



“People Come and Go”: The Perception of Senior High School Students on the Effects of Ghosting on Romantic Relationships

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ABSTRACT: Romantic relationships are consequential to being an adolescent. Hence, it is inevitable that relationship dissolution is experienced during this life stage. One of the relationship dissolution strategies used in present times is ghosting. The present study aims to explore the perception of senior high school students on the effects of ghosting experiences on romantic relationships. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews with 17 participants selected through purposive sampling. Thematic analysis of interview data revealed that after the ghosting experience, the participants' previous views on romantic relationships were either solidified or changed in terms of having labels, founded on friendships, and planned carefully. Moreover, their responses indicated that after the ghosting experience, they have considered themselves 'particular and considerate' or 'hesitant and guarded' as romantic partners. Comparing the responses of the male and female participants, the findings of the study show that there is a difference in the views of romantic relationships and of themselves as romantic partners between the two sexes. Their accounts further revealed that the ghosting experience had negatively affected them both psychologically and physically. These findings serve as a great contribution to existing research on the effects of ghosting on the adolescent ghostee's perception of romantic relationships, for this study is one of the first to explore such.

KEYWORDS: adolescents; ghosting; partners; perception; relationships

INTRODUCTION

Studies show that adolescents, the youngest at 13 years old, become involved in romantic relationships (Collins et al., 2009), and it is estimated that most adolescents have experienced participation in one by the age of 16 (Carver et al., 2003 as cited in Mapalad, 2014). In contrast to friendships, romantic relationships are approached by adolescents with awkwardness and doubt (Giordano et al., 2006). Additionally, adolescent years can become a foundation for future ones and could be regarded as an essential developmental context (Conolly & Goldberg, 1999; Furman & Wehner, 1994; Collins, 2003, as cited in Madsen & Collins, 2011). However, Madsen and Collins (2011) claimed that both negative and positive results can emerge from these relationships. One possible effect is the alteration of behavior to reconcile and maintain relationships (Giordano et al., 2006). It is also found that romantic relationships have a significant impact on self-perception and future relationships. Those who had good relationships may develop a more positive perception of themselves as a romantic partner, in contrast to those who had the opposite experience (Furman & Shaffer, 2003). As Collins (2003, as cited in Madsen & Collins, 2011) predicted, the experiences adolescents have had with several features in their relationships seem to be differentially associated with the outcomes.

As much as the formation of relationships is prevalent during adolescence, so is its dissolution. A relationship dissolution was defined as the “permanent dismembership of an existing relationship” (Duck, 1982, as cited in Hocutt, 1998, p. 195). The catalysts of romantic terminations are quite similar in adolescents and adults. It was identified that among the most common causes of relationship termination were unmet needs for intimacy, affiliation, and sexuality (Connolly & McIsaac, 2008; Field et al., 2010). Several studies have presented that high post-romantic dissolution distress impacts several aspects of the psychological well-being of an individual, including increased scores on scales for anger, anxiety, depression, and lower rate for self-concept (Furman & Shaffer, 2003; Field et al., 2010; Field et al., 2013; Slotter et al., 2009). Moreover, Connolly and McIsaac (2009) concluded that teenagers have a wide understanding of the causes of relationship termination and act upon these reasons to prevent future break-ups. More so, relationship dissolutions affect the development of an adolescent’s meaning-making and perception of romantic relationships (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009).

A certain relationship dissolution strategy has become prevalent during the recent decades due to the rise in Internet and social media usage. Ghosting, which originally referred to a disembodied spirit of a dead person, has expanded to refer to the act of “disappearing from a special someone’s life mysteriously and without explanation” which emerged from dating apps like Tinder and OKCupid (Peters, 2017, para. 2). Due to the nature of ghosting which often leaves the non-initiator (called as *ghostee*) without context as to why they were ghosted, negative outcomes spanning from anger to rumination (Koessler et

al., 2019) and internalized self-blame (LeFebvre et al., 2019a) were triggered. Ghostees would use 'anxiety,' 'insecurity,' and 'frustrating' to describe how they feel after the dissolution (Manning et al., 2019). Repeated ghosting can worsen self-perception as it could prompt a person to internalize the belief that something is inherently wrong with him or her (LeFebvre et al., 2019b). Another factor that may aggravate the effects of ghosting upon the ghostee is the wanting to renew their relationship which could cause distress (Lukacs & Quan-Haase, 2015) and trauma (Fox & Tokunaga, 2015).

With the information that ghosting has the aforementioned effects on older adults, the present study is interested in exploring if such effects are also present in Filipino adolescents who have experienced being ghosted, since there is a lack of research conducted on individuals of this age group, locally for this particular topic. Consequently, Upadhyay et al. (2006) cited that most adolescents, both locally and internationally, follow a particular sequence in romantic relationships. This sequence includes developing an infatuation, wooing the other, forming romantic relationships, dating the partner, and undertaking sexual intercourse (Raymundo et al., 2001; Hansen et al., 1999; Lam et al., 2002; Pinter & Tomori, 2000; Youn, 1996; Zulkifli et al., 1995; as cited in Upadhyay et al., 2006). While this pattern for forming romantic relationships may be common among adolescents worldwide, the presence of a ghosting experience and the cultural differences may create nuances that were not explored in earlier studies, given that these were primarily executed by foreign researchers on foreign participants. For instance, ghosting abruptly interrupts an individual's experience of a romantic relationship with no reassurance of continuation with the same partner. A study on ghosting, especially that which focuses on the ghostee after the experience, may present valuable insights on the effects of ghosting on adolescents. Concurrently, it is thought that Filipinos frequently engage in indirect communication, leading to the development and usage of *pakikiramdam*, during social interactions (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). *Pakikiramdam* is commonly the act of exercising sensitivity to the other person, including receptiveness to faint cues (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). Since Filipinos are also described as mostly non-confrontational (de Leon, 2007, as cited in Calaguas, 2012), ghosting may be viewed as a viable option for Filipinos to incite romantic relationship dissolution because it still exhibits *pakikiramdam* upon the ghostee, truthfulness without one's own expense, and avoidance of a confrontation. The cultural custom of *pakikiramdam* may even be challenged by the occurrence of ghosting, as the initiators (called as *ghosters*) do not always exhibit signs of deciding to ghost someone. This may be among the reasons why some ghostees, especially Filipino ghostees, are confused about why they have been ghosted. While this study did not particularly focus on the implications of cultural nuances, indispensable information about the experiences of Filipino adolescent ghostees are still evident.

