

## INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' LOVE-BOMBING AND GHOSTING EXPERIENCES AND THEIR SELF-EFFICACY LEVELS IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

### ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN LOVE-BOMBING VE GHOSTING DENEYİMLERİ İLE ROMANTİK İLİŞKİLERDE ÖZ-YETERLİK DÜZEYLERİ ARASINDAKİ İLİŞKİNİN İNCELENMESİ

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#### Anahtar Kelimeler

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#### Keywords

Love-bombing,  
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Bu çalışma üniversite öğrencilerinin aşırı sevgi bombardımanı (love-bombing) ve sessizlik/görünmezlik modu (ghosting) deneyimleri ile romantik ilişkilerde öz-yeterlilik düzeyleri arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemeyi amaçlamıştır. Bu amaçla 18-30 yaş aralığındaki 167'si kadın, 58'i erkek olmak üzere toplam 225 üniversite öğrencisine ulaşılmıştır. Veri toplama aracı olarak; "Sosyo-Demografik Bilgi Formu", "Aşırı Sevgi Bombardımanı (Love-Bombing) Soru Listesi", "Görünmezlik Modu (Ghosting) Soru Listesi" ve "Romantik İlişkilerde Öz-yeterlilik Ölçeği" kullanılmıştır. Bulgularda kadınların erkeklere göre anlamlı düzeyde daha yüksek aşırı sevgi bombardımanı yaşadıkları görülmüştür. Love-bombing deneyimleri yaş, eğitim seviyesi, çalışma durumuna ve gelir düzeyine göre anlamlı farklılık göstermemiştir. Ghosting deneyimleri açısından sosyo-demografik değişkenlere göre anlamlı farklılaşma bulunmamıştır. Katılımcıların romantik ilişkilerde öz-yeterlilik düzeyleri ise yaş, cinsiyet ve eğitim düzeylerine göre anlamlı düzeyde farklılaşmaktadır. 18-24 yaş grubunun 25-30 yaş grubuna göre; kadınların erkeklere göre; lisans öğrencilerinin ise lisansüstü öğrencilerine göre öz-yeterlilik düzeyleri anlamlı düzeyde daha yüksek bulunmuştur. Korelasyonel analiz sonuçlarına göre, romantik ilişkilerdeki öz-yeterlilik düzeyi ile aşırı sevgi bombardımanı ve görünmezlik modu deneyimleri arasında anlamlı düzeyde, negatif yönlü, zayıf doğrusal ilişki; love-bombing ve ghosting deneyimleri arasında anlamlı, pozitif yönlü orta şiddette ilişki bulunmuştur.

#### ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the relationship between university students' love-bombing and ghosting experiences and their self-efficacy levels in romantic relationships. For this purpose, a total of 225 university students, 167 women and 58 men, between the ages of 18 and 30, were reached. As a means of gathering data, "Socio-Demographic Information Form," "Love-Bombing Question List," "Ghosting Question List," created by the researchers, and "Self-Efficacy in Romantic Relationships Scale" were used. The findings showed that women experienced significantly higher love-bombing than men. Love-bombing experiences did not differ significantly according to age groups, education level, employment status, or income level. There were no notable differences based on ghosting experiences according to socio-demographic variables. Participants' self-efficacy levels in romantic relationships vary significantly according to age, sex, and education levels. The self-efficacy levels of the (18–24) age group were higher than those of the (25–30) age group; females self-efficacy levels were higher than males; and undergraduate students self-efficacy levels were higher than those of graduate school students. According to the correlational analysis results, a significant, negative, weak linear correlation was found between the level of self-efficacy in romantic relationships and love-bombing and ghosting experiences. There is a significant, positive, moderately correlated relationship between love-bombing and ghosting experiences.

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## Introduction

Terms such as "love-bombing" and "ghosting" have been popularized and widely used by internet users. These terms have spread to a wider audience after they became widely used on online platforms, especially social media and relationship forums. The rise in narcissism among college students from the millennial generation—those born between 1980 and 2000—with the improvements in technology today (Twenge et al., 2008a-2008b) has led to a rise in incidents of love-bombing and ghosting.

