

Clout-lighting: Pranking your partner for likes is a surefire way to get dumped this April Fools' Day

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

What would you do to get more likes or shares on your favorite social media platform this April Fools' Day?

Would you blast an [airhorn in your partner's ear](#) while they're sleeping,

record and upload their reaction online? Would you put hot chili in their food, then film and share their distress?

Online prank videos are nothing new, and while many are lighthearted, a concerning sub-genre called "clout-lighting" has been [emerging across the internet](#).

But in case you might be planning to clout-light your partner this April Fools' Day, research shows it's a surefire way to get dumped.

What is clout-lighting?

Clout-lighting is a combination of the word "clout" (to have [social influence](#)) and "gaslighting" ([systematic manipulation](#) that leads victims to question their own beliefs and feelings).

The term was first used by British journalist [Jessica Lindsay](#) to describe the practice of intimate partners playing extreme practical jokes on one another and posting their reactions on social media.

Clout-lighting is related to, but different from an online prank. [Pranks](#) target unsuspecting people, often strangers, whereas clout-lighting involves intimate partners.

Both clout-lighting and online pranks represent "[aggressive humor](#)" or "[negative humor](#)" and its subcategory "[disparagement](#)"—they mock, tease, or ridicule innocent victims to entertain an audience.

Clout-lighting is also different from cyberbullying. "Clout-lighters" appear motivated by their emotional needs—attention seeking and gaining popularity on social media. By contrast, [cyberbullies](#) relentlessly target individuals to cause harm or distress, hidden by the cloak of [anonymity](#).

Why is clout-lighting an emerging trend?

There is nothing new about filming and publishing a practical joke. US reality show [Candid Camera](#) first aired in 1948; like the more recent [Punk'd](#) and similar shows, they feature footage captured by a hidden camera of everyday people (sometimes celebrities) caught up in pranks or hoaxes.

However, social media has created a platform for people to use pranks as a means of generating more clicks and social media popularity: clout. Today, anyone can be a comedic celebrity, and YouTube is full of them.

YouTube prank channels provide a platform for [pranksters](#) to amass followers and popularity.

However, to get more likes, shares or followers, clout-lighters need to publish extreme (sometimes even cruel and painful) pranks inflicted on their closest people.

One example reportedly involved [rubbing chili on a tampon](#), with the resulting video reaction viewed by millions online. Others have involved secretly adding [laxatives](#) or [hot chili sauce](#) to food, or tormenting a [girlfriend with a spider](#).

While many of the skits appear highly produced, the genre of clout-lighting pushes beyond the boundaries of comedic entertainment, towards promoting intimate partner abuse and misogyny.

Passive voyeurism

Concerningly, many of these cruel and embarrassing clips have been downloaded hundreds of thousands of times, suggesting our appetite for

passive voyeurism. Just as [reality television](#) illustrates [suffering and loss](#) and a preoccupation with personal trauma for the sake of entertainment, clout-lighting videos do the same thing.

Studies have indicated viewers who are drawn to extreme forms of entertainment have the [sensation-seeking](#) personality trait—a tendency to constantly seek varied and intense viewing experiences. [Passive voyeurism](#) of human pain increases as our compassion fades, and we become desensitized to the footage. Accordingly, we watch even more extreme footage to attain the same level of sensation.

By that token, clout-lighters need to post even more painful and humiliating content to keep driving traffic to their channel.

Who are clout-lighters?

A [2020 study](#) found that regardless of age, clout-lighters tended to have [low self-esteem](#) and were "higher social media users." Males were over four times more likely to engage in clout-lighting than females.

The study also indicated that couples engaged in clout-lighting were more likely to have "low levels of satisfaction" in their relationship, and more likely to break up.

Canadian researchers found some online pranksters tended to be motivated by [sadism](#)—a desire to harm others to boost their own positive feelings.

[Relational dialectics theory](#) explains contradictions in relationships—the point between harmony and possible separation. As two people come together as partners, they begin to experience internal tensions—they each want different things, express different values and life goals. Research finds that people perceive [negative relational humor](#) as a sign

of diminished relationship satisfaction.

Relating this theory to clout-lighting, pranking a partner and posting the results on [social media](#) can increase the level of perceived insecurity in a relationship, especially when the prank is demeaning and socially embarrassing. Hence the likelihood the partners will separate.

These studies reject the notion that clout-lighting is nothing more than light-hearted pranks directed at a loved one. At a much deeper level, such pranks could be indicative of relationship dissatisfaction.

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