To determine how ghosting could affect adolescents' perception towards romantic relationships, this research integrated the participants' sex, past relationship experiences with their ghoster, and their experiences as their relationship concluded. These possible factors were drawn from Shulman and Kipnis (2001), who found that the past adolescent romance that males and females have had was directly related to the quality of their current relationships. Moreover, Furman (2002) revealed that different kinds of relationships moderately affect one another, and past experiences from previous romantic relationships can affect future ones. This occurs as most of the relationships were unlikely to be replicated since new relationships could present new challenges. Connolly, Furman, and Konarski (2000, as cited in Furman, 2002) explained that over the span of a year, across different relationships, the perceptions of individuals on the support and negative interactions within their romantic relationships were found to be stable.

However, Furman and Shaffer (2003) also stated that limited information is known about the elements which do and do not carry over from one relationship to the next; therefore, the present research also attempts to address this gap. Hence, the objective of this research is to determine the perception of senior high school (SHS) students on the effects of ghosting on romantic relationships.

Specifically, the study aims to answer the following:

1. How do the ghostees now view romantic relationships after the ghosting experience?
2. How do the ghostees now consider themselves as romantic partners after the experience?
3. How do male and female ghostees differ in their views of romantic relationships and their views about themselves as romantic partners after the experience?
4. What are the perceived impacts of ghosting on the ghostee's daily life?

This study may prove to be beneficial to numerous people, such as parents, guardians, and counselors. The results shown in this study could help parents and guardians reach an understanding on how adolescents perceive the effects of ghosting experiences on their outlook of romantic relationships, which could help them improve their present parenting strategies to provide better emotional and/or mental support to their child. Similarly, this study could also help counselors to better understand adolescents' psychological and emotional issues that concern their self-identity, self-perception, and emotional regulation, which could lead them to think of ways to enrich the development of adolescents even more.

METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to discover the perceptions of senior high school students from a private institution in the Philippines concerning the effects of ghosting on romantic relationships. The students from this institution were contacted through electronic correspondence. A total of 17 participants, seven males and ten females, from the population of adolescents between the ages of 16 to 18 who have experienced being a ghostee, underwent semi-structured interviews. Initially, a total of 24 participants were gathered based on their responses in a pre-interview screening survey published through Google Forms; however, some withdrew their participation and others were considered not fitting the characteristics needed as respondents in the study.

This method is a demonstration of the purposive sampling technique, which is defined by Tongco (2007) as the sampling method where an informant will be chosen based on the qualities that they possess. Tongco further described it as a sampling technique that does not require a set number of respondents or underlying theories and a nonrandom technique (p. 147). Given the current circumstances with the COVID-19 pandemic, the researchers chose this sampling technique for efficient execution of their research. Moreover, due to the pandemic, the interviews were held via Zoom, an online video-conferencing application. The interviews were conducted from January to February 2021, with the main interviews lasting from 20 to 40 minutes and follow-ups lasting up to 30 minutes.

Interested participants voluntarily filled out the linked pre-interview screening form and a separate informed consent form, detailing the privacy and confidentiality guidelines to be upheld throughout the research process. Jorm, et al. (2007, as cited in Draucker et al., 2009) stated that interviews where participants are asked to recall, reveal, or reexamine their experiences may cause embarrassment, depression, anxiety, or acute stress reactions. Thus, a distress protocol was formulated to accompany the procedure of obtaining consent. Aside from an informed consent form, participants were also requested to provide a pseudonym of their choice, in the event they are referred to in the research study.

Thematic analysis was utilized to analyze the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) defined thematic analysis (TA) as “a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data” (p. 79). They further elaborated in 2012 that “...TA allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences” (p. 57). Interview recordings were transcribed orthographically, and themes were identified. Moreover, various validity and reliability strategies from Creswell (2014) were integrated to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the research findings. These included triangulation and clarification of personal biases.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Upon the data analysis conducted by the researchers, four main themes emerged from the participants' accounts on their views of romantic relationships after being ghosted. Two major themes appeared on how they now consider themselves as romantic partners after the experience. Significant differences were observed between male and female ghostees on their views of romantic relationships and of themselves, as romantic partners, after the experience. Findings also showed that participants were negatively affected both psychologically and physically after the ghosting experience.

Table 1

How the Ghostees Now View Romantic Relationships After the Ghosting Experience

Theme	Subthemes	Quotes
Romantic relationships should be labeled.	Valuing labels	<p>"I think it is important <i>talaga na nagka-label</i> in the first place. I- I guess, like, <i>'yung na-realize ko lang</i> is it was important <i>na, ayun nga</i>, to clarify everything." [I really think that it is important to have a label in the first place. I guess I realized that it was important to clarify everything.] (Grace)</p> <p>"<i>Tapos</i> we established that, <i>ano</i>, we really like each other and you know <i>may parang</i> commitment to stay together." [Then we established that we really like each other and you know, there's commitment to stay together.] (Marco)</p>
	Not valuing labels	<p>"But I think <i>na</i> especially now with this generation, labels aren't exactly something <i>na</i> are so important <i>kasi</i> as long as <i>parang masaya kayo</i> then that would be enough." [But I think that especially now with this generation, labels aren't exactly something that are so important because as long as you and your significant other are happy, then that would be enough.] (Lexie)</p> <p>"<i>E, kasi uso naman ngayon 'yung walang label.</i>" [Having no label is "in" these days.] (Yiseo)</p>
Romantic relationships should be founded on friendship.	Friendship as an important factor	<p>"<i>Pero kasi, ano, na-fe-feel ko na parang</i> if friends <i>kayo</i>, based <i>din sa lesson, na magiging maganda 'yung- 'yung</i> foundation." [Based on our lesson, I feel like if you were friends beforehand, the foundation of the relationship would be good.] (Law)</p> <p>"<i>Kasi, syempre, kilala na n'ung dalawang tao 'yung isa't isa, parang may mas</i> care for the, uhm, on the other ends <i>kaya mas mababawasan 'yung</i> ghosting <i>kapag ganu'n.</i>" [Because of course the two people already know and care for each other, which lessens the chances of ghosting.] (Lalacat)</p>
	Friendship as an unimportant factor	<p>"I would say <i>na hindi naman siya</i> super need <i>na may</i> prior friendship <i>kayo n'ung- n'ung tao.</i>" [I would say that friendship before a relationship with the person is not really needed.] (SM)</p> <p>"I don't think it's, <i>ano</i>, important because a lot of relationships now don't start with that <i>na</i> and they tend to last <i>rin naman.</i>" (XYZ)</p>