The term "*love-bombing*" refers to a pattern of behavior that typically arises at the beginning of a relationship, which is usually a romantic relationship where one party "bombs" the other with excessive admiration and interest, is excessively communicative (Strutzenberg, 2017), makes an early declaration of love to the other, and gives gifts and compliments (Psychology Today, n.d.). On the other side, the term "*ghosting*" refers to "the termination of a relationship without any explanation and the act of "not being there" by closing all the partner's communication channels" (Erkan et al., 2023). The person who performs the ghosting action is called a "*ghoster*," and the person who is exposed to the action is known as the "*ghostee*".

Since the terms are new, there is insufficient research on love-bombing and ghosting. It has been noted in the literature assessment that there is a couple of research that shows love-bombing is associated with narcissism. A sequence of abusive behavior known as "*love bombing*" followed by "*ghosting*" is frequently employed by narcissists to control and dominate another individual. Therefore, it is necessary to be ready for romantic relationships that begin with love bombing and usually end with ghosting.

When a few ghosting studies are examined, it can be seen that ghosting has been found in relation to issues such as sex, attachment, and neuroticism. There is also research about the consequences of being exposed to ghosting, strategies for coping with, ghosting in non-romantic relationships, and ghosting on digital platforms. According to Powell et al.'s (2021) research, individuals who are exposed to ghosting have a higher rate of anxiety compared to those who are not exposed. Again, the same study found that individuals who were not exposed to ghosting were less likely to have avoidant behavior than those who were exposed. According to the study, men are more likely to react aggressively on social media than women, who are more inclined to use ghosting strategies such as interrupting communication and staying silent. (Biolcati et al., 2022). However, research (Navarro et al., 2020) concludes that there is no significant sex- or age-based difference in ghosting. Neuroticism studies have shown that neurotic males use violence against their partners (Kaygas & Candemir, 2023; Hellmuth & McNulty, 2008) and females use psychological aggression in their romantic relationships. (Kaygas & Candemir, 2023; Rampersad, 2008).

Pancani et al.'s (2021) research described the ghosting process in three stages. In the first stage, the individual experiences confusion; in the second stage, sadness, anger, and guilt; and in the third stage, experiences such as acceptance, separation, dissolution, and investment in new relationships. Ghosting action is described in the literature as a new dissolution strategy. (Timmermans et al., 2020). According to a study by Kaygas and Candemir (2023), the amount of adverse effects can vary depending on how the relationship dissolution process goes through. Ghostees can be challenged to understand and manage the process of separation and dissolution because the dissolution resulting from the ghosting action occurs instantly. (Kaygas & Candemir, 2023; Freedman et al., 2019). It has been discovered that experiencing ghosting activity is linked to unfavorable feelings that are detrimental to one's mental health, such as sadness, injury, anger, and frustration (Astleitner et al., 2023; Timmermans et al., 2020). Petric's (2022) study indicates that experiencing ghosting can be extremely distressing and negatively affect an individual's mental well-being and self-worth. Other research has concluded that exposure to ghosting can result in negative emotions such as sadness, hurt, anger, and disappointment. (Kaygas & Candemir, 2023; Astleitner et al., 2023; Timmermans et al., 2020).

Barnett and Womack (2015) assert that narcissism and self-esteem are strongly correlated. Research by Strutzenberg et al. (2017) indicates that people with low self-esteem and high degrees of narcissism frequently use the love bombing tactic. According to some sources, a person who is subjected to a love bombing act may be negatively affected emotionally and behaviorally, and as a result of the act, they may have difficulties interacting with others (Psychology Today, n.d.).

Love-bombing and ghosting behavior's negative consequences on the victim brought up the question of whether love-bombing and ghosting experiences affect the self-efficacy level of individuals in romantic relationships. The concept of self-efficacy in romantic relationships, according to Lopez et al. (2007), refers to

individuals' perceptions of their abilities and abilities to cope with what happens in a romantic relationship. Self-efficacy in romantic relationships is defined as “*subjective assessments of partners' ability to express their individual needs, control their emotions, resolve conflicts, and maintain relationships*” (Ogan & Öz Soysal, 2022). Those who have high relationship self-efficacy feel confident in their ability to handle intimacy and are at ease in personal settings, whereas those who have low self-efficacy experience discomfort and awkwardness (Raggio et al., 2013). Research has shown that in romantic relationships, self-efficacy is positively linked to relationship sustainability and relationship satisfaction (Weiser & Weigel, 2016).

