, the sense of rivalry caused adverse reactions. It is suggested that anxiety about relationships and needs for mutual respect might cause exaggerated reactions.

KEY WORDS: teasing, reaction, relationship

Introduction
Definition and functions of teasing
Teasing is one type of aggressive sense of humor (Ueno, 1992). It is also "an intentional provocation accompanied by playful off-record markers that together comment on the characteristics of the target (Keltner, Capps, Kring, Young, & Heerey, 2001). “Off-record markers” are verbal or non-verbal cues that are expressed in association with teasing, such as smiles, exaggerations, and playful tones of voice, among others.

Previous studies on teasing have classified teasing into two types; the perception of teasing as an attack, and teasing as a prosocial interaction. According to the former viewpoint, teasing is “an expression of suppressed aggressiveness or a sense of superiority” (Ueno, 1992). It has been indicated that teasing has harmful effects. For example, teasing might lead to a type of bullying (Keltner, Young, Heerey, Oemig & Monarch, 1998), and teasing girls about their bodies might cause eating disorders (Thompson, Coovert & Stormer, 1999). On the other hand, according to the latter viewpoint, teasing has a function of making people become more close (Martin, 2007). Moreover, Endo (2008) indicated that mutual provocations might be confirmation of a close relationship between two people. In the present study, based on Martin (2007) and Endo (2008), teasing was regarded as a prosocial interaction.

Attitudes of Teasers
Teasing has been examined from the standpoints of the teaser and the target, and most studies have considered the teaser’s
intentions. For example, Martin (2007) suggested that one person teases another person to send a friendly message. Moreover, a teaser changes the content of teasing depending on the target, e.g., when a target is a person of higher status, the teaser teases about his/her positive aspects, whereas the teaser teases the target aggressively if the target is a person that dissatisfies the teaser, (Keltner et al., 1998). Sometimes teasing fails because of inadequate communication methods, insufficient skills, unsuitable facial expressions, and too many repetitions, among others, which makes the target uncomfortable (Hayama & Sakurai, 2008).

Moreover, it has been indicated that teasers’ behaviors are profoundly affected by the targets’ reactions to teasing. For example, the teaser’s feeling of affinity towards the target increase when the target smiles (Martin, 2007) and “the sense of acceptance” as well as “the sense of understanding of others” increase, leading to an expectation that the friendly intentions of extreme jokes will be understood (Hayama & Sakurai, 2010). Thus, teasers’ attitudes change depending on the targets’ reactions.

**Relationships between teasers and the targets**

Studies have examined teasing from the perspective of the teaser and the target, which mutually affect each other. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on the relationship between the two. However, there are only a few studies on the relationship between the teaser and the target, and these have investigated the psychological distance between them. Endo (2008) indicated that teasing tends to fail because of the mismatch in recognizing the psychological distance between the teaser and the target. Moreover, Hayama and Sakurai (2010) indicated that emotionally expressive reactions tend to be made to uncomfortable teasing when the psychological distance between the teaser and the target is short.

On the other hand, relationships between teasers and targets should be investigated from the perspective of the need for a desirable
Relationships and emotions towards the counterpart. According to Kasahara and Shimatani (2012), communication between two people differs according to each other's need for friendship. Also, reactions of targets in teasing settings might differ according to the targets' needs for maintaining relationships with the teasers. Moreover, the target's emotions towards the teaser might be relevant. Communication studies related to family therapy have indicated that when relationships between two people are unstable, they show communication behaviors to approach each other (Ikuta, 1999; Sugawara & Ikuta, 2001). Also, a different type of communication from the usual might take place in teasing settings when the target is anxious or has conflicts in the relationship with the teaser.

Pragmatics of communication
This study conceptualized teasing as communication between teasers and targets based on the “pragmatics of human communication” (Watzlawick, Beavelas, & Jackson, 1967), which perceives communication as a mutual effect between the sender and receiver. Pragmatics of communication introduces the concept of “meta-communication,” which conveys a higher-level message than the typical message (Watzlawick et al., 1967). Communicating by teasing sends a positive message to the target while being verbally provocative, which is a type of meta-communication. Meta-communication is established based on the relationship between communicators (Watzlawick et al., 1967). Therefore, communication by teasing is affected by the relationship between the teaser and the target.