Romantic relationships should be carefully planned.	Importance of individuality	<p>"I learned that, uh, we all have, like, our own lives and our world doesn't have to revolve around them." (Lexie)</p> <p>"<i>Kapag binase mo 'yung buong kasiyahan mo sa isang tao, ano, pangit magiging kalalabasan n'un.</i>" [Nothing good will come out if your entire happiness is based on a single person.] (Li)</p>
	Cannot be forced	<p>"We have to be patient for the right person to come <i>kasi</i> these things cannot be forced." (Jujubee)</p> <p>"<i>Alam kong pwede ka umalis anytime kasi you're not-hindi naman talaga-</i> it's your choice <i>naman na.</i>" [I know that you can go anytime, because that's your choice.] (Siopao)</p>
	Involves an exchange	<p>"I was like, 'Oh, <i>dapat 'yung lalake gumagawa lahat. Dapat siya 'yung nag-e-effort.</i>' <i>Pero</i>, of course, after that I realized <i>na</i> I should give <i>din</i>. [I was like, 'Oh, the guy should be the one to do everything. He should be the one to put in effort.' But, of course, after that I realized that I should give as well] ... I should be giving of my time, of my effort and not just the guy cause it's a two way thing." (XYZ)</p>
	Not just feelings	<p>"Romantic relationships are not only just about love at the moment." (STEM-Iniwaned)</p> <p>"There's a lot of things to consider when you want to enter that kind of relationship so, uh, I think mo- it's more of how I think, uh, how I value it, like, do I want to get into this kind of relationship with someone? Before, I would not think about it as much but now I- I think I would like, uh, consider a lot of things first before getting into that kind of relationship." (John)</p>
There is no change in their definition of romantic relationships.		<p>"Whatever happened to the outcome to- our outcome actually will not change, will never change what romantic relationships look like." (STEM-Iniwaned)</p> <p>"I think it's more of <i>na</i>-solidify <i>ko 'yung</i> belief- my initial belief." (Diane)</p>

According to Collins et al. (2009), the number of romantic relationships adolescents enter increases, between the ages of 12 and 18. Furthermore, they add that as a person ages, changes within their perceptions of their social function and concepts of relationships occur (p. 641). From this, a connection between experiences from romantic relationships and views on romantic relationships could be drawn. This could explain why several participants exhibited changes in their view of romantic relationships after being ghosted. The first question of this study pursued the question of how ghostees now viewed romantic relationships after their ghosting experience.

It was revealed that the ghostees' view on the role of labels in romantic relationships were now regarded as either important or unimportant because of the ghosting experience. Stanley et al. (2010) state that until mutual commitment within the relationship is clarified, individuals face anxiety about potential relationship dissolution, once they become more attached to a partner (as cited in Knopp et al., 2020). This could

be the reason why some value establishing labels in a romantic relationship for it could be a manifestation of a person's commitment to stay in that relationship, as explained by Marco, "*Tapos* we established that, *ano*, we really like each other and you know *may parang* commitment to stay together." [Then we established that we really like each other and you know, there's commitment to stay together.] However, there are others that valued the emotion their significant other and they feel in the relationship, more than labels, like Lexie, who said that "...as long as *parang masaya kayo* then that would be enough." [...as long as you and your significant other are happy, then that would be enough.] Moreover, the popularity of having no labels within the respondents' generation seemed to play a factor in their decision to not value labels, like what Yiseo expressed when she mentioned that "*E, kasi uso naman ngayon 'yung walang label*. [Having no label is a trend these days.] This is consistent with the findings of the study by Vaterlaus et al. (2017), which indicated that adolescent romantic relationships were perceived to be influenced by interactive technology and entertainment media, according to most of their adolescent and college student participants.

Similar to labels, friendship as a foundation for a romantic relationship was also regarded as important or unimportant by the ghostees after the experience. Some of the participants felt that establishing a friendship with someone before entering a romantic relationship with them would lessen the likelihood of being ghosted. "*Kasi, syempre, kilala na n'ung dalawang tao 'yung isa't isa parang may mas care for the, uhm, on the other ends kaya mas mababawasan 'yung ghosting kapag ganu'n*," [Because of course the two persons already know and care for each other, which lessens the chances of ghosting,] Lalacat explains. On the other hand, several respondents deemed friendship as an unimportant factor when it comes to building romantic relationships. They explain that most relationships nowadays that have friendship as a foundation do not prevent ghosting, and those relationships that did not start with friendship work just as well as those who did, which is why they do not see its importance. Simon et al. (2000) stated that several important functions for romantic relationships can be found within the peer context (p. 12). This could explain the varying views in friendship as a foundation for romantic relationships as the ghostees experience within their friendships could be the reason behind why some also associate the likelihood of ghosting to be lessened if there is a good friendship foundation, and why others do not. Relating friendships with less ghosting could also stem from those respondents' feeling of familiarity and security with similar kinds of experiences from their friendships; considering that affiliative characteristics, like intimacy, companionship, and mutual co-construction of the relationship, can be found in both romantic relationships and friendships (Furman, in press; Furman & Wehner, 1994, as cited in Simon et al., 2000).

