

Ghosting (relationships)

Ghosting is breaking off a relationship (often an intimate relationship) by ceasing all communication and contact with the former partner without any apparent warning or justification, as well as ignoring the former partner's attempts to reach out or communicate.

A person who has been ghosted by a friend

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Origin of term

The term is attested since at least 2011, in the context of online exchanges,^[1] and became popular by 2015 through numerous articles on high-profile celebrity relationship dissolutions,^{[2][3]} and went on to be widely used. It has been the subject of numerous articles^[4] and discussions^[5] on dating and relationships in various media. It was included in the *Collins English Dictionary* in 2015.^[6]

In personal relationships

Ghosting may be especially traumatic for those on the receiving end, causing feelings of ostracism and rejection^[7]. Some mental health professionals consider ghosting to be a passive-aggressive form of emotional abuse, a type of silent treatment or stonewalling behaviour, and emotional cruelty.^[7]

In Alexander Abad-Sabos' article "In Defense of Ghosting", he states that "the thing that undermines these diatribes against ghosting is that...[we] know what happened with their ghost. It just didn't work out and sometimes we just can't accept it." ^[8] Abad-Sabos states that "[a]t the heart of it, ghosting is as clear as any other form of rejection. The reason we complain about it is because we wanted a different outcome ... which is totally understandable."^[9] However, this argument does not account for the inherent ambiguity in ghosting - the person being ghosted does not know whether they're being rejected, whether the person is just extremely busy, if the person started dating someone else and wanted to cut off communication with other interests, or if the person is waiting to see if something works out with someone else but trying to keep the person as an option if the other person doesn't work out. Due to the frequency of these actions, it becomes impossible to tell which it is, making it especially frustrating and stressful.^[10]

In Emily Kellogg's article "Why Ghosting Is a Form of Self-Protection for Women", she states that after she tried to break up in person with a man, he kept sending her invites, which she kept declining; eventually she "just didn’t text him back”; she states "...it can feel like the safer option for women dealing with men who won’t take “no” for an answer" who make "...us feel unsafe by crossing our boundaries or refusing to accept our rejection".^[11] Kellogg states that "...until women can safely exercise their autonomy and communicate with men without fear of violent retaliation, we’ll have to keep doing whatever we can to keep ourselves and others safe—and yes, sometimes that means ghosting."^[12] However, there is no actual evidence that men actually react with physical violence to rejection. If one is worried about being verbally insulted in some way as a result of being rejected: the person will be just as likely to receive negative comments whether or not they ghost - it will just be delayed with ghosting.^[13]^[14]

In popular culture

Ghosting appears to be becoming more common.^[15] Various explanations have been suggested, but social media is often blamed,^[16] as are dating apps and the relative anonymity and isolation in modern-day dating and hookup culture, which make it easier to behave poorly with few social repercussions.^[17] In addition, the more commonplace the behaviour becomes, the more individuals can become desensitised to it.^[7] Others have suggested that it is due to the decline of empathy in society, along with the promotion of a more selfish, narcissistic culture.^[18]

Ghosting is not limited to only intimate relationship contexts, but can also happen between friends or even family members.^[19] The term "ghostbusting" is "when you force them to reply"; Marleying is "when an ex gets in touch with you at Christmas out of nowhere"; and “Caspering” is a "friendly alternative to ghosting. Instead of ignoring someone, you’re honest about how you feel, and let them down gently before disappearing from their lives."^[20]

In the media

- Esther Perel *Stable Ambiguity and the Rise of Ghosting, Icing and Simmering* (2015)

See also

- Cold shoulder
- Maladaptive coping
- Ghost banning
- Ostracism
- Silent treatment
- Social rejection
- Stonewalling

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