Studies on the pragmatics of communication have indicated two aspects of communication: digital and analog (Watzlawick et al., 1967). Digital communication is “communication using language,” whereas analog communication is “all types of communication without using language,” but using attitudes, gestures, facial expressions, and voice tones, among others. Most studies related to family therapy have examined digital communication as the “content aspect” and analog communication as the “management aspect” of communication (e.g., Wakashima, 1997; Okuno, 2013). Moreover, a mixture of content and management aspects is observed in studies on teasing reactions, including “pretending to accept a joke by laughing” (Hayama & Sakurai, 2010). Furthermore, teasing often involves paradoxical communication (Keltner et al., 1998), such as showing inconsistency between the content and management aspects as in the case of saying “Stop it” while smiling. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the reactions of a target to teasing from the perspectives of content and management.

Based on the above discussion, this study focused on relationships between teasers and targets, especially the emotions of a targets towards teasers, and the need for maintaining a relationship with teasers, and examined the effects of teasing on the reactions of the targets.

Methods
1) Participants
Japanese university students (M=178, 71 men and 79 women, mean age=19.29 years of age, SD=1.38) participated in the study. They provided 150 valid responses.

2) Survey period
The survey was conducted in October 2017.

3) Questionnaires
Respondents were requested to assume “A, who is a same sex friend that sometimes teases you.” Then respondents were asked about their feelings toward A and the need for maintaining a relationship with A. Their reactions to A’s teasing were also inquired.

   (1) The Emotions Towards Friends Scale (Enomoto, 1999): This scale assesses emotions towards friends. The respondents’ emotions toward A were assessed in this study. The scale includes the following subscales comprising of 25 items; “trust/stability” (e.g., I trust A), “anxiety/worry” (e.g., I’m worried about how A thinks about me), “independence” (e.g., I behave according to my will even when staying with A), “a sense of rivalry” (e.g., I don’t want to lose to A in many points), and “conflicts” (e.g., I cannot say my ideas to A). Respondents responded using a six-point scale. The total value of the items was used as the item score.

   (2) The Needs for Friends Scale (Enomoto, 2000): This scale assesses needs for friends. The respondents’ needs for the relationship with A were assessed in the present study. The scale includes the following subscales comprising of 21 items; “needs for affinity” (e.g., I want to stay with A), “needs for conformity” (e.g., I want A to conform his/her hobbies and behaviors with mine), and “needs for mutual respect” (e.g., I want to talk honestly with A). Responses were made using a six-point scale. The total score for the items was used as the item score.

(3) The Reactions to Teasing Questionnaire: This questionnaire was developed based on the classification of teasing reactions by Koiwa and Okuno (2017), e.g., “showing a dissatisfied facial expression.” The questionnaire includes 9 items inquiring about content aspects and 56 items inquiring about management aspects, consisting of 65 items. The responses were made using a six-point scale.

Results

1. Results of factor analyzing teasing reaction items
Among the 9 items assessing content aspects and 56 items assessing management aspects of teasing reactions, 21 items indicated a floor effect. Three items indicated a floor effect; however, they were judged as expressing uncomfortable feelings about teasing. Therefore, these items were considered indispensable to teasing reactions and included in the factor analysis. These items included (5) “Responding in a smaller voice than usual;” (22), “Responding in an offended tone,” and (45) Having a dissatisfied attitude.”
Relationships and Teasing Reactions

Table 1. The results of factor analysis of the content aspect of teasing reactions

| Item content | F1   | F2   |
|--------------|------|------|
| **Acceptance (α=.711)** |      |      |
| (29) Reacting to jokes | .715 | .114 |
| (1) Responding playfully by accepting teasing | .710 | -.231 |
| (9) Teasing back | .585 | -.030 |
| (12) Making fun of oneself by accepting teasing | .536 | .124 |
| **Rejection (α=.558)** |      |      |
| (41) Making an excuse | .084 | .621 |
| (40) Asking back, by saying “What do you mean?” | .204 | .507 |
| (21) Saying, “Stop it,” or “I don’t like it.” | -.130 | .460 |
| (51) Apologizing | -.100 | .414 |