Furthermore, after being ghosted, several respondents realized that careful planning should be done before entering a romantic relationship, as they become aware of new realizations. Most participants now recognize that maintaining “the sense of individuality” in their relationships is an essential aspect within romantic relationships after the ghosting experience. Additionally, they showed negative perceptions towards being too dependent on romantic partners. A reason for this could be that the participants associate their dependency on their previous partner negatively because that relationship ended with ghosting, as explained by Li: “*Kapag binase mo ‘yung buong kasiyahan mo sa isang tao, ano, pangit magiging kalalabasan n’un.*” [Nothing good will come out of basing your entire happiness on a single person.] Aside from this, another idea that were shared by most of the ghostees was the belief that a romantic relationship is not something that a person can force. A connection between the ghosting experience and the acceptance that the participants had towards the idea that relationships cannot be forced to happen or the person in a relationship cannot be forced to stay, can be noticed within the interview transcripts. This could come from the fact that, in a ghosting experience, the ghoster usually does not explain their reasons for leaving a relationship and just abruptly cuts off any form of communication they had with the ghostee. Aside from this, XYZ, one of the female participants of the study, explicitly revealed a new subtheme when she realized that romantic relationships were supposed to be an exchange between the people involved, after her ghosting experience. She explained that time and effort should be given by both people within a relationship and “not just the guy, ‘cause it’s a two-way thing.” Additionally, some of the male participants became aware that relationships do not depend on feelings alone after their ghosting experience. John, in particular, expressed how the ghosting experience may lead someone to reflect on their previous beliefs when it comes to relationships, which then ultimately led to him changing his prior views on the things he considers before entering a romantic relationship. All of these changes, in what the participants would like to plan and think of ahead before engaging romantically with someone following their ghosting experience, could be related to the idea that Furman and Shaffer (2003) presented in their paper. They explained that adolescents develop a sense of their self or identity in their romantic experiences which suggests that romantic experiences may actually affect an individual’s sense of self in the romantic domain (p. 4). This implies that the ghosting experience that had occurred in the participants’ past romantic relationship could have influenced why they now have new ideas of what their role should be and what they should do in current and future romantic relationships; hence, they are redefining romantic relationships as well. This is further supported by Simon et al. (2002), who stated that due to adolescents’ less fixed beliefs, “Greater variety in romantic experiences may, in turn, increase opportunities to disconfirm existing views” (p.17).

It is important to note, however, that some participants felt that their definition of romantic relationships stayed the same, even after their ghosting experience. Diane explains that instead of changing how she defines romantic relationships, the ghosting experience solidified her existing beliefs on it. She stated that, "I think it's more of *na-solidify ko 'yung belief- my initial belief.*" This could be explained by how adolescents enter relationships with a set of expectations. It is said that views on romantic relationships are reinforced and strengthened if an adolescent's experiences are in line with their expectations, and if those two largely differ from one another while that individual remains in that relationship, then their views on romantic relationships could change (Simon et al., 2000). It could be assumed the participants who faced a change in their views of romantic relationships after being ghosted, had different expectations for their relationship with the ghoster, than those whose views remained the same. As a result, although the ghosting experience did not lead to change in the definition of romantic relationships for some of the participants, it provided assurance that their previous views on what romantic relationships were true.

Table 2

How Ghostees Now Consider Themselves as Romantic Partners After the Ghosting Experience

Themes	Subthemes	Quotes
The ghostees became particular and considerate.	Practicing better sensitivity	" <i>Mahalaga na alamin mo rin 'yung situation n'ung tao kasi they're not always as good as you or as ano in terms of their life situation, ganu'n, and to become more sensitive din du'n sa tao.</i> " [It is important to know the other person's situation as well, since they're not always as good as you in terms of their situation, and to become more sensitive to them.] (SM)
	Becoming more affectionate	"I'd spoil my partner Gift giving and words of affirmation. I think that's how I will spoil someone" (M) "Ghosting experience makes me in- in- in my perspective, a more performative person <i>siguro</i> [maybe] in the relationship, in terms of being romantic." (STEM-Iniwaned)
	Wanting more connections	" <i>Na-realize ko rin na may- siguro</i> I lack something <i>na parang ma-de-develop siguro</i> if I enter more social relationships, so <i>parang</i> at the same time, open <i>na din ako.</i> " [I realized that maybe I lack something that might develop if I enter more social relationships, so at the same time, I am open as well.] (John) "I think it's sort of ampli- I think the ghosting sort of amplified- <i>mga</i> heightened- amplified or strengthened that need or something" (Simon)
	Becoming more specific	"It really made my standards high." (SM) " <i>Based sa mga experience ko before, mas gusto ko na makakita na ng action Gusto ko naman</i> this time, <i>pantay na kami.</i> " [Based on my previous experiences, I want to see more action. This time around, I want us to be equals.] (Lalacat) "I became more picky with the guys I communicate with." (Diane) " <i>Gusto ko pa kasi sana, no strings attached na Ayaw ko na sa concept ng pagkakarohan ng jowa.</i> " [What I want now, no strings attached I don't want the concept of having a significant other anymore.] (Li)