Based on all the research mentioned above, this study focuses on investigating the relationship between university students' love-bombing and ghosting experiences and their self-efficacy levels in romantic relationships. Additionally, it investigates whether university students' love-bombing, ghosting experiences, and self-efficacy levels in romantic relationships differ according to independent variables.

### **Aim of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the associations between the self-efficacy levels of university students in romantic relationships and their experiences with love-bombing and ghosting.

For this purpose, answers were sought to the following questions:

1. What are university students' love-bombing and ghosting experiences?
2. What are university students' self-efficacy levels?
3. Is there a significant difference in university students' ghosting experiences according to socio-demographic variables?
4. Is there a significant difference in university students' love-bombing experiences according to socio-demographic variables?
5. Is there a significant difference in university students' levels of self-efficacy in romantic relationships according to socio-demographic variables?
6. Is there a significant correlational relationship between the university students' ghosting and love bombing experiences and their levels of self-efficacy in romantic relationships?

### **Significance of the Study**

The genuine value of this study is to determine the relationship between university students' love-bombing and ghosting experiences and their self-efficacy levels in romantic relationships, which have not been studied in the literature. Despite the growing interest in the dynamics of romantic relationships, there are still a lot of gaps in the literature regarding the experiences of university students. Though previous research has explored love-bombing primarily in the context of narcissism, a broader understanding of its effects on self-efficacy in romantic relationships is notably absent. Moreover, studies on ghosting have primarily focused on its correlations with attachment styles, sex, and neuroticism, overlooking its direct impact on self-efficacy. This research aims to bridge these gaps by examining the relationship between university students' love-bombing and ghosting experiences and their self-efficacy levels in romantic relationships. The results of the research will provide insight for future studies. At the same time, this study is important because it can increase the awareness levels of individuals on the subject and contribute positively to services in the field of psychological counseling and mental health. Moreover, addressing experiences of “love-bombing” and “ghosting” in relationships is important, as these behaviors can have a variety of negative effects on both an individual and societal level. Understanding and discussing these two concepts can help establish and maintain healthy dynamics in relationships. With the topics it deals with, this study will help teach people to protect their emotional health in romantic relationships. The study will also be one of the pioneering studies in increasing social awareness of the issues it addresses, preparing educational programs, and creating support mechanisms for victims. Raising awareness about the connection between love-bombing ghosting and self-efficacy contributes to the

development of a healthier and more respectful communication culture, both in individuals' own relationships and in society at large.

## Methods

### Model of the Research

In the study, a relational screening model, which is one of the quantitative research method designs, was used. The relational screening model is defined by Karasar (2018) as "*research approaches that aim to describe a situation that has existed in the past or still exists, as it exists*" (p.109). "Love-bombing experience," "ghosting experience," and "self-efficacy in romantic relationships" are the three main variables identified in this research model. This research aimed to determine the relationship and/or degree between these variables.

### Data Collection Tools

Data were collected from the participants online (via *Google Forms*) by the survey method. As a means of gathering data, four tools have been used: The questionnaire consisted of a "*Socio-Demographic Information Form*," a "*Love-bombing Question List*" (a list of questions to determine whether they have experienced love-bombing), a "*Ghosting Question List*" (a list of questions to determine whether they have experienced ghosting), and a "*Self-Efficacy in Romantic Relationships Scale*."

***Socio-Demographic Information Form:*** The demographic information form developed by the researchers consists of questions about the sex, age groups (age of 18–24 and 25–30), education level (Bachelor, Masters–PhD), employment status, and socio-economic status (high, middle, or low income) of the participants.