Correlation between factors

|     | F1   | F2   |
|-----|------|------|
| F1  |     | -.10 |
| F2  |     |      |

Factor analysis was conducted on the 9 items of content aspect using the maximum likelihood method and Promax rotation, which extracted two factors. One factor included components of accepting teasing, such as “reacting to jokes” and “responding playfully,” which was named the “Acceptance” factor. The other factor included components of rejecting teasing, such as “making excuses” or “asking to stop it,” which was named the “Rejection” factor. Chronbach’s α of the admitting factor was .711, and the rejection factor was .558. The results of the factor analysis are shown in Table 1.

Next, factor analysis was conducted on the 56 items of the management aspect using the maximum likelihood method and Promax rotation, which extracted four factors. The first factor included items related to exaggerated reactions to teasing, such as “big gestures,” “exaggerated gestures,” “loud voice,” and “high-toned voice,” which was named “Exaggerated reactions.” The second factor included items expressing dissatisfaction toward the teaser, such as “dissatisfied attitudes” and “dissatisfied facial expressions,” which was named “Dissatisfied reactions.” The third factor included items related to enjoying teasing, such as "a playful tone" or "a bright mood," which was named “Cheerful reactions.” The fourth factor included items related to calm and usual reactions such as “usual attitudes,” “a usual tone,” and “a gentle tone,” which was named “Calm reactions.” Chronbach’s α of “Exaggerated reactions” was .827, “Dissatisfied reactions” was .802, “Cheerful reactions”
was .759, and “Calm reaction” was .560. The results of the factor analysis are shown in Table 2.

2. Correlation model of the target’s emotions/needs for relationships with the teaser and reactions to teasing

A correlation model of the target’s emotions toward the teaser and needs for relationships with the teaser and reactions to teasing was developed using Amos using the following procedures. Firstly, multiple regression analysis was conducted with needs for relationships with friends and needs for relatedness as exploratory variables and subscales of teasing

To find an appropriate model, the correlation model was developed using Amos using the following procedures. Firstly, multiple regression analysis was conducted with needs for relationships with friends and needs for relatedness as exploratory variables and subscales of teasing.
Relationships and Teasing Reactions

Correlation analysis among variables was conducted (Table 3). Latent variables were established based on the correlation coefficients among reactions to teasing. A high positive correlation was indicated between “Acceptance” and “Cheerful reactions” (r=.720, p<.01). Therefore, a latent variable named “positive reaction” was developed. On the other hand, a significant negative correlation was indicated between “Calm reactions” and “Dissatisfied reactions” (r=-.54, p<.01). Therefore, a latent variable named “negative reaction” was developed. Moreover, a low positive correlation was indicated between “Acceptance” and “Exaggerated reactions” (r=.293, p<.001). Therefore, a path from “Exaggerated reactions” to “Positive reactions” was established. Furthermore, the results of multiple regression analysis indicated paths from “a sense of rivalry,” “independence,” and “trust/stability” to “Negative reactions” as well as paths from “anxiety/worry,” “needs for mutual respect” to “Positive reactions” and “Exaggerated reactions.” Finally, causal relationships between independent variables were examined based on the correlation coefficients, and paths from “anxiety/worry” to “a sense of rivalry,” “independence,” and “trust/stability” and paths from “needs for mutual respect” to “independence” and “trust/stability” were developed. Figure 1 shows the developed model. The goodness of fit of the model was as follows; GFI=.961, AGFI=.917, CFI=.980, RMSEA=.044, and AIC=91.359. The values of GFI and AGFI were higher than .90, and the value of RMSEA was lower than .05, indicating that the goodness of fit of the model was sufficiently acceptable.

