

Peer Review Comments

Article: Koessler, R. B., et al. (2019). When Your Boo Becomes a Ghost: The Association Between Breakup Strategy and Breakup Role in Experiences of Relationship Dissolution. *Collabra: Psychology*, 5(1): 29. DOI:

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Article type: Original Research Report

Editor: William Chopik

Article submitted: 16 January 2019

Editor decision: Accept submission

Revision submitted: 9 April 2019

Article accepted: 17 June 2019

Article published: 27 June 2019

Responses for Version 1

Reviewer A

1) General comments and summary of recommendation

Describe your overall impressions and your recommendation, including changes or revisions. Please note that you should pay attention to scientific, methodological, and ethical soundness only, not novelty, topicality, or scope.

A checklist of things to you may want to consider is below:

- Are the methodologies used appropriate?
- Are any methodological weaknesses addressed?
- Is all statistical analysis sound?
- Does the conclusion (if present) reflect the argument, is it supported by data/facts?
- Is the article logically structured, succinct, and does the argument flow coherently?
- Are the references adequate and appropriate? *

Overall, the introduction is organized well and provides a thorough review of the literature on romantic relationship dissolution as is relevant to the studies conducted. When the authors are discussing the different roles of disengager and recipient, they may want to reference Baumeister, Wotman, & Stillwell (1993).

The methods and results are very thorough, and I appreciated the open notebook and the detail it provided about your data collection process. As a minor point, I would recommend providing the exact p-values for all results, including non-significant ones (e.g., see page 22).

In the discussion, the authors point out that they found direct breakups to be more distressing than ghosting breakups. One possible explanation for this finding is that the types of relationships ended through direct breakups may be different (e.g., longer, involving more commitment, involving people in

closer physical proximity) than those that end through ghosting. It would be helpful if the limitations of interpreting this finding were described.

Finally, in the discussion, when the authors describe the prior research on the Dark Triad and ghosting, it looks like that is referring to a dataset they collected. It might help readers better understand the state of the research if that were referred to as "preliminary evidence" or something of that sort as the findings have not been subject to peer review yet.

2) Figures/tables/data availability:

Please comment on the author's use of tables, charts, figures, if relevant. Please acknowledge that adequate underlying data is available to ensure reproducibility (see open data policies per discipline of Collabra [here](#)). *
The tables were informative and helpful. The data is available on OSF.

3) Ethical approval:

If humans or animals have been used as research subjects, and/or tissue or field sampling, are the necessary statements of ethical approval by a relevant authority present? Where humans have participated in research, informed consent should also be declared.

If not, please detail where you think a further ethics approval/statement/follow-up is required. *

The necessary statements are present. The authors state that they received approval from the Western Ontario Research Ethics Board. Participants gave "implied consent" after seeing a letter of information.

4) Language:

Is the text well written and jargon free? Please comment on the quality of English and any need for improvement beyond the scope of this process. *
The manuscript is very well written.

5a) Signing your review?

Please check yes or no, and, if yes, write your name in 5b. Please note, that if the author chooses to make this review available with the accepted article, your name will be publicly associated with this review. *

No

5b)

If you have chosen to sign your review, please include your name here.

6) Comments to the editor:

Please place any comments that should not be seen by the author below (which will be confidential, regardless of whether you are signing your review).

The manuscript is well written and the authors are very transparent about their methods and data analytic procedures. The only revisions I recommend are minor ones (see comments above).

Reviewer E

I really enjoyed reading this manuscript, and thought the topic was important, and the research was very carefully executed and written up. I do have several questions and comments, but most are on relatively minor issues.

p. 3; last sentence of first paragraph: You have the following sentence, "However, little research has investigated how relationships can be dissolved by removing or preventing access to the technologically-mediated connections that once existed between partners." It is not clear who is removing or preventing access, and so this sentence could almost read to refer to what would happen to breakups if the partners could not access technologically-mediated communication. I would change it to make it clear that one person (the initiator) is doing it to the other.

p. 3; 2nd paragraph: Do all definitions and research on ghosting suggest that, to qualify as ghosting, it is used in place of an explicit explanation or declaration of dissolution? Couldn't it also be something that occurs after a brief declaration of relationship ending, and still qualify as ghosting? In fact, on bottom of p. 7, you refer to "breakup tactics that are used prior to ghosting being implemented as a breakup strategy...", thus acknowledging that breakup tactics can be used prior to ghosting. Actually, this sentence raises another question for me: What is the difference between a breakup tactic and a breakup strategy?

