GhosTea: A multiple case study of ghosting among Filipino young adults

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ABSTRACT

Abruptly ceasing communication without any explanation, otherwise known as ghosting, has become a popularized means of relationship dissolution due to technological advancements and the emergence of social media as well as online dating. This multiple case study provides an in-depth analysis and understanding of the narratives of the (5) young adults who faced psychological and emotional issues as victims of ghosting. These young adults navigated the unknown territory of the said relationship dissolution as they struggled with adverse emotions (i.e., pain, anger, confusion, grief, and distrust) and psychological issues (i.e., anxiety, self-doubt, self-blame, and self-devaluation) which impacted them both in short-term and long-term. This paper also highlights the difficulty and fear of victims in trusting their current/future partner and the utter disbelief some have felt for being ghosted in a serious relationship. The narratives of these young adults serve as a looking glass to the issues brought by ghosting and open the discussion about the severity of it and the significance of treating this matter with a greater sense of urgency. This paper's findings conclude that there is indeed a great need for more studies and research that talks about the adverse impacts of ghosting in different contexts, and with relationships involving other members of the public.

*Keywords: Emotional issues**, Filipino young adults, ghosting, relationship dissolution, romantic relationships*

INTRODUCTION

Most people experience relationship dissolution (Eastwick et al., 2008), and in ending romantic relationships, there are various strategies available for an individual's use (Powell et al., 2021). Ghosting has recently become renowned in popular culture and subsequently in the scholarly setting. Numerous scholars like Freedman et al. (2021, 2022), Hermans et al. (2020), and Mazonni et al. (2021) defined ghosting as the act of unilaterally severing or cutting off all forms of contact with the immediate partner and ignoring their attempts to reach out, done either personally or through one or more technological media. This phenomenon has recently received excellent traction in our modern society, where data provided an insight into the spread of the ghosting phenomenon, which indicated that 20-40% of the general population have experienced ghosting either as a victim, disengager, or both (Freedman et al., 2019; LeFebvre et al., 2019). Another definition by LeFebvre et al. (2019) defined ghosting as: "A contemporary breakup strategy. Ghosting uses undesirable forms of social rejection and ostracism to create physical and psychological distance" (p. 434), and when a relationship is at its early talking stages or its casual dating stage, it is easier to leave with little to no explanation, sometimes slowly or even all at once. There is a different type of pain that comes along with

being left this way, and individuals often feel confused, frustrated, angry, sad, and even self-doubt. Being left on read for the remainder of a romantic relationship proves to foster feelings of anxiety and abandonment. Recipients of this breakup strategy often are left to manage and understand their partner's reason for lack of communication, which mostly ends up in the closing of the relationship without ever having the privilege of closure (Heaslip, 2022). Consequently, Baxter (1982) and Kendler et al. (2003) considered the end of a relationship as one of the most distressing and painful events in human life.

Ghosting is a modern linguistic relational dissolution term that became popular in Urban Dictionary in 2006 (Stevenson, 2016). Although ghosting has long been a term used in various contexts, it has become especially prevalent in this generation of dating and romantic relationships due to technological advancements. The use of social media and online dating websites has popularized ghosting as a means of ending online relationships (Heaslip, 2022), as they can cease contact easily when the relationship is solely dependent on communication relayed through technology. The dependence of relationships on technological media and the lack of personal contact makes individuals feel a lesser sense of obligation to the partner or to the relationship itself (Binoya & Santiago, 2019). According to Weisskirch and Delevi (2013), relationship dissolution is increasingly shifting to accommodate technological advancement,s and because of this, the relationship dissolution strategy of ghosting emerged at the relationship breakup forefront, where individuals experience and perform withdrawal or avoidance strategies, respectively (LeFebvre et al., 2017).

Following the rise of popular culture on the internet, the term "tea" is a slang word originating from black drag culture (Merriam Webster, 2017) which has become a common term online to refer to gossip (Lemoine, 2019). Generation Z often "spills tea" leading to a discussion on the internet. This paper holds that the preceding literature lacks descriptive data for young Filipino adults who have been victims of ghosting. Thus, this case study aims to allow young adult Legazpeños who have experienced being ghosted to "spill tea" and provide discussion on the psychological issues they have experienced to further develop an understanding of these issues resulting from being ghosted. Moreover, this paper intends to explore the different typical psychological issues of social exclusion (e.g., sadness, anger, self-esteem, belongingness, control, and meaningful existence) (Williams, 2009, as cited by Pancani et al., 2022), and whether they are experienced by ghosting victims. The experiences of young Filipino adults are essential to make sense of the short-term and long-term issues experienced by victims in the context of Filipino dating culture. The study aims to shed light on the negative effects of ghosting on the psychological well-being of victims, so as to inform engagers and hopefully lessen the act in dating culture. Furthermore, the researchers are also after mental health practitioners, specifically psychologists and counsellors, to be conscious, updated, and increase their understanding of the effects of ghosting on the mental health of the victims and possible clients who experienced this phenomenon. Additionally, the study hopes to help mental health practitioners to come up with intervention plans to address the psychological issues brought up by ghosting victims and clients.