Table 3: Correlation coefficients of variables used to construct the model

|                      | Trust/ stability | Anxiety/ worry | Independence | Sense of rivalry | Need for mutual respect | Acceptance | Exaggerated reactions | Dissatisfied reactions | Cheerful reactions | Calm reactions |
|----------------------|------------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------|------------------------|------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------|---------------|
| Trust/ stability     |      | -.171*         | .295**       | .161*           | .562**                   | .331**     | .009                 | .250**               | .453**           | .453**        |
| Anxiety/ worry       |      |                | .417**       | .333**          | .003                   | .074       | .184*                 | .364**               | .198*            | .299**        |
| Independence         |      |                |              | .056            | .258**                   | .197*     | .084                 | .249**               | .294**           | .277**        |
| Sense of rivalry     |      |                |              |                | .069                   | .254**     | .090                 | .287**               | .267**           | .136          |
| Need for mutual respect |      |                |              |                |                        |            |                      |                      |                  |               |
| Acceptance           |      |                |              |                |                        |            |                      |                      |                  |               |
| Exaggerated reactions|      |                |              |                |                        |            |                      |                      |                  |               |
| Dissatisfied reactions|      |                |              |                |                        |            |                      |                      |                  |               |
| Cheerful reactions   |      |                |              |                |                        |            |                      |                      |                  |               |
| Calm reactions       |      |                |              |                |                        |            |                      |                      |                  |               |

Values consist correlation coefficients, *p<.05, **p<.001
**Discussion**

1. **Communication behaviors of teasing targets**

   The results of factor analysis indicated two types of content aspects and four types of management aspects in the reactions of the targets to teasing. The content of reactions was classified as “Acceptance” and “Rejection.” Acceptance is a reaction that includes humor, such as “reacting to a joke” or “reacting playfully.” Rejection is the reaction of not accepting teasing and rejecting provocative words.

   The following types of reactions were indicated as management behaviors towards teasing; Exaggerated, Cheerful, Dissatisfied, and Calm reactions. A previous study on teasing reported two types of reactions to teasing; compliant reactions and emotionally strong reactions (Hayama & Sakurai, 2010). Cheerful reactions among management behaviors identified in the present study are similar to compliant reactions in Hayama and Sakurai (2010), and dissatisfied reactions correspond to emotionally expressive reactions in Hayama et al. (2010) because targets express their unpleasant feelings toward teasers.

   On the other hand, Calm reactions and Exaggerated reactions were not indicated in the previous study. Exaggerated reactions express the targets’ intention to actively react to teasers’ provocation, leading involvement in teasing communication. Moreover, items of Exaggerated reactions included items related to gestures. Gestures have a function of maintaining conversations and relationships (Wakashima, 1996). Therefore, Exaggerated reactions might be useful for maintaining a conversation. On the other hand, Calm reactions imply gently reacting to the teasers’

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![Figure 1](image.png)

*Figure 1. Correlation model among targets’ emotions/needs for the relationship with teasers and reactions to teasing (Values are standardizing coefficients.)*
provocations in the usual way, which is the opposite of the management communication of Exaggerated reactions.

Based on the above, it might be possible to perceive interactive relationships between a teaser and a target by focusing on the management aspect of communication using teasing.

2. Factors affecting positive reactions in targets of teasing

It was indicated that reactions in targets of teasing could be classified into two types; positive and negative. Positive reactions include accepting teasing with Cheerful associated with Exaggerated reactions.

It was suggested that Positive reactions to teasing were affected by emotions toward the teaser and the need for the relationship with the teaser. Needs for mutual respect had a positive effect on positive reactions, suggesting that when a target wants to maintain a relationship of mutual respect with the teaser, they tended to make Exaggerated or Positive reactions. Moreover, gestures included in Exaggerated reactions are often made when the psychological distance between interlocutors is short (Wakashima, 1997). Gestures may have been expressed based on an existing good relationship, in which the need for mutual respect can be held.

On the other hand, anxiety and worry had a positive correlation with Positive reactions. Exaggerated and Positive reactions might be made even when having anxiety about the relationship with the teaser. It has been reported that communication to restore a relationship is undertaken when the relationship becomes distant (Ikuta, 1999; Sugawara & Ikuta, 2001). Also, the target might try to restore a relationship by making exaggerated and positive reactions when the target is not sure about the relationship with the teaser.