p. 4; 1st paragraph under "Ghosting": You might indicate who was surveyed by the YouGov and Huffington Post in 2014. Provide a little information about the sample. In that same paragraph, as you described the Freedman et al. study done with a MTurk sample, you might indicate what percent of the mTurk sample had both events happen to them (been ghosted and had ghosted). And, why do you think your exploratory sample had a much higher level of ghosting than these prior studies? Different ages? More recent data? You may want to provide a comment about this.

p. 9; near bottom: As you discuss the dialectical approach, you really should be citing Leslie Baxter's research.

p. 10; top: You refer to Sprecher's (1994) study as "catching a rare perspective of both sides of a breakup," but then do not report any findings related to how partners were similar or different in their reactions to the breakup.

p. 12; under Participants, you indicate that you aimed to collect at least “296 participants for both Sample A and Sample B.” To me this was ambiguous: Sample A and Sample B combined? Or for each sample?

p. 12; last paragraph: How was “a non-mutual breakup” defined to the participants? In addition how was “through ghosting” defined to them?

p. 13; top: It is unclear to me how there were so many participants who started the survey if they didn’t meet the criteria for inclusion. Weren’t the criteria listed first, and the participant wouldn’t even start the survey if they didn’t qualify?

An analysis question: Wouldn’t it be important to control for the length of the relationship or the type of relationship in looking at the effects of ghosting vs. direct communication (and maybe even role in the breakup)? Shorter relationships may be more likely to have ghosting and the ending of shorter relationships may differ in distinguishable ways from ending of longer relationships (that may be attributed to ghosting in this study?).

p. 15; near bottom: Most readers probably won’t bother to go to the website to find out information from the earlier study. At a minimum, could you indicate something here about who the sample was and how many?

General comment: The researchers appear to have chosen good measures/scales for their study.

p. 18; under Procedure: Was there a way to prevent an MTurk respondent from clicking on each of the conditions (for example, if all events had happened to them)?

General comment (which could be discussed in the Discussion section): Is it really the role (disengager or recipient) or the type of disengagement (ghosting vs. direct) that are driving the results – or is the “type of person” that affects both the likelihood of having experienced one of these events recently and one’s reactions to the breakup? Also, what about gender differences?

p. 34; first full paragraph: I think you could link your findings to prior research here.

p. 35; last sentence: You state here that you provided participants with “a general definition of what constitutes a ghosting breakup”. Could you provide that definition in the Method section?

Very minor editing suggestions:

p. 9; line 1: I would add a comma after (Sprecher & Fehr)

p. 11; line 2: should be recipients (not recipients’)

p. 11; line 5 from bottom; I would add a comma after “In this study..”

p. 36; line 8: Should be “current researchers” (plural), correct?

Editor Decision for Version 1

Editor: William Chopik

Affiliation: Michigan State University

Editor decision: Revisions required

Decision date: 18 March 2019

Dear Ms Rebecca Bryanne Bear Koessler,

Thank you for submitting your manuscript, *When your boo becomes a ghost: The association between breakup strategy and breakup role in experiences of relationship dissolution*, to *Collabra: Psychology*. We very much appreciate you considering us as an outlet for your work.

I have now received two reviews for your manuscript and have read your paper carefully myself. Both the reviewers and I saw valuable aspects of the manuscript. The study presents valuable descriptive information about a phenomenon that to date has only received cursory media attention and few rigorous studies. The findings are also relatively straight-forward and provocative—that emotions and breakup motivations (whether perceived or felt) varied by type of breakup and role. We appreciated the transparency and how thoughtful the analysis and discussion about ghosting was. I think this manuscript will make an excellent contribution to the literature and you should be commended for your efforts. Both reviewers noted that the paper was also well written.

However, both reviewers expressed a number of concerns about the manuscript. I view many of these suggestions as minor and mostly focus on (a) clarifying things about the design or (b) adding references or discussions about additional issues. Based on the reviewers' comments and recommendations to me (and my own reading of the manuscript), I am recommending a "Revisions Required" decision.

If you elect to undertake a revision, I urge you to pay close attention to my and the reviewers' suggestions and to thoroughly address each issue that was raised. For example, both reviewers requested a more critical discussion of when ghosting is more likely to occur. Although you cite research that people view ghosting as less acceptable when ending a long-term relationship, some clarifications are needed. Reviewer A noted that it might only occur in short-term relationships and Reviewer E explicitly asked that previous relationship duration be included in an exploratory analysis. As Reviewer E articulated, ghosting and direct strategies may not be mutually exclusive. There are plenty of scenarios (particularly in emotionally intense or severe breakups) where a direct strategy could be used to end a relationship and

then a person could be ghosted from all future contact. However, you might technically define ghosting as *the single* way of breaking up with someone in the absence of a direct strategy (whereas a direct + ghosting-afterward-behavior might be defined as "direct" only). If this is the case, it is important to define this upfront or discuss how this distinction might not always apply in the Discussion (or both). The reviewers also bring up several additional notes (e.g., how to discuss/cite unpublished data, reporting exact p-values, considering gender, considering individual differences (see Reviewer E's "type of person" point)).