METHODS

This study took on a qualitative approach with a multiple case study design. The researchers gathered and analyzed data on the psychological issues of the victims after being ghosted which requires deeper knowledge about the event. Multiple case study was the best fit to fulfill this research because the design will serve as an avenue to capture different profiles of victims and perspectives of the experiences of the victims after being ghosted in a romantic relationship to

explain the mental and emotional struggles, psychological issues, and coping strategies of victims.

Five (5) participants were selected through snowball sampling based on the inclusion criteria: (a) must be residing in Legazpi City permanently; (b) must be 19 to 30 years old; (c) has experienced being ghosted in a romantic relationship, and; (d) has posted in any social media about his/her ghosting experience. Participants shall be excluded if: (a) currently resides in Legazpi City, but not permanently; (b) Legazpeños who are not currently residing in the city, and; (c) has experienced ghosting from friends and/or family. The participants came from Legazpi City since it is the most populous city in Albay, having 209,533 population based on the LGU Report of 2022. Table 1 shows the sociodemographic profile of the participants who took part in the study and fit the criteria needed for them to be qualified.

[Place Table 1 about here]

This paper conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews to answer the primary research question *"What are the psychological issues of young adult Legazpeños who experienced ghosting?"* The interview questions were structured into simple open-ended questions which can further be explained and expounded if needed to avoid confusion and yield more appropriate data from the participants. Other corpora of data will be their status posts/pictures on any social media platform about their ghosting experiences.

To identify potential participants, the researchers asked the people they know if they have experienced being ghosted and if they know people who have undergone that phenomenon. The researchers also used an online mode of gathering participants to reach a wider pool through a "Call for Participants" post. In the said post, a link to a Google form was included to collect the necessary information about the participants and it allowed them to upload a screenshot of the social media post they made about their ghosting experience/s. When the researchers have confirmed their eligibility, they forwarded an Information Sheet that contained necessary details about the research, the rights of the participants, and what should be expected in the interview proper. At the same time, the researchers sent an invitation for an interview. The semi-structured interview was done in person and separately for each participant and before the interview proper, they asked the participants to sign the consent form. Approximately, the interview for each participant lasted for at least 30 minutes to gather enough evidence and information about the participant and his/her experiences on ghosting. Each interview was audio recorded for evidence and transcribing purposes only. After the data gathering, the interviews were transcribed, coded, and analysed through thematic analysis.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis was used as an analytic technique to determine and examine the existing themes and patterns in the responses of the participants via cross-case analysis through repertory gridding. This mode was endorsed by the research of Braun and Clark (2013) and the researchers will follow the 6 phases of Thematic Analysis to successfully analyse the data. The researchers validated the themes through correspondence and a member-checking technique.

A number of participants experienced what was somewhat a euphoric high in the initial stages of their relationship after experiencing a toxic fallout. Being treated in a good manner, somewhat above what was expected of their partners would do, was what made them feel good about their relationships. Following the good treatment and the sweet acts was the ambiguous and vague fallout kicked off by being ghosted. The ambiguous lack of communication prior to being ghosted gave the victims an overwhelming sense of rejection, confusion, and a sense of mistrust developing overtime (Mager, 2022), even affecting their perspective in forming future relationships. A number of participants also experienced a complex combination of emotions

where despite the painful experience of being ghosted, some still found themselves reminiscing about the good things they once had. Thus, making it hard for them to move on and move forward from the experience. Some of the participants also had to bear the grief over the loss of someone they really loved. Just like having smoke in your eyes, these participants were left in pain after being in a serious relationship with their disengager, some even having plans about their future. Grief, pain, disbelief, anger and having difficulties trusting others after the breakup were the key characteristics felt by these participants. These characteristics were then grouped and collectively described through the generated themes.

This study has potential limitations, such as failing to capture diverse participants in terms of age and gender to represent the whole young adult Legazpeños and to delve deeply into each psychological issue detected in the participants. Also, the researchers did not set any limit nor a minimal number of ghosting experiences for participants. Hence, the paper focuses on the general population of ghosting victims in Legazpi City.

Findings

This multiple case study aims to understand the psychological issues and effects of ghosting among Filipino young adults. Each case scenario shows the uniqueness of the ghosting experiences, as well as their strategies and coping. Table 2 shows the summary of cases while Table 2 illustrates the tabular representation of the ghosting experiences.