***Love-Bombing Question List:*** A list of 10 questions was prepared by the researchers to determine the participant's love-bombing experience. In the online survey, participants were presented with a clear definition of love bombing. Each checklist question was specifically crafted as a component of this definition. The questions consist of (yes) and (no) options. A question list was prepared based on previous literature, like Strutzenberg et al. (2017) research, as well as assertions made by some accounts published on internet blogs (*see Table 3*).

To evaluate the factorability of the question list, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy measure and Bartlett's sphericity test are primarily used (as cited in Demir, Coşkun & Duman,2022; Fidel, 2009, pp.657-9). Bartlett's sphericity test significance level being significant ( $p < .05$ ) indicates that the correlation between the items is suitable for factor analysis; the KMO value being  $> .50$  indicates that the sample is large enough to perform factor analysis (as cited in Demir, Coşkun & Duman,2022; Fidel, 2009, pp.657-9). When the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's sphericity test findings were examined; it was determined that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy value was .858 and Bartlett's significance level was  $p = .000$  ( $p < .05$ ). Accordingly; since  $KMO = .858 > .80$ , it is understood that the sample size is good enough for factor analysis ( $.80 < KMO$ ). Since Bartlett's significance level was  $p = .000$ , the correlation between the items was found suitable for factor analysis.

The factor loading of the survey items was determined to be at least .40 (as cited in Demir, Coşkun & Duman,2022; Fidel, 2009, 660), and it was decided to exclude items lower than this value. The items included in the analysis whose eigenvalues were higher than 1 were considered as factors. This is the total variance explained by these factors regarding the measurement tool. As a result of the analysis, there is no factor loading value below .40 in the survey items. In the factor analysis, a factor has a value higher than 1; this factor explains 38.78% of the variance. If this value is more than 50%, it is possible to say that the measurement tool is valid (as cited in Demir, Coşkun & Duman,2022; Field, 2009, p.661). The generally accepted variance explanation rate is between 40-60% in the social sciences, but a rate of 38.78% is not considered too low and provides some data regarding the validity of the survey. In this case, it is useful to conduct a reliability analysis (Cronbach's

alpha) to evaluate whether the survey is generally consistent in a single dimension. The Cronbach's alpha value of the survey was calculated as  $\alpha = .80$ . It was understood that the internal consistency of the data collection tool is high. A high reliability rate indicates that the survey effectively measures a one-dimensional structure. In this case, it is appropriate to say that the survey is valid and reliable.

***Ghosting Question List:*** A list of 12 questions was prepared by the researchers to determine the ghosting experiences of the individuals. In the online survey, participants were presented with a clear definition of ghosting. Each checklist question was specifically crafted as a component of this definition. The questions were answered by the participants by choosing one of the (yes) or (no) options. The questions were prepared based on previous literature (e.g. Navarro et al., 2020, Powell et al., 2021 & Timmermans et al., 2020) research, as well as assertions made by some accounts published on internet blogs (*see Table 4*).

Here, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy value was .898 and Bartlett's significance level was  $p = .000$  ( $p < .05$ ). As a result of the factor analysis, there is no factor loading value below .40 in the survey items. In the analysis, a factor has a value higher than 1 and this factor explains 54.56% of the variance. If this value is more than 50%, it is possible to say that the measurement tool is valid (as cited in Demir, Coşkun & Duman, 2022; Field, 2009, p.661). To assess reliability, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was measured using Cronbach's alpha, resulting in a high score of  $\alpha = .91$ . In this case, it is appropriate to say that the survey is valid and reliable.

***Self-Efficacy in Romantic Relationships (SERR) Scale:*** SERR developed by Raggio et al. (2011) and adapted into Turkish by Öz-Soysal et al. (2019) was used in the study. It is a 9-point Likert-type scale and consists of 12 items in total, and the items are scored as 1 (strongly disagree), 5 (neither agree nor disagree), and 9 (completely agree). Items 1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 on the scale are scored reversely. The scale has two factor structures, one negative and the other positive. Factor one is negative and consists of judgments covering the individual's abilities and personal difficulties, and factor two is positive and measures the individual's continuity in fulfilling his or her duties in relationships (Ogan & Öz Soysal, 2022). Cronbach's alpha coefficient ( $\alpha$ ) of the scale was determined to be .89. Higher scores on the scale indicate a higher level of relational self-efficacy.