		<p>"From past experience, <i>na</i>-understand <i>ko na</i> [I understood that] there should be communication." (XYZ)</p> <p>"I feel need <i>talaga ng</i> assurance sa relationship <i>kasi syempre, mag-wo-worry tayo.</i>" [I feel assurance in relationships is really needed because, of course, we would worry.] (Law)</p>
The ghostees became hesitant and guarded.	Discouraged from spoiling succeeding partners	<p>"I really fear being a spoiler ... When I was <i>ano-</i> with 'yung girl, <i>medyo</i> spoiler <i>ako. Madami akong regalo noon.</i> I don't know why, <i>pero napapagastos ako.</i>" [... When I was with that girl, I was a bit of a spoiler. I gave a lot of gifts. I don't know why but I spent a lot of money.] (Marco)</p>
	Concerned about being ghosted again	<p>"Of course, at any moment, that chat could, you know, just stop. And I was cautious about that" (XYZ)</p> <p>"<i>Hindi ko pa kayang</i> i-all out 'yung <i>nararamdaman ko kasi, syempre, natatakot ako na ma-ghost.</i>" [I can't be 'all-out' with my feelings because, of course, I'm scared of being ghosted again.] (Lalacat)</p> <p>"There's an additional fear <i>na</i> you might get ghosted again and, you know, that ghosting is really a sad, terrible experience that you don't want to go back to that" (John)</p>
	Lost their interest in pursuing others	<p>"If it happens <i>na lang, sige, mangyari na lang. Para sa- para sa 'kin, gano'n na lang rin.</i>" [If it happens, alright, just let it happen. For me, it's just like that.] (Marco)</p> <p>"<i>Hinahayaan ko na lang so hindi na ako 'yung tipong maghababol.</i>" [I just let it be, I'm not the type to pursue others anymore.] (Siopao)</p> <p>"<i>Hindi naman po sa nadagdagan pero parang mas nag-weigh siya sa mind ko.</i>" [It's not like it increased but it weighed more in my mind]. (Li)</p> <p>"I think it was further aggravated, further developed, or future solidified by that experience, honestly." (Diane)</p> <p>"<i>Di na rin ako masyadong open to it.</i>" [I'm not that open to it anymore.] (Grace)</p>

The second question in this study sought to determine how ghostees consider themselves as romantic partners after their ghosting experience. With regard to this question, it was found that their testimonies can be classified into two main themes: *the ghostees became particular and considerate*, and *the ghostees became hesitant and guarded*.

Practicing better sensitivity is among the steps that could be taken by ghostees after a particular ghosting experience. SM was the only one, out of the 17 participants, to have been recorded elaborating on this element. Despite being singular, it is significant that this response was collected from a female respondent. She stated, "It is important to know the other person's situation ... since they are not always as good as you in terms of their situation." Data from previous research suggest that adolescent females are more attuned towards interpersonal issues, susceptible to emotional investment manifesting in worrying, and inclined to behave in certain ways for a harmonious relationship (Rudolph, 2002; Rudolph & Conley, 2005). Generally, between males and females, the latter is also usually observed to show more distress about their romantic partners than the former (Gore et al., 1993, as cited in Rudolph & Conley, 2005). This result aligns with those of earlier

studies and argues that the unpredictable nature of ghosting may cause further development of receptivity in ghostees as romantic partners in future relationships.

The act of becoming more affectionate is another development that ghostees may undergo as romantic partners after their experience. In their interviews, most participants agreed that 'spoiling' their romantic partners is something that they consider doing, both prior and after the ghosting experience. In this context, spoiling is closer to 'indulging' or 'pampering' the significant other, in one way or another. As an example, M illustrated that she would spoil her partner through "gift-giving and words of affirmation." STEM-Iniwaned, on the other hand, mentioned that instead of spoiling, his experience made him a "more performative person ... in terms of being romantic." When asked what he meant by being more performative, he responded that "it's a remarkable difference to the previous style of you romantically." A possible explanation for this type of response might be that adolescents commonly regard inadequate intimacy among the reasons for relationship dissolutions (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). The participants may have considered their display of affection, may it be existent or absent during the relationship, to be among the causes for their partner ghosting them.

An outlier from these results shows that not all ghostees may opt to become more affectionate in their future relationships. Marco revealed that he has since been discouraged to spoil his succeeding relationships because of his ghosting experience. Leary et al. (1998) concluded that interpersonal assessment may impact an individual's self-esteem which may either be increased or decreased depending on whether an action is accepted or rejected by the receiver. One's confidence in showing affection might be affected by the receiver's reaction to it and may lead to carrying over to other relationships.

As romantic partners after their ghosting experiences, the participants' accounts reveal that they are more specific in what they want in their partner. This is consistent with a remark by Norona and Olmstead (2017) where experiencing relationship dissolution may lead to discovering one's preferences in a partner and may then be a guide to future romantic relationships. Although there is no previous literature exploring shifts in partner standards following a ghosting experience, the present findings could be explained by literature on romantic rejection experiences. Simpson et al. (2001) highlighted that three elements, namely the self, the envisioned partner, and envisioned relationship combine to form an individual's ideal standards (p. 89). If a person undergoes multiple rejections, the said standards would decrease while their flexibility would increase (p. 92). In contrast to this literature, the ideal standards of the participants did not decrease but were rather reinforced. It is also notable that the female participants commented that they were more specific with what they want in romantic relationships. This result differs from Reeve et al.'s

(2017), where female participants who received rejection cues were less particular with their preferences.

Interestingly, it is evident that most ghostees had formed a perception of the significance of communication between partners after their ghosting experience. XYZ told the researchers, "I understood that there should be communication." For participants, communication manifests in different forms. For one, it is making things clear with the other party, as Jujubee placed it, "If they don't ask for permission, it's gonna- it's gonna make me overthink." Alternatively, it is letting the partner know how their day went, Lexie described, "Just like [sic] initiative to tell me how his day is or something like that, for me, that's already fine." It could also be simply being able to talk about feelings or things in mind. As Simon and Diane explained, "I could just, *ayun*, talk to them about my feelings...", "He's able to share things with me..." Law explained that there is a need for communication since it is a method of reassurance to alleviate worries in a relationship. Peel and Caltabiano (2020) found that communication between partners was considered as a method to maintain relationships and even prevent distress. The participants' report of their value for communication reflects this and may be caused by the sudden loss of communication in ghosting situations, a feature of ghosting as defined by Koessler et al. (2019).

Some participants revealed their concern about going through a similar situation in the future. John encapsulated this concern, saying that "There's an additional fear *na* you might get ghosted again and, you know, that ghosting is really a sad, terrible experience that you don't want to go back to that." As a result, they became hesitant in their succeeding interactions with others, including potential partners. Two female participants (Li and Diane) also mentioned that fear of commitment weighed more in their minds after the ghosting experience. These findings are in agreement with those by LeFebvre and Fan (2020), where their participants reported engaging in cautious communication and, for some, even stopped dating after the ghosting experience. This hesitation and discontinuation to engage in romantic relationships may be an act of self-preservation, as relationship dissolutions can be "emotionally painful" and "psychologically distressing" (Kendler et al., 2003 as cited in LeFebvre & Fan, 2020).