[Place Table 2 about here]

Case Scenario 1: *The Ghoster Ghostee*

Female, 22

Silver is a 22-year-old college student, who formed a connection with Gold but was abruptly ghosted. She was left feeling confused, hurt, and sad, wondering what had gone wrong and regretting the missed opportunity of the possibility of a new romantic relationship. Although she had other people to talk to, Silver couldn't shake off the feeling of being led on and abandoned. Despite advice from friends, she still felt an urge to reach out to Gold, but still received no replies and stone-cold silence. So, she stopped, focused on her studies, and tried talking to others but found it hard not to compare them to Gold. Stating that she wanted to feel understood due to difficulty finding people who had that ability that resonated with her. She engaged in hoeing (hoeing is connoted as flirting and having online sexual encounters by the participant) for attention and distraction but felt it was out of character for her. However, she found solace in the knowledge that her friends would still accept her if she opened up about her experiences with hoeing. She used social media to poke fun at her ghosting experience with memes (an image, video, piece of text, etc., typically humorous in nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by internet users, often with slight variations. (Oxford Dictionary) and had another ghosting experience with Bronze, who remained a friend. Silver admitted to ghosting others and feels guilty and uncomfortable about it. She hopes no one finds out because it was not typical of her. Some people cope with ghosting while others explore themselves in life, which Silver has also experienced. She engages in self-reflection to understand her behavior and feelings.

Case Scenario 2: *The Hurting Ghostee*

Male, 22

Pierre, 21, dated a guy for five weeks but was ghosted by him. He confronted the guy, who later apologized and gave reasons like moving away and being closeted. However, Pierre later discovered that these reasons were false when he found out the guy lied about moving to Taguig and had a significant other which he introduced to his parents. Pierre was deeply hurt even if he knew his worth and regretted losing the guy because of his good looks. Pierre experienced pain when he was ghosted after a hookup on the beach with the guy. He felt that he did not deserve what happened, as he had engaged in a sexual activity half-heartedly but overlooked it due to the guy's kindness. The ghosting experience caused Pierre to become a disengager and ghost others. He cried and had dreams about the guy, but eventually accepted what happened. Pierre coped by playing games, seeking sympathy from friends who were also friends with the guy, running for elections, and overworking himself. He used social media to express his pain, anger, and disappointment through posts and memes. Despite this, Pierre's social media activity still reflects his jolly personality and interests.

Case Scenario 3: *The Traumatized Ghostee*

Female, 21

Kira has experienced multiple instances of being ghosted, starting from her online gaming connections. She gradually became accustomed to it and believed it was a common occurrence in modern culture. These ghosting experiences have greatly affected her self-perception, making her feel inadequate and forming a belief that she would always be ghosted. She slowly grew used to being ghosted, believing it is the norm in modern culture to ghost when one no longer wants to continue the relationship. She coped by distracting herself and engaging with others to avoid the emotions associated with ghosting. However, the pandemic's peak caused one ghosting incident to impact her more deeply. Kira developed a fear of being ghosted and approached romantic relationships cautiously, maintaining emotional distance to protect herself. She refrains from becoming too attached and keeps in mind that no-label relationships can end suddenly. Despite feeling secure, there is always a lingering thought of potential ghosting. Kira puts up an emotional wall to remain whole if ghosted again, although she acknowledges that toning down her emotions may not be ideal. Despite being ghosted various times, Kira has not intentionally ghosted anyone. Regardless of her experiences, she still enjoyed gaming and found new interests. Her social media activity no longer reflected her ghosting experiences, and she entered a new relationship where she could share her interest in cosplaying.

Case Scenario 4: *The Easy-to-Get Ghostee*

Female, 22

Iris has experienced being ghosted multiple times, starting at the age of 14, but only became aware of the term "ghosting" in 2020. She recalls two specific instances of being ghosted by her ex-boyfriend and ex-suitor. In both cases, the ghosting occurred after they had sex. She initially reached out to them, but received no response, causing confusion and questioning her self-worth. The suddenness of the ghosting left her feeling lonely when alone. She noticed a pattern where the motives of the disengagers were centered around sex. Iris tried reaching out for answers but received none, leading her to move forward and stop seeking explanations. She acknowledged her emotions and talked to others to cope with the anger and sadness. Iris used

humor to lighten the seriousness of her ghosting experiences, often sharing humorous posts on social media.

Case Scenario 5: *The Disbelieving Ghostee*

Male, 22

Supremo, a 22-year-old college student, had his first encounter with ghosting, aware of the concept from friends who had experienced it. The sudden loss of connection with his romantic partner left him confused and worried for their safety. Supremo felt resentment and anger, struggling to forget the pain caused by his ex-partner. He turned to casual dating and social media to cope but feared entering another relationship. Despite the painful memories, he still regretted losing the relationship and doubted himself and future partners. Finding answers and closure was important to him. Eventually, Supremo found healing and learned to trust again in a happy relationship. On social media, he openly expressed his struggles even a year after the ghosting experience, reflecting the lingering emotional impact.

[Place Table 3 about here]

The experiences of the five (5) cases revealed the different emotional and psychological issues they had encountered after being ghosted. To further develop an understanding of how the ghosting phenomenon yields psychological issues in its victims, this case study highlights specific personal, emotional, and psychological issues of a selected group of Filipino Young Adults residing in Legazpi City. The different narratives of the victims paved the way to identify and generate themes to summarize the accounts of their ghosting experiences. In relation to the paper's title, the researchers used the concept of "tea" and its distinct taste and characteristics as metaphors that will serve as the main theme encapsulating the shared issues experienced by the participants after being ghosted. The teas used by the researchers were the following: Masala, Matcha, and Lapsang.

