

Teasers, bullies may be clueless, desire to control

Psychology experts advise victims to speak up and confront their tormentors

By Kim Chapman
Copy Chief

Kids on the playground do it. Adults in cubicles do it. Rappers devote song after song to it. It doesn't cause cancer or ruin checking accounts, but making fun of others has a spot in the world of vices.

Making fun of others can take many different forms, such as playful teasing among friends or antagonistic put-downs between enemies. Likewise, people make fun of others for a variety of reasons.

"That kind of behavior would probably suggest insensitivity or a maliciousness," University Counseling and Testing Center senior staff psychologist Ron Miyaguchi said.

Among adults, it may also be an issue of cluelessness or a lack of social cues on the part of the person who does it. Teasing can be harmless depending on the context and the norms of a group, Miyaguchi added.

Bullying is an extreme form of making fun of others and includes public humiliation, physical aggression and verbal harassment. About 15 percent of adolescent students are either bullied regularly or initiate bullying behavior, according to <http://www.AboutHealth.com>.

Children and adolescents who bully try to maintain their social status by attacking others, said Massachusetts General Hospital child psychiatrist Dr. Paula Rauch on [AboutHealth.com](http://www.AboutHealth.com). The perpetrator may have low self-esteem or feel the need to have control over somebody else, which would explain why they put others down, Rauch said.

On the other hand, researchers at UCLA are trying to dispel the notion that youths who bully have low self-esteem. The UCLA studies have found that bullies are often popular and psychologically strong; they do not need ego boosters or feel lonely. A report on the research is available at <http://www.college.ucla.edu/juvenile.htm>.

Adults who make fun of others may not realize they are doing it, Clemson University psychology Professor Robin Kowalski told NPR's Morning Edition on Dec. 3, 2003. Still, bad behavior functions to increase the instigator's control, she said. Kowalski, the author of "Complaining, Teasing, and Other Annoying Behaviors," asserts that Western society is ruder than it used to be and is filled with incivility. In adulthood, teasing can even manifest itself in sexual harassment, Kowalski said.

While it may be funny to the instigator, the person being teased may feel hurt or have lasting effects from being a target. Miyaguchi said he does not come across many students who visit the counseling center who are picked on presently, but they may be dealing with the cumulative effects of being teased when they were younger.

Adults interpret being made fun of in different ways depending on context, personality and their history dealing with it, according to a study by University of Kentucky researchers published in the August 2003 Journal of Personality.

"Although childhood teasing is often unambiguously hostile, in adulthood teasing ... these negative comments are often framed with verbal and nonverbal cues or playful markers, such as laughter or smiling, that allow the teasing comment not to be taken seriously," the researchers wrote. The duality of negative statements and humor cues is what makes teasing ambiguous and creates room for interpretation.

Miyaguchi and Kowalski contend that adults should speak up and tell their perpetrator that the teasing is bothersome.

The person being made fun of "bears some responsibility to take action or to say something," Miyaguchi said.

It is better to acknowledge hurtful comments rather than retaliate and start a vicious cycle, Kowalski said. It is important to speak up because the other person may not be aware of what they are doing.

"I think ideally people outgrow that kind of behavior," Miyaguchi said.

Contact the copy chief
at kimchapman@dailyemerald.com

GAMBLING

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games, from cards to video poker to the lottery. Online gambling has also emerged as a major new tool for students who like to wager.

Marotta said gambling becomes more common as access to it increases. Oregon has eight casinos, with another planned for Florence, along with video poker and a state-sponsored lottery.

One slot supervisor at Chinook Winds Casino in Lincoln City said he commonly sees college-age gamblers in the pit, where the blackjack, craps and roulette tables are located.

"Especially when they're playing craps, it looks like they're betting pretty good," Paul Reedy said, adding that

slots also attract college-aged gamblers.

Student problem gamblers often fit a profile, according to the Minnesota study. They tend to be men and are more likely to engage in risky behavior, such as drinking and using illegal drugs, than non-gamblers. They also tend to have relatively high disposable incomes.

Perhaps surprisingly, the study found that a student's GPA and credit card debt load were unrelated to gambling problems.

Gambling is particularly prevalent among student-athletes. A University of Michigan study found that 72 percent of student-athletes gambled during college and 28 percent gambled on sports.

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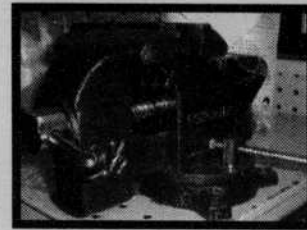
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