There are also a number of minor comments that I will add.

First, I would bulk up the "Current Study" section a little bit to more clearly articulate what you did in the current study (e.g., specifically recruited four samples of people who: broke up (were broken up) via direct (ghosting) strategies and compared their behavior, motivations, and perceptions).

Second, I noticed an error in Table 1 and was able to check the data to verify it (thanks again for the transparency): the distribution of how partners met has two incorrect variables. I would also double check the values in this table overall. Also a value in Table 6 is only rounded to the hundredth decimal.

Third, I was a little confused: You had people report on their role and how the breakup occurred (p. 14) but also recruited separately based on this (via four ads; p. 18). Understandably, some direct disengages might have responded to a different ad or something; it'd be useful to just clarify how the data were collected and if this was a question meant to verify that you had enough numbers of each "cell". Also, it would be useful to report the % of participants in each cell (e.g., # of direct disengagers).

Fourth, the alphas for the factors of the motivations (direct and ghosting) should be reported somewhere. From what I can tell, only the overall alpha for each 13-item scale is reported.

Fifth, you have a large number of tables which is useful for transparency's sake, but isn't always the most efficient way of conveying information. For example, I think the alphas from Tables 2-3 can be reported in text and Tables 5 and 6 could be "stacked" to be combined into one table given their thematic relationship. This last one is merely a suggestion. Another way might to relegate some of the information to a supplement or an OSF site.

I laid out these suggestions above because I think the paper shows promise and has the potential to contribute to the literature on ghosting; but the paper needs to be improved dramatically before it can be considered for publication in Collabra: Psychology. I would like to thank you again for

sending your manuscript to us for consideration and wish you every success in developing this research program.

To access your submission account, follow the below instructions:

- 1) login to the journal webpage with username and password
- 2) click on the submission title
- 3) click 'Review' menu option
- 4) download Reviewed file and make revisions based on review feedback
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- 6) Click the 'notify editor' icon and email the confirmation of re-submission and any relevant comments to the journal.

Please ensure that your revised files adhere to our author guidelines, and that the files are fully copyedited/proofed prior to upload. Please also ensure that all copyright permissions have been obtained. This is the last opportunity for major editing; therefore please fully check your file prior to re-submission.

If you have any questions or difficulties during this process, please do contact us.

Please could you have the revisions submitted by [GIVE 2 WEEK DEADLINE]. If you cannot make this deadline, please let us know as early as possible.

Kind regards,

William J. Chopik
Michigan State University
chopikwi@msu.edu

Author's Response to Review Comments for Version 1

Author: Rebecca B. Koessler

Affiliation: University of Western Ontario

Revision submitted: 9 April 2019

To whom it may concern:

A revised version of our manuscript "When your boo becomes a ghost: The association between breakup strategy and breakup role in experiences of relationship dissolution" has been uploaded to the Collabra: Psychology journal management system. A letter from the authors to the editor (Dr. Chopik) and the reviewers describing the revisions has been added as a supplementary file (per the instructions on the "submissions" page). Please let us know if you are in need of any additional information.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Warm regards,

Rebecca B. Koessler
rkoessle@uwo.ca

Attached document:

<https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/ubiquity-partner-network/ucp/journal/collabra/230-3015-1-SP.docx>

Editor Decision for Version 2

Editor: William Chopik
Affiliation: Michigan State University
Editor decision: Accept submission
Decision date: 17 June 2019

Dear Ms Rebecca Bryanne Bear Koessler,

I apologize for the delay in sending this decision. After review, we have reached a decision regarding your submission to Collabra: Psychology, "When Your Boo Becomes A Ghost: The Association Between Breakup Strategy and Breakup Role in Experiences of Relationship Dissolution", and are happy to accept your submission for publication, pending the completion of copyediting and formatting processes.

As there are no further reviewer revisions to make, you do not have to complete any tasks at this point. The accepted submission will now undergo final copyediting. You will be contacted once this is complete to answer any queries that may have arisen during copyediting and to allow a final chance to edit the files prior to typesetting. If you wish to view your submission during this time, you can log in via the journal website.

The review information should be included in this email.

Kind regards,

William J. Chopik
Michigan State University
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