Masala is a term used to refer to a blend of spices that are commonly used in South Asian and Indian cuisine. The bold and flavorful taste allows for the masala to be used in various dishes, and although it is not an inherently toxic blend, it can become toxic if it contains contaminants or is improperly stored. (O'Brien, 2021). Large amounts of Masala tea can also impact a person negatively, as high amounts of caffeine can impact sleep, heart rate, and cause anxiety (Ansley, 2019). Matcha is a type of green tea that is ground into a fine powder and whisked into hot water to make a frothy drink. Matcha taste differs depending on its grade, but organic ceremonial-grade Matcha green tea boasts a multifaceted flavor profile, characterized by subtle vegetal and grassy notes, a natural and appealing nutty sweetness, a mild bitterness, and a satisfying savory finish. (*What Does Matcha Taste like + How to Use?*, 2023) Similarly, the cases have been left with a bittersweet aftertaste, reminiscent of the flavor profile of matcha. Lapsang Souchong is a type of black tea that is known for its unique smoky "pine" flavor, which is achieved through an extensive oxidation process. This oxidation process modifies the tea's flavor profile, resulting in a distinctive taste that is sweet, refreshing, and smoky, and is singular to Lapsang Souchong. Additionally, when properly brewed, the tea displays a stunning coppery-golden color in the cup and has a delightful smoky aroma (*The Beginners' Guide to Lapsang Souchong – Everything You Should Know*, 2023). Just as some of the victims experienced a relationship like smoke got in their eyes.

In the case of using masala, matcha, and lapsang tea to describe the experiences and issues of victims of ghosting, the researchers used these metaphors to draw parallels between the sensations and experiences of drinking tea and the emotional experiences of being ghosted. In short, the use of these metaphors was a way for the researchers to make the experiences and issues of ghosting more relatable and understandable to a wider audience.

DISCUSSION

The accounts of the five (5) young adults aged 21-22 painted the picture of how romantic relationships delineate themselves from other forms of interpersonal relationships in this technological age. Pierre met his disengager in Grndr (A mobile application that utilizes location-based technology to facilitate social networking and dating opportunities for men who identify as gay, bisexual, and bi-curious. (*Grindr | ESafety Commissioner*, 2022)) as well as Kira and her disengager communicating through Facebook Messenger. These cases are in congruence with Pettigrew's (2009) article, as referenced by Koessler et al. (2019), that couples today are talking with one another more through electronically mediated platforms and that technology plays a huge role in perpetuating the phenomenon of ghosting. The findings of Hand and Furman (2004), as referenced by Wentland and Reissing (2013) in their study about casual sexual relationships wherein physical intimacy, caretaking, and love were emphasized as features that characterize romantic relationships. In this stage of development, relationships of young adults grow steadily and are characterized by elevated levels of intimacy and an increased sense of commitment (Bouchey & Furman, 2003; Collins, 2003, as cited in Shulman & Connolly, 2013).

The first theme identified was The *Masala* **Effect**: Euphoric-turned-toxic Ghosting Issues, which described the victim as someone who experienced a euphoric high in the early stages of the relationship but ended in a toxic fallout when the relationship dissolved abruptly without explanations. Interestingly, the concept of toxicity in Masala tea can also be applied to romantic relationships. In toxic relationships such as those which were experienced by ghosting victims, what was once a complex and euphoric connection can turn negative and harmful over time, causing emotional distress and dama**ge**.

The *Matcha* **Effect**: Bittersweet-blend Ghosting issues. In this theme, the cases have been left with a bittersweet aftertaste, reminiscent of the flavor profile of matcha. The experience of being ghosted can be both bitter and sweet, as the initial excitement and connection with the other person is abruptly cut off, leaving the victim with mixed emotions of disappointment and confusion. This can create a lingering feeling of bitterness but may also provide a sense of closure and a chance to move on from the relationship. The multifaceted flavor profile of matcha can be seen as a metaphor for the complex emotions associated with being ghosted, with each taste element representing a different aspect of the experience.

Lastly is The *Lapsang* **Effect**: Smoke-gets-in-your-eyes Ghosting Experiences, which depicts the victim's grief over the relationship and disbelief of the disengager for engaging in ghosting even though there were already established plans for the relationship itself. Interestingly, the smokiness of Lapsang Souchong can be related to the experience of ghosting in relationships. Victims of ghosting experience feelings of anger, sadness, and confusion after being ghosted. They are left wondering and as if they have smoke in their eyes, the reasons for being ghosted become unclear, and anger, sadness as well as confusion cloud their eyesight. Some have also consequently become distrusting of others, as their clear view of others becomes clouded with doubt and negative prejudices.