One unexpected finding was that some participants were, on the contrary, wanting to form more connections. This is in contrast to LeFebvre and Fan's (2020) findings and was unforeseen to the researchers as previous literature usually discusses the negative impact of ghosting on ghostees. Instead of pessimistic self-blame, John noted, "Maybe I lack something that might develop if I enter more social relationships..." John might have taken his ghosting experience as a lesson for self-development instead of thinking that something is innately wrong with him.

Table 3*How Male and Female Ghostees Differ in Their Views*

Theme	Females (n=10)	Males (n=7)
RQ1: How do the ghostees now view romantic relationships after the ghosting experience?		
Romantic relationships should be labeled.		
Valuing labels	✓	✓
Not valuing labels	✓	✓
Romantic Relationships should be founded on friendship.		
Friendships as an important factor	✓	✓
Friendships as an unimportant factor	✓	✓
Romantic relationships should be carefully planned.		
Importance of individuality	✓	✓
Cannot be forced	✓	✓
Involves an exchange	✓	
Not just feelings		✓
No change in their definition of romantic relationships.	✓	✓
RQ2: How do the ghostees now consider themselves as romantic partners after the experience?		
The ghostees became particular and considerate.		
Practicing better sensitivity	✓	
Becoming more affectionate	✓	✓
Wanting more connections		✓
Becoming more specific	✓	✓
The ghostees became hesitant and guarded.		
Discouraged from spoiling succeeding partner		✓
Concerned about being ghosted again	✓	✓
Lost their interest in pursuing others	✓	✓

The findings of the study show that although most themes were present in the responses of both sexes, there are several that only emerged from one specific sex, as can be observed from the table presented above.

Out of the seven male respondents in this study, three of them expressed that after the ghosting experiences, they realized that romantic relationships are not solely reliant on feelings. As the participants in this study were within 16 to 18 years old, this realization could be explained by Shulman and Kipnis (2001). In their study, they explain that trust, stability, and support was depicted in young adulthood romance, whereas adolescent romance was presented in terms of companionship (p. 346). Due to the participants' age, ranging from late adolescent years to growing young adults, their perceptions of romantic relationships could also be maturing with them. This is also in line with what Shulman and Kipnis (2001) found in their study, which revealed that adolescent romance are mixed with

components of physical attraction and friendship which develop into a committed and mature relationship in later years and thus, can be thought of as a transitory stage (p. 349).

Meanwhile, only one female participant stated that they now believe that romantic relationships involve an exchange from both parties after the ghosting experience. XYZ explained that "In my *parang* first... relationship, it- I was like, 'Oh, *dapat 'yung lalake gumagawa lahat. Dapat siya 'yung nag-e-effort.*" [In my first relationship, I thought that the boy should be the one to do everything and exert effort.] Her previous belief could stem from the traditional gender roles that are still being accepted in the present time, where the men are expected to be the initiators and act directly in relationships (Barhana & Büyüksahin-Sunal, 2015). Interaction with incoming information from a person's social environment shapes their expectations and future plans on how men and women should be in romantic relationships (Sakalli-Ugurlu, 2003). Hence, through this particular participant's experience and interaction with her relationship with the ghoster, she was able to develop new expectations about romantic relationships that differ from the traditional gender roles that are usually imposed on men and women in romantic relationships which she previously believed.

From the response of one particular female participant, Lalacat, emerged the theme of *practicing better sensitivity*. While she further elaborated that this belief was formed from the circumstances of the relationship itself, saying that "*Bata pa 'ko... medyo bata pa ako n'un* [I was young, I was young back then]", this also reflects a societal stereotype on women. Women are expected to be more empathetic than men (Gilligan & Wiggins, 1988, as cited in Karniol et al., 1998). This can be attributed to the traditional roles of women as caretakers and being submissive in male-dominated spheres. Findings of Karniol et al. (1998) and Mestre et al. (2009) present that female adolescents receive higher empathy scores than their male counterparts. Aside from this, Karniol et al. (1998) highlighted that adolescents who had more feminine traits, despite their biological sex, had higher empathy scores than male adolescents (p. 55).

In addition, two male participants had answers with the theme of *wanting more connections*. Taking their accounts, John and Simon interpreted the relationship dissolution as a sign of having something to work on, and that they would be able to discern what they have to improve upon when they interact more with others. However, this could also be a manifestation of the traditional heterosexual courtship script. As Seal and Ehrhardt (2003) explained, males who are not able to follow through on courtship prospects would have their masculinity and sexual orientation subsequently doubted by others (p. 296).

