



Ghosting: Reasons from the “Ghoster” and Reactions from the “Ghosted”

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ABSTRACT

Ghosting is the sudden unexplained disappearance (via social media or in person) of an individual with whom one had a relationship. One-hundred and forty-six undergraduates (80% women; 20% men) at a large southeastern university completed a 21-item questionnaire. Fifty-six percent reported that they had ghosted someone- the primary reason being that it was easier to disappear than to have further contact with the person. Fifty-one percent reported having been ghosted- the primary reactions being confusion and sadness. Women who had been ghosted were significantly more likely than men to report higher anxiety ($p < .01$), loss of appetite ($p < .05$), confusion ($p < .05$), lower self-esteem ($p < .05$), and feelings of distrust ($p < .05$). There were no differences by race or sexual orientation in emotional reactions to having been ghosted.



FINDINGS- GHOSTING SOMEONE ELSE

Over half of the respondents (56.2%) reported they had ever ghosted someone- 20.6% had ghosted one person, 15.7% had ghosted 2 people, and 38.3% had ghosted 3 or more people. The primary reasons for ghosting someone is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1- PRIMARY REASON FOR GHOSTING SOMEONE

Reason	Percent
Easier to disappear than to have more contact	18.5
Other person wanted more involvement	10.3
Met someone new	6.2
Didn't have time for a relationship now	4.1
Didn't have heart to tell person the real reason	3.4
Wanted to avoid drama of a breakup	2.7
Did not want long-distance relationship	2.7

Quantitative Analysis

When ghosters were asked what message they would like to convey to the person they ghosted, the majority (54%) provided a legitimate or seemingly genuine explanation for their ghosting behavior. Reasons included losing interest and that the person they ghosted wanted more relationship investment/commitment from them. While the majority of ghosters appeared remorseful for their ghosting, one-fifth of ghosters provided a nonapologetic evaluation for their behavior such as “I do not regret ghosting you. It was in my best interest.” Another 18% of ghosters provided a pure apology for their ghosting (i.e., “I’m sorry”). When the ghosted were asked what message they would like to send to the person who ghosted them, 42% said they would like an explanation of why they were ghosted (“Why couldn’t you just explain why you didn’t want to talk anymore, it’s not that hard!” and “Why? Wasn’t I good enough?”). A quarter of those who were ghosted were angry or sad in their response (“Damn, that’s how you feel?”). Other ghosted respondents said they had nothing else to say, that they had “moved on” (17%). And finally, 13% had a more positive response such as, “I respect your decision and it was probably for the best,” and “I forgive you.”

SYMBOLIC INTERACTION THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Symbolic interaction emphasizes how meanings, labels, and definitions are learned from one’s culture and through interaction with others. Persons who were ghosted had expectations of how they felt they should be treated if the partner wanted to end the relationship. These expectations were usually not through being ghosted but by being let down easily over a period of time or given some explanation as to why the person wanted to end the relationship. Ghosting is rejection, and hard enough when an abrupt ending occurs. But to be left with no explanation is even more disheartening. Similarly, the person doing the ghosting, the “ghoster” would be aware of the cultural scripting of “coward” but would seek to avoid the drama/confrontation involved in telling the partner why the relationship needed to end.

REFERENCES

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INTRODUCTION

Ghosting has become a common way of ending a relationship. The abruptness leaves unanswered why ghosters leave and the emotional fallout from being ghosted.

SURVEY, SAMPLE, ANALYSIS

One hundred forty-six undergraduates completed a 21-item internet survey. The age range was 18-55 with a mean age of 20.21. The quantitative data were analyzed using the SPSS program. Qualitative data from answers to open ended questions were also coded and analyzed.

FINDINGS- BEING GHOSTED

Over half (50.7%) reported that they had been ghosted by someone else (after an average of 5.17 months). The emotional reactions to being ghosted were confusion, sadness, distrust, loneliness, and anger. Compared to men, women were more likely to report higher anxiety ($p < .01$), loss of appetite ($p < .05$), confusion ($p < .05$), lower self-esteem ($p < .05$), and distrust ($p < .05$). There were no racial or sexual orientation differences in reactions to being ghosted.