With this, a repertory grid was formulated to present the themes as well as collective descriptions of the psychological issues and effects of the victims' ghosting experiences. (See table 3)

The *Masala* Effect: Euphoric-turned-toxic Ghosting Issues

The cases of the five (5) young adults who engaged in romantic relationships showed a promising start. However, only a selected few expressed feelings of elation either from their partner's actions or the course of the relationship itself. Despite the beautiful start of their relationship, four (4) of the five victims found themselves in a toxic fallout after being ghosted. Experiencing loss at the most unexpected time left the victims confused, questioning themselves and the relationship itself.

The Masala Effect refers to a phenomenon that can occur in romantic relationships when one partner, usually the person who has been ghosted, experiences a euphoric high in the initial stages of the relationship that is ultimately followed by a toxic fallout when the relationship ends abruptly and without explanation. These are the effects of ghosting that make victims question themselves, their worth as a person, and what possibly went wrong to end up having been ghosted, as they recall not having had any problems prior to being ghosted.

The cases of Silver (*The Ghoster Ghostee)* and Iris (*The Easy-To-Get Ghostee)* described having a good start with their relationship. Both cases showed feeling hopeful in their relationship. Meanwhile, Pierre (*The Hurting Ghostee*) mentioned that despite the fleeting moment they have shared, he saw how caring and sweet his disengager was. They believed that this was "the one" and that this relationship was bound to a long-term commitment. Similar to the case of Supremo (*The Disbelieving Ghostee),* who was on good terms with his disengager long before they started having romantic relationships and recounted fond memories of them in the early stages of their relationship while also planning for the future and the direction of their relationship. Despite the amount of time and effort invested, and regardless of how sweet and romantic their relationships started, the three cases were made to face the negative aftermath when the relationship ended abruptly. Without warning, the four (4) victims shared the same experiences before being ghosted. Abrupt and unilateral cutting off communication without explanation and shutting off all efforts to reconnect and reach out (Freedman et al., 2022, 2021; Mazonni et al., 2021; and Hermans et al., 2020) was similarly faced by the victims from their disengagers.

Considering all the personal experiences of the four cases, they all had a taste of the **Masala Effect**, which is collectively referred to as the state where victims experience a euphoric high during the initial stages of their relationship, but are then followed by a toxic fallout when the relationship ended abruptly without warning, leaving them confused as to why their relationship ended without having any problems prior to being ghosted, and questioning their self-worth as a person. This agrees with the findings of Larrañaga et al. (2021), wherein victims are often given little to no explanation as to why their partners have ghosted them, leaving them in a state of confusion and disarray as they were left to understand what happened in their relationship. Victims are also left with the sour aftertaste of questioning their self-worth and engaging in self-devaluating thought patterns before being ghosted. This coincides with the findings of Hermans et al. (2020), where several of the participants in their study started questioning and blaming themselves for not being enough, not interesting enough, and not attractive enough for the disengager.

Similarly, Kira (*The Traumatized Ghostee)* expressed feelings of self-doubt and self-blame prior to being ghosted. Kira reported thinking about her inadequacies that made the disengager resort to ghosting. Considering the difficulties which the victims face, the victims' collective experiences present a crucial vantage point where a make-or-break situation is most probable when the negative impacts of ghosting are not addressed. As the victims navigate through the experiences and issues that they had prior to being ghosted, victims must understand that the ghosting behavior of their disengager says nothing about the worthiness of the victims and their invested love towards their disengager (Villhauer, 2015). In line with this, mental health professionals, educators, advocates, and researchers need to put more weight on the issues faced by ghosting victims and look more into the negative impacts of ghosting in a different context and delve deeper into understanding the different factors that perpetuate ghosting in different media and situations.

The *Matcha* Effect: Bittersweet-blend Ghosting Issues

Although the five (5) victims have all tasted the bitterness of being ghosted, some have distinctly experienced a unique taste. Silver (*The Ghoster Ghostee*), Pierre (*The Hurting Ghostee*), and Supremo (*The Disbelieving Ghostee*) have all experienced a bittersweet blend in their experience. Despite being put in a difficult situation after being ghosted, these victims still found a hint of sweetness from their hopes and the fond memories they shared with their disengagers. However, regardless of the distinct taste they found in their experience, the overpowering bitterness of the negative impacts left them struggling to move on from being ghosted.

The *Matcha* Effect refers to a phenomenon that can occur in romantic relationships when one partner experiences a bittersweet blend of emotions after being ghosted. This effect is named after the popular Japanese green tea, matcha, which is known for its bittersweet flavor profile. This is characteristic to how ghosting victims feel about being ghosted. Victims are hurt and disappointed, as they were hopeful about the relationship only to be met with being ghosted in the end. Victims have blamed themselves and questioned their self-worth and have developed issues on trusting others as well as a fear of being ghosted.