Table 4*The Perceived Impacts of Ghosting on the Ghostee's Daily Life*

Themes	Subthemes	Quotes
Having negative emotional responses	Feeling hurt	I really had feelings for him <i>na</i> . So, when he ghosted me, <i>sobrang sakit n'un sa 'kin</i> . And then- like- <i>siguro</i> for a month straight, I was crying. [I really had feelings for him already so when he ghosted me, it was really painful for me and then for a month straight, I was crying.] (Lexie) It's um... it's painful, it's hurting, it's alarming to us whenever no one is- no one is suddenly not talking to us, especially if the person that you love, ' <i>di ba</i> [right]? (STEM-Iniwaned)
	Feeling upset	Not surprising but, yeah, it's disappointing. (Jujubee) <i>Medyo nainis. 'Yun 'yung pinaka-ma-de-describe ko doon</i> . [Slightly annoyed. That's how I would best describe [how I felt] back then.] (Grace)
	Feeling indifferent	So I felt a little bit indifferent, a little bit sad. More like, I feel like [the relationship] was such a waste, it's like having your favorite food get spoiled. (TJ) <i>Pero parang nangyari ayun-</i> just don't care about it at all, stay apathetic about it. [What happened is [I] just don't care about it at all, stay apathetic about it.] (Simon)
Having self-deprecating thoughts	<i>Baka 'di nila pinapansin na</i> [Maybe they are ignoring [me]...] or maybe they don't care about what I'm saying. Maybe "Ah, this guy is so stupid, I don't like him anymore." (Simon) I actually compare myself to the trash to all of these, I- I use these metaphors to <i>parang 'O, buti pa 'yung ganyan ganyan</i> , uh, he actually still goes with.' [I actually compared myself to trash all [throughout] of these [times that he ghosted me]. I use metaphors to say that 'This and that is lucky because he actually still goes with [them.]'] (STEM-Iniwaned) I felt confused <i>tapos sabi ko, "Ano bang nagawa kong mali?" tapos "May nagawa ba akong mali?" Parang nag-doubt ako sa sarili ko, 'yung ganu'n ... Syempre, um, iba yung feeling na, um, 'pag- Syempre 'pag na-go-ghost kasi, 'yung confidence mo bababa, tapos mag-se-self doubt ka rin</i> . [I felt confused and I thought, 'What did I do wrong?' then 'Did I do something wrong?'... It's like I doubted myself because, of course, when one gets ghosted, their confidence decreases and they start to self-doubt.] (Lalacat)	
Heightened stress	Added stressor	<i>'Pag sa pag-aaral lang ako like that pero ngayon, may dagdag na ganu'n na iniisip mo so na-di-distract ka na</i> [I'm only like that [focused] with my studies but now there's that [the ghosting experience] that you think about so you get distracted] you can't really function normally like before, you know, 'cause you keep on thinking about that and you keep on thinking "What if? What if? What if?" You know that there's not really anything you can do. (John) <i>Sobrang na- na-bo-bother ako na minsan nakakadagdag siya sa mga bagay na nagpapa-sad sa akin. Minsan, ano, sa sobrang stress, mag-be-breakdown ka na lang</i> . [I was very bothered that it sometimes adds to the things that make me sad. Sometimes, due to heightened stress, [all you could do is] break down.] (Law)
	Decreased motivation	That was around the time kasi that term three was still, um, <i>parang, tinatapos pa lang</i> so we still had requirements. <i>Tapos sobrang, like, wala na akong gana</i> to do my schoolwork, <i>kasi like-</i> I was just crying <i>tapos super sad ako</i> . [That was around the end of term 3 and we still had requirements. I really did not have motivation to do my schoolwork because I was just crying and I was super sad.] (Lexie)
Developing trauma and triggers	Ghosted people will actually suffer consequences even after the ghosting experience. <i>Parang</i> [Like] there will and there will be, j- just like in traumatic, um, situations, there will and there will be, um, triggers that will actually, yeah sadly, um, hurt them [the ghostees]. (STEM-Iniwaned)	
Physical manifestations of stress	I noticed <i>na um</i> , I started having, like, weird patches on my skin, <i>tapos araw-araw ako nagpupuyat, nagigising ako, umiyak ako</i> . And then, um, I started noticing that even my hair was falling out <i>na</i> . [I noticed that I started having weird patches on my skin. I always sleep late and when I wake up, I cry. And then I started noticing that even my hair was falling out already.] (Lexie)	

Upon the interview and data analysis conducted by the researchers, several themes that were perceived as a negative impact to the ghostee's daily life have emerged. These themes could be classified into two distinct aspects: psychological and physical.

Psychological aspect. The psychological aspect or mental health of the participants was observed to be the most impacted aspect of their daily life after their ghosting experience. A female participant has affirmed this with her statement, "It affected my mental health a lot." However, the gathered data shows that experiencing ghosting had varying effects on adolescents.

A wide range of emotions were observed among the ghostees as a response to the experience. Among those who felt hurt, their attachment formed with the ghosters seems to have played a role in why they felt this way (Timmermans et al., 2020). Meanwhile, some participants were only mildly upset with the situation. Disappointment on how the relationship ended was common among male and female ghostees. Jujubee's statement (see Table 4), which concisely represents other participants' disappointment, implies that these ghostees may have some understanding and/or expectation that the ghosting was going to occur. Conversely, the annoyance due to the miscommunication as expressed by Grace in Table 4 shows that there might be misunderstanding of intentions between them and the ghoster. Nevertheless, these emotional responses are consistent with the findings of Koessler et al. (2019) provided first-hand accounts of ghosting which expressed anger. While most participants have shown strong emotions towards the experience, some were indifferent to the relationship dissolution. Additionally, this type of emotional response was also seen in Koessler et al.'s (2019) study. This goes to show that ghosting could affect people to varying levels of degree based on the factors concerning the status of the relationship before the ghosting happened.

Confusion and the desire to know the reason behind the ghosting is a response that was observed to be common among the majority of the participants. This response has also been found in prior studies on ghosting (Koessler, 2019; LeFebvre et al., 2019b). STEM-Iniwaned recalled that after "a sudden cut-off of communication out of nowhere with no reasons left," he thought, "Oh, God, *bakit naman biglang ganu'n?*" [Oh, God, why did it happen so suddenly?] On the other hand, Law expressed that he was "trying to find an answer, *parang bakit siya nangyari ganu'n, bakit- bakit ganito, bakit ganyan.*" [...like why did it happen, why this and that.] Although this response does not necessarily impact the ghostee's daily life on its own, two themes that do have stemmed from this: having self-deprecating thoughts and heightened stress.

First is the theme of having self-deprecating thoughts among ghostees. The development and presence of such has a relationship with the lack of explanation from

the ghostees. In the statement of Lalacat, she perceives that the ghosting had a negative impact on her confidence which led to self-doubt. Similarly, STEM-Iniwaned and Simon had exhibited such mentality. Such findings are consistent with the results of Lefebvre et al. (2019a). It is inferred from this observation that the consideration of how the participant's ghoster perceive them had affected their self-perception in a way that the ghostees blame their personality and past actions as the cause of the unexplained relationship dissolution. Furthermore, LeFebvre et al. (2019b) claim that repeated ghosting experience also contributes to the internalization of the belief that something is inherently wrong with them, thus strengthening self-blame.