### **Ethics of the Study**

Permission to use the SERR scale used in the research was obtained from the corresponding author via email. After gathering the scale and preparing the forms for application for ethical approval by researchers, the ethics committee permission for the study was obtained with the decision numbered 2024/04-24 taken at the meeting of the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Istanbul 29 Mayıs University dated 01.04.2024. Research started after obtaining ethical approval. Participation in the research is voluntary. The informed consent form and scales were presented to the participants via Google Forms.

### **Analysis**

The data were analyzed via the SPSS-25 program for Windows. Normal distribution indicators were examined to determine which of the parametric or non-parametric analysis methods to use. It was concluded that the kurtosis and skewness coefficients were within the range of  $\pm 1.5$  (*see Table 2*). The fact that the data is within the range of  $\pm 1.5$  indicates that it has a normal distribution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2015). In addition, studies can be found in the literature indicating that the use of a parametric test does not cause a significant deviation from the 'p' significance level to be calculated in the analysis if the size of each of the subgroups is 15 or higher ( $n \geq 15$ ) (Büyüköztürk, 2012, p. 8). As such, the data are suitable for parametric analysis. Independent sample t-test, one-way ANOVA (analysis of variance), and Pearson correlation analysis were used.  $p < .05$  and  $p < .001$  significance levels were preferred in interpretation.

## Sampling

In the spring semester of the school year 2023–2024, this research was carried out. Data were collected from the participants by an online (*Google Forms*) survey method between April 6, 2024, and May 12, 2024. The participants are university students between the ages of 18 and 30. In the study, data were obtained from 225 students. A straightforward convenience sampling method is used to choose participants, and it involves computing a 95% confidence interval and a 6.5% margin of error in an unidentified universe. Detailed information about the participants is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Socio-Demographical Variables

Variables		<i>n</i>	%
Sex	Female	167	74.2%
	Male	58	25.8%
Age	18-24 years	176	78.2%
	25-30 years	49	21.8%
Education Level	Undergraduate	180	80.0%
	Graduate (MSc, PhD)	45	20.0%
Income Status	High income	15	6.7%
	Middle income	159	70.7%
Employment Status	Low income	51	22.7%
	Unemployed	187	83.1%
	Employed	38	16.9%
	<i>Total</i>	<i>225</i>	<i>100%</i>

## Results

In the results section of this study, frequency analysis, descriptive analysis, comparative analysis, and correlation analysis results on the relationship between university students' love-bombing and ghosting experiences and their self-efficacy levels in romantic relationships will be presented accordingly.

### Frequency Analysis

The frequency analysis table showing youngsters' love-bombing and ghosting experiences is presented in Table 2 below. According to frequency analysis, while 59.1% of the participants were observed to have not experienced ghosting in their intimate partner relationships, it was understood that 57.3% of them were not exposed to love-bombing.

**Table 2.** Frequency Analysis

Experiences	Answers	<i>n</i>	%
Love-bombing	No	129	<b>57,3%</b>
	Yes	96	42,7%
Ghosting	No	133	<b>59,1%</b>
	Yes	92	40,9%
	<i>Total</i>	<i>225</i>	<i>100%</i>

When the question lists regarding love-bombing and ghosting experiences are examined more closely, the frequency distributions of the answers to the questions are presented in the table below. While questions 1-5 and 7 for love bombing receive high frequency of answers; For ghosting, questions 1-4 and 10 received high frequency responses. The frequency analysis results of the answers to the questions in the “Love-bombing Question List” and “Ghosting Question List” are detailed as follows:

**Table 3.** Frequency Analysis of Love-Bombing and Ghosting Question Lists

		Questions	Answers	<i>n</i>	%
LOVE-BOMBING QUESTION LIST	1.	My partner wanted to know everything about me right away.	Yes	95	<b>42.2%</b>
			No	130	57.8%
	2.	He or she shared his personal information very quickly...	Yes	81