3. Factors affecting adverse reactions in targets of teasing

Adverse reactions to teasing mean showing dissatisfaction with a bad mood, suggesting the target’s intention to try to prevent the teasing. It was suggested that adverse reactions to teasing were affected by emotions towards the teaser. Independence and trust/stability reduced adverse reactions, suggesting that a target’s negative attitudes toward teasing might be suppressed when the target trusted the teaser, and they had an independent relationship.

Teasing is regarded as meta-communication from the perspective of the pragmatics of communication, which is related to the relationship between the communicators (Watzlawick. et al., 1967). When a target has favorable feelings toward a teaser, the target read a friendly meta-message from the teaser and may reject the teasing less often.

Anxiety and worry might have a positive correlation with negative reactions to teasing, suggesting that a target tries to stop the teasing when the target is anxious about the relationship with a teaser. Digital and analog modalities are inconsistent in communication by teasing, and a target interprets one with the other, which is affected by the target’s
recognition (Watzlawick et al., 1967). When a target is anxious, he/she tends to interpret teasing as an attack, which results in negative attitudes about teasing. Moreover, the sense of rivalry has a positive correlation with adverse reactions, suggesting that when a target regards a teaser as a rival, the target tries to stop the teasing. Teasing is an expression of a sense of superiority (Ueno, 1992). Therefore, in teasing communication, a person regards the self as having a higher status than the other. The sense of rivalry is the desire of a person to increase his or her status in relation to another person. Therefore, if targets have a sense of rivalry with teasers, the targets might try to maintain their status by rejecting teasing.

4. Suggestions to clinical settings

Applying the results of the present study to daily communication with friends would enable predicting emotions and needs of a target person by the teaser or a third person looking at the teasing situation. Even when a target makes positive reactions, if the reactions are exaggerated, the target might be anxious about the teaser. Moreover, the sense of rivalry of the target with the teaser could be elucidated from the target’s negative responses. Therefore, reactions to teasing might be appropriate for assessing relationships between friends.

In family therapy and brief therapy interventions consideres it essential to conduct interventions for specific patterns of communication (Hasegawa, 1997; Hanada, 2003). The present study suggests that exaggerated reactions tend to cause communication having a specific pattern. Exaggerated reactions express the target's intention to excessively react to the teaser’s provocation, leading to involvement in teasing communication. The results of this study indicated that exaggerated reactions are made when a target is anxious about the relationship with the teaser. When the target is not sure about the relationship with the teaser and wants to resolve the anxiety, he/she reacts to teasing in an exaggerated manner, which maintains teasing communication, producing a vicious cycle between the teaser and the target. It might be useful to use calm reactions, which is opposite to exaggerated reactions, to break the vicious cycle. In other words, to suggest to a target always suffering from teasing that he/she should react in a gentle way, as usual, might function as "Doing different.” It is also essential to attend to a targets’ emotions toward teasers and needs for relationships with the teasers to provide “Do different” interventions in brief therapy.

Conclusions

Teasing reactions are affected by the targets’ emotions and needs for maintaining the relationships with the teasers. When targets have favorable feelings towards a teaser, they tend to show positive reactions. On the other hand, when targets have a sense of rivalry with teasers, they tend to show adverse reactions to teasing. Moreover, when targets have anxiety about the relationships with teasers, they tend to show exaggerated reactions to shorten the psychological distance. On the other hand,
when targets have anxiety, they sometimes show adverse reactions. In the future, factors determining targets’ reactions should be examined in more detail.

The present study conducted a questionnaire survey with university students about their relationships with an assumed friend. In the future, unconscious reactions to teasing in actual communication settings should be examined. Moreover, a survey on different age groups should be conducted because teasing tends to become a problem in junior and senior high school students. Furthermore, the quality of teasing should be examined because the reaction might differ based on the teasers’ method of teasing and the content of teasing.

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