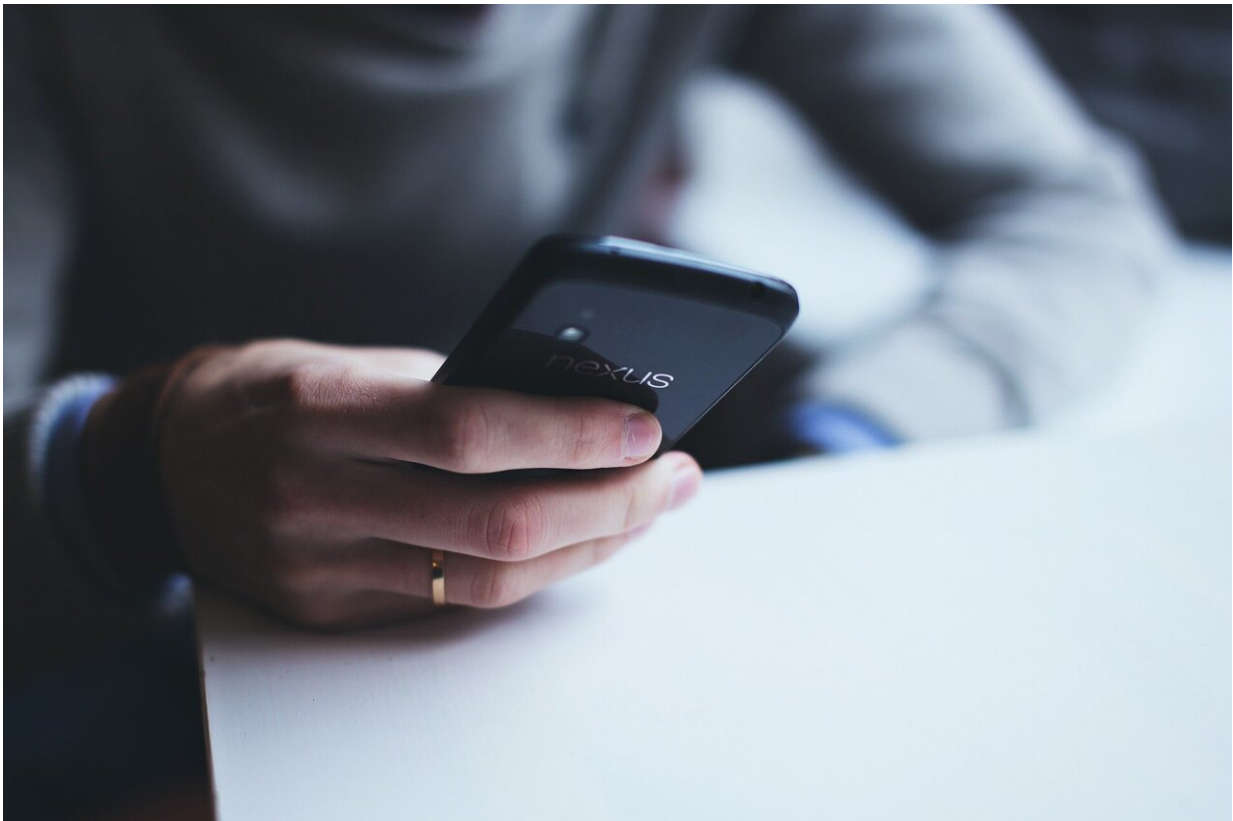


# Study shows need for closure can magnify emotional effect of ghosting

February 13 2023, by Erica Techo

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Odds are, you know someone who has been ghosted. And according to a new study from the University of Georgia, it can be a haunting experience.

A recent study conducted by researcher and corresponding author Christina Leckfor and University of Mississippi researcher Natasha Wood found nearly two-thirds of participants have ghosted—ended a [relationship](#) by ignoring the other person, without offering a clear explanation—and have been ghosted.

And as [online dating](#), dating apps and other social technologies grow in popularity, so does the likelihood that someone is left on read after a few dates. Yet despite its frequent occurrence, little is known about why people ghost or the psychological effects of this social phenomenon.

"Ghosting is becoming a common strategy, and it creates an ambiguous situation where one party doesn't really know what's going on," said Leckfor, a doctoral student in the UGA Department of Psychology. "We were interested in what [individual differences](#) or [personal characteristics](#) might influence a person's intentions to use ghosting. We also wanted to know if people with a high need for closure were less likely to use ghosting, or if they would hurt more after being ghosted."

On the receiving end of a breakup, ghosting was a [negative experience](#) for almost all participants. But for individuals who yearn for closure, the negative effects of ghosting are even more profound.

To gauge the effect of a breakup, study participants reflected on a past relationship, either a time they were ghosted or directly rejected, and then answered questions about their psychological needs satisfaction—feelings of belonging, self-esteem, control and meaningful existence. Ghosted participants had some of the lowest needs satisfaction, meaning they were hit hardest by the rejection, and those who wanted closure reported even lower needs satisfaction.

"For recipients, desire for closure has this magnifying effect. When someone with a high need for closure recalled a time where they were

ghosted or directly rejected, it hurt more than if they had a low need for closure," Leckfor said. "But they also felt more positive after recalling times when they were acknowledged by their partner."

In contrast, when someone considered initiating a breakup, the connection between closure and ghosting varied.

"We actually found that people who had a higher need for closure were slightly more likely to intend to use ghosting to end a relationship," Leckfor said. "Even though things may be ambiguous on the recipient side, the person who is ghosting sees it as a distinct end to the relationship. Those results weren't definitive in our study, but they pose an interesting avenue for future research."

And ghosting's not just for dating apps anymore. More than half of the study participants wrote about a time when they were ghosted by a friend, rather than a romantic partner.

"The individuals who were ghosted by a friend reported feeling just as bad about the relationship as those who wrote about a time when they were ghosted by a romantic partner," Leckfor said. "In psychology in general, a lot of literature regarding adult relationships focuses on romantic relationships. This [research] shows that friendships are really important to study as well."

It also relates back to the role of technology in our relationships. There have been several studies on how people initiate, maintain and end relationships without technology, but as more human connectivity moves to [social media](#), dating apps, texting or Zoom, those relationships can change. And individual traits, such as a need for closure, will factor into how we use those technologies.

"Now, almost everybody uses these technologies to communicate and

maintain these different types of relationships," Leckfor said. "Knowing when these technologies can be helpful to build [social connections](#) or maintain your personal well-being, versus knowing when they might be harmful, is the end goal of what I hope my work in this area conveys to the public."

The study is published in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*.

**More information:** Christina M. Leckfor et al, From close to ghost: Examining the relationship between the need for closure, intentions to ghost, and reactions to being ghosted, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/02654075221149955](https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075221149955)

Provided by University of Georgia

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