 Silver (*The Ghoster Ghostee*) expressed that she regretted the missed opportunity of the possibility of a new romantic relationship with her disengager, given that they had established a deep connection already. Likewise, Pierre (*The Hurting Ghostee*) talked about being regretful about losing the person he had been dating and the memories they shared, despite the pain of being ghosted. Similarly, Supremo (*The Disbelieving Ghostee*) expressed his regret for the lost relationship with his ex-partner and his willingness to give the relationship another chance despite the painful memories the partner caused him. Kira (*The Traumatized Ghostee*) has resorted to self-blame to justify being ghosted. Kira also questioned her self-worth, thinking she was ghosted because she was not enough. After more ghosting incidents, this phenomenon became normalized in her brain. Kira had even started expecting to be ghosted whenever she had a new partner. The repeated ghosting instances Kira faced happened through mediated context. The gaming community where Kira had frequent encounters with ghosting was parallel to the study of Binoya and Santiago (2019) where they stated that the ease of online implications of relationships made it easy for disengagers to enact this phenomenon to the unsuspecting victims arguing that less physical contact, there is also less sense of obligation within the relationship. Likewise, Iris *(The Easy-to-Get Ghostee) and* Supremo (*The Disbelieving Ghostee)* also blamed themselves for being ghosted initially. Iris started thinking that she was lacking and questioned what was wrong with her for her to be ghosted. These findings supported the study of Timmermans et al. (2020), which indicated that a considerable

number (37%) of individuals who have been ghosted tend to blame themselves for the experience. Additionally, the results of this study complemented the findings of Hermans et al. (2020), stating that participants blamed themselves for being ghosted, thinking they were not good, interesting, and attractive enough. This claim was also supported by the narrative of Pierre when he said there was a chance that the true reason for him to be ghosted was that his disengager found someone more enjoyable.

These cases showcased their experiences of the Matcha Effect, where victims are left with bittersweet feelings after being ghosted by disengagers. Despite the aftermath of being ghosted, fostering various negative emotions in victims, there were cases with lingering sweetness and hope. The victims acknowledged that these relationships were losses, and the potential of the relationship and the memories, are looked back on by the victims. These results are in congruence with Larrañaga et al. (2021) who asserted that individuals who are ghosted by their partners are frequently left without any justification or clarification regarding the reasons behind their partner's disappearance. Regardless of the circumstances or platform involved, being ghosted places victims in a position where they must grapple and come to terms with what occurred in their relationship.

Despite facing complex challenges in moving forward from their bittersweet experiences of being ghosted, all five cases demonstrated a resilient effort to overcome this hardship. Each of them utilized their unique coping mechanisms to distract themselves from the pain and confusion of being ghosted. These coping mechanisms included seeking solace in the company of friends, engaging in leisure activities such as gaming and casual dating, and even indulging in risky behaviors such as hooking up and drinking. Unfortunately, some of the cases were unable to find closure and answers to their questions about why they were ghosted, resulting in trust issues. For instance, Supremo had a hard time trusting his succeeding partners after being ghosted because he always compared the behavior of his disengager to the behavior of his new partner, and their similarities triggered Supremo to assume that he would be ghosted again. This aided the claim of Heaslip and colleagues (2022), Mager (2022), Hermans et al. (2020), and Soeiro (2019), who asserted that victims of ghosting develop distrust in others.

However, those who could find answers, like Iris and Supremo, eventually found peace and closure, allowing them to move forward from the hurt of being ghosted. Ultimately, each of these cases could move forward in their own way and at their own pace, with some, such as Pierre and Supremo, who have now formed new romantic relationships. These findings aligned with the research of Timmerman et al. (2020), which suggested that individuals who have been ghosted adopt various coping mechanisms to deal with their experiences. Some of these coping mechanisms include rationalizing the ghosting event, modifying their dating application behavior and expectations regarding future interactions, checking the social media accounts of the person who ghosted them, and contacting the disengager's social network for information just like what Silver, Pierre, Iris, and Supremo did when they reached out to their disengagers to seek for clarity and reasons as to why they were ghosted. Additionally, many ghosting victims seek support from their friends by sharing their experiences and finding comfort in their company. This was evident in his narrative when he expressed that he reached out to his friends, even if they were also his disengager's friends, to seek sympathy and comfort.

The *Lapsang* Effect: Smoke-gets-in-your-eyes Ghosting Experiences

Faced with the different issues brought on by their experiences with ghosting, the five (5) young adults who are the focus of this study were collectively exposed to the Lapsang Effect, which is the abrupt and unexpected break-up of the relationship with their disengager and left

the victims in pain and felt a sense of grief. The painful aftertaste of the Lapsang effect heavily impacted those victims who, despite having plans ready for the future, were still left hanging without any explanation from their disengager.

The *Lapsang* Effect is the phenomenon that can occur in romantic relationships when one partner experiences a smoky and unpleasant aftermath after being ghosted. This effect is named after the Chinese black tea, lapsang souchong, which is known for its strong and smoky flavor profile. Break-ups are painful, more so those that end suddenly without a proper goodbye especially from the person whom you really fell in love with. Ghosting victims feel a sense of grief after ghosting incidents and are in disbelief that they have been ghosted in a serious relationship where there are already plans for the relationship itself. Hence, they become troubled with trusting potential partners after being ghosted.