Heightened stress was also found to be linked with the confusion that ghostees had. As they continue to one-sidedly search and ponder for the cause of the ghosting for a long period of time, this has developed into a stressor that contributes to the ghostee's daily stress. For some people like John, the ghosting experience became a distraction in his studies and a disturbance of his daily life. However, it can also be an additional stressor significant enough to cause a person to break down. Considering the nature of ghosting in which there is a complete loss of connection without knowing its cause and these statements, there is an impression that the effects of ghosting could persist long term. Similar to how the additional stressor can disturb one's focus on schoolwork, ghostees felt a decrease in their motivation to do work. This is in line with Field et al.'s (2012) findings where breakups affect the concentration and ability to perform homework among university students.

The experience of ghosting was not pleasant for ghostees. However, development of trauma related to romantic relationships may occur as a consequence of the experience. STEM-Iniwaned expressed this during the interview as stated in Table 4. Considering that ghosting could elicit negative emotions such as feeling hurt and could lead to heightened stress, both of which are possible to be experienced in the long term, developing trauma is possible. Bunze and colleagues' (2008, as cited in Owenz & Fowers, 2018) study on measurement of emotional stress found that the relationship breakups can cause distress for emerging adults comparable to other traumatic events such as experiencing a severe earthquake.

Physical aspect. For most ghostees, the effects of ghosting had impacted their mental health only. However, in a specific case of one female participant, its effects on a physical level were reported. Like other ghostees, Lexie also experienced the psychological impact of ghosting, specifically feeling hurt, heightened stress, decreased motivation, and having self-deprecating thoughts. Additionally, she listed appearances of skin patches, disrupted sleep schedule, and hair loss post-ghosting. One possible explanation for this may be related with the psychological impacts that she encountered. Grossi et al. (2015) state that some of the symptoms of stress-related exhaustion disorder

and major depressive disorder include concentration difficulties, sleep impairments, and self-blame. Meanwhile, Kross and colleagues (2011) revealed that social rejection could result in physical pain disorders. Using these studies as a basis, the physical effects that Lexie listed may be manifestations of the psychological impact of ghosting.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the present research is to determine the role of previous romantic dissolution experience, specifically ghosting, in adolescents' development of perception of romantic relationships and of themselves as a partner. The differences between male and female ghostees regarding their perception of romantic relationships and of themselves as romantic partners were investigated. The perceived impacts of ghosting on the ghostees' daily life after the experience were also examined.

This study has identified four main themes on the participants' views on romantic relationships after being ghosted, such as *Romantic relationships should be labeled*, *Romantic relationships should be founded on friendship*, *Romantic relationships should be carefully planned*, and *There is no change in their definition of romantic relationships*. These findings which show that previous personal experiences within romantic relationships do have an effect on an adolescent's view of romantic relationships, whether it brings them new realizations or further solidifies their existing beliefs, are consistent with the current existing literature done on the said topic. Furthermore, this also supports the idea that adolescent romantic relationships play a significant role in shaping views which those individuals carry onto their future romantic relationships, hence the importance of investigating emerging trends in romantic relationships, such as ghosting, and its perceived effects.

Two main themes for how the participants considered themselves as romantic partners after being ghosted emerged such as *The ghostees became particular and considerate* and *The ghostees became hesitant and guarded*. These findings strengthen the idea that adolescents develop a sense of identity in romantic experiences. Hence, these further support the notion that ghosting does have negative consequences upon the ghostee. In contrast to this, the results also show that ghosting may have a positive impact on the ghostees as romantic partners in their succeeding relationships. This study has raised questions about the nature of the perceived effects of ghosting, particularly how the positive effects of ghosting are not usually included in studies about ghostees after their ghosting experience.

There were differences between the views of male and female ghostees, specifically in viewing romantic relationships as involving an exchange and not just feelings, and viewing themselves as practicing better sensitivity, wanting more connections, and discouraged from spoiling succeeding partners. This indicates that due

to the difference in the effects of ghosting regarding adolescents' views on romantic relationships and their perception of themselves as romantic partners between the males and females, there is a need to further explore the extent of these differences on the two sexes which were brought about by ghosting.

Having negative emotional responses, self-deprecating thoughts, heightened stress, developing trauma and triggers, and physical manifestations of stress were the perceived impacts on the participants' daily lives after their ghosting experience. These results show that ghosting has varying impacts on the ghostees. Also, these impacts are related to one another and are rooted in the psychological distress that the experience has brought them. The researchers would also like to stress the physical impact of ghosting that emerged from this study's results.

Overall, the results of this research support the idea that ghosting has an impact on those who have experienced it, especially the non-initiators, in more ways than one. Not only is self-perception affected by ghosting, but also the views on romantic relationships, on the self as a romantic partner, and the daily life are influenced by this.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigated the impact of ghosting experience on the perception of adolescents in romantic relationships. The researchers specifically studied the role of biological sex, past relationship experiences with the ghoster, and the relationship dissolution experience in their self-perception as a romantic partner and romantic relationships in general after being ghosted. This research may further increase adolescents' sensitivity towards others and promote introspection, developing individuals who are not only mindful of their own future romantic endeavors but also of others. The parents and guardians who have adolescents under their care may also benefit from the result of the study. As getting in romantic relationships are common during adolescence, it is good to understand how adolescents perceive the effects of ghosting experiences on their outlook of relationships. The results of this study may help school guidance counselors form a clearer plan on how to approach and handle adolescents who have gone through a ghosting experience. Thus, they may work together with school administrators, teachers, as well as parents and guardians, to enrich the development of adolescents even more.

The current study accounted for ghosting experiences, in both platonic and romantic relationships, in determining the perceived effects of ghosting on romantic relationships. It is recommended that future research should consider the possible differences in the effects of platonic and romantic ghosting. The number of male and female participants gathered for this study was uneven and are from a private institution. With this, the proponents of this study recommend future research to have (a) an equal

number of male and female participants and (b) participants of different socioeconomic statuses for a general representation of the effects of ghosting on adolescents. In addition, this research found data suggesting that ghosting has an impact on the ghostee's physical health which could be further explored in the future. As previous literature on ghosting has been concentrated on its effects on adults, it is also proposed to examine its impact on adolescents.

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