Silver, *The Ghoster Ghostee*, had undergone an unpleasant situation that she put herself in to cope with the loss of communication. Because of the event, she resorted to hoeing and meeting other people for the purpose of just talking with them, in hopes of finding the traits of the person who ghosted her, wherein the countless meaningless people met, she has also resulted in ghosting them instead. This course of events reflected the study of Soeiro (2019), which stated that people who were victims of ghosting were more likely to ghost others as a coping mechanism, and the research of Villhauer (2020) that revealed 50% of all ghosting victims had ghosted other people was also supported by Silver's narrative.

Pierre, *The Hurting Ghostee,* experienced various issues as a victim of ghosting. He strongly expressed disbelief that he experienced such a thing for the first time, especially since he knew his value and worth. It hurt him so much that it took years for him to finally move on. He cried for days after the event and expressed that he deserved another breakup reason, just not being ghosted and ignored for days and days on end. Consistently, studies on silent treatment have shown that the victims usually prefer negative attention (i.e., being insulted and even being the target of physical violence) (Zadro, 2004; Zadro et al., 2005, as cited in Pancani et al., 2022), rather than being completely ignored. Pierre's difficulty coping with the unexpected breakup and the lack of communication generated confusion and uncertainty within him, making Pierre less likely to overcome the breakup, especially when Pierre found out the reasons given to him by his disengager were not entirely true, which fueled Pierre's confusion and anger more. (LeFebre, 2017).

Iris, *The Easy-to-Get Ghostee,* noted being confused after having been ghosted the first three times. Initially, she was concerned about the disengager as there was no apparent issue before being ghosted. However, upon recognizing a pattern of ghosting after engaging in sexual activity with different partners, Iris became aware of the situation. Although the ghosting incidents did not significantly impact her daily life, Iris expressed feelings of sadness when alone. The findings of Hermans et al. (2020) and Koessler and associates (2019) expressed that disengagers blame the victims because of the victim's personality, location, or undesirable action. This finding was seen in the case of Iris when she shared that one of her disengagers told her the reason behind the ghosting was that he did not find Iris worthy enough to be introduced to his mother. This reasoning by her disengager made Iris doubt her self-worth and whole personality and caused her to evaluate herself. Furthermore, the ghosting experiences influenced her approach to future relationships. They developed an impression that she could no longer do anything if her partners disappeared again and would just let them be. However, while Iris felt upset and angry about being ghosted, the incidents still did not directly impact her self-esteem, and she remained optimistic about future romantic connections.

As one who was good friends with his disengager long before engaging in romantic conversations, Supremo, *The Disbelieving Ghostee*, was left in pain and tears over the loss of a serious relationship. He reported having feelings of anger and sadness before being ghosted. Several studies have noted the short-term and long-term effects of ghosting on the mental and emotional health of the victims. Being ghosted led to feelings of confusion, frustration, anger, and sadness (Borgueta, 2017; Allen et al., 2019; and Mager, 2020). The efforts of Supremo to reach out were also left without a response from the disengager, which exacerbated his frustration and sadness from the experience. The abrupt separation of his partner from their relationship despite having plans for the future, has also left Supremo grieving for the loss of the relationship. Relative to the Lapsang Effect, Supremo's distrust for his present partner was also congruent to the past studies of Heaslip, 2022; Hermans et al., 2020; Mager, 2022; Soeiro, 2019, where victims of ghosting reported developing distrust in others and the world. This was further supported by Mager (2022), who emphasized that the feeling of distrust developing over time is characterized as a long-term effect of being ghosted.

The different themes, the Masala Effect, Matcha Effect, and Lapsang Effect, categorized the different issues that were found in the participants. In The Masala Effect, it was incorporated in the theme of the feelings of sadness for losing a relationship that started with sweetness and stability, and the confusion the participants had experienced after being ghosted since there were no arguments that could make the disengagers leave the relationship they have established. Anger could also be seen in this theme and the way the victims of ghosting questioned, devalued, and blamed themselves for experiencing the ghosting incident. The Matcha Effect emphasized the bittersweet feelings of the victims such as feelings of hurt and disappointment over the disengagers for leaving without notice. The participants knew to themselves that they did not deserve such a breakup, so they had a hard time moving forward after the incident, and some developed a hard time trusting their succeeding partners. The fear of being ghosted repeatedly also surfaced in this theme. Hence, they normalized the ghosting culture in the getting-to-know stage to lessen the painful feeling once it really happened. The last theme, The Lapsang Effect, highlighted the feelings of sadness, disbelief, and anger for being left hanging in the relationship despite the plans they have made as partners.

LESSONS LEARNED

As the ghosting phenomenon continuously becomes more prevalent, its number of victims also increases. The growing popularity of the said dissolution strategy prompted researchers to look further into the relatively new form of break up, namely ghosting, to better investigate the psychological issues of the victims of ghosting.

This paper affirmed that issues are indeed experienced by ghosting victims which penetrates the psychological being of the victims, as it caused them self-doubt, which shook their perception of themselves, confusion as to why they were ghosted without communication beforehand, anger as they knew they did not deserve it, as well as sadness and pain because the relationship was dissolved. Some even blamed themselves for being ghosted and imposed that they were not good enough for their ex-partners. With that, a few developed a fear of trusting again and experiencing repeated ghosting victimization. This paper also shed light to the possibility of the phenomenon to be normalized in some context. Some of the participants with repeated exposure to the said phenomenon have resigned to the idea that it is normal to be ghosted in some situations and in particular media. This developed thought pattern has prevented some of the participants from forming connections with present partner/s due to the established wall that all relationships will end through ambiguous separation. Thus, calls the

need for further awareness and knowledge about the phenomenon to mitigate its further impact on victims and potential victims.

Considering the complexity of the narrated issues encountered by the victims, the findings of this paper show that victims not only undergo a linear structure of coping but experience a loop during their coping journey. Evidence from the accounts of some victims suggests that the issues they have encountered after being ghosted may still reoccur regardless of how long it has been since their ghosting experience. These cases not only amplify the need for target-specific interventions for both disengagers and victims but also promote a safer environment for both online and physical worlds. Victims' coping strategies and success may depend on their individual readiness and self-integrity, as well as the availability of support structure from their peers, family, society, and professional intervention if needed.

Examining the narratives of the five (5) young adult victims of ghosting through Thematic Analysis, it was found that these narratives encompass the three themes that emerged in the study, namely The Masala Effect, The Matcha Effect, and The Lapsang Effect, which illustrate the issues faced by the victims in their ghosting experiences. These themes serve as the guidelines that will promote societal awareness and further understanding of the actual gravity of the phenomenon with studies conducted by Freedman et al. (2022) and Pancani et al. (2022) confirming that victims of ghosting experienced more of a threat to their fundamental psychological needs, and with Holmes (2022) acknowledging the boom of technology generated new human experiences like being ghosted makes the end of a romantic relationship even more difficult, stressing that it is important to seek understanding of this phenomenon sooner than later to understand the future of romantic relationships and society as a whole.. This paper also supplements past studies which failed to focus on the emotional and psychological impact of ghosting on its victims. The findings of this study also provided an eye-opener for the general public that ghosting exists and compromises the emotional and psychological stability of the victims in the aftermath of being ghosted. With increased understanding of this phenomenon, individuals, mental health professionals, and organizations can help recognize and address the issue more effectively. This research on the psychological issues faced by victims of ghosting can promote prevention efforts by increasing awareness of the issue and its potential negative impacts. This could lead to increased efforts to prevent ghosting, both at the individual level (e.g., through education and communication about healthy relationship communication) and at the organizational level (e.g., through policies and practices that discourage ghosting in the workplace). Along with that, this research supplements the need for data in the Southeast Asian context of dating culture, specifically in the Philippines.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Moving forward, there are several avenues for future researchers that could build upon the findings of this study. It can also encourage further research on the effects of ghosting on young adults and can inspire comprehensive investigations into the prevalence and patterns of different ghosting behaviors in different contexts, depending on the length, type, and depth of relationships specifically, one potential direction would be to investigate more on the different types of relationships, such as delineating the distinct differences between ghosting experienced by those in a romantic versus a platonic relationship, and the length of the relationship, (e.g. short-term relationships, long-term relationships, hookups, casual-sex relationships, open relationships). Additional research can supplement data on the factors that contribute to ghosting, including but not limited to personality traits, attachment styles, religion and beliefs, and communication skills. Furthermore, it would be valuable to explore the

potential impact of demographic variables such as age, whereas future studies could consider how this phenomenon emerges in older adults to investigate more on the possible differences with what was observed in this present study to find out if they represent a generational issue associated with the extensive use of developing technologies. As mentioned in the study, there is a case that highlighted the experiences of an individual from the LGBTQIA+ community, and more specifically his disengager's reasons as to why he was ghosted in the first place. The researchers believe that there is a distinct implication for this reason to be used as a motivation for ghosting, thus, further research can be conducted to shed light on this demographic to provide a more detailed inclusion of the current society. Longitudinal research methods can be used in the future to confirm the psychological reactions among victims, by conducting repeated quantitative assessments of the relevant psychological factors.

Finally, further research could be conducted to examine potential interventions or strategies for addressing the issues identified in this study, with a focus on promoting mental health and well-being among those affected. It can also lead to the development of prevention programs and educational initiatives like workshops, seminars on healthy and effective communication by the Guidance field in education, aimed at reducing the incidence of ghosting behavior of individuals in relationships. Additionally, the population can use the research to promote healthy communication and social skills among young adults. By pursuing these future directions, future researchers can continue to deepen our understanding of these important issues and work towards developing more effective approaches for supporting individuals who face these psychological issues brought forth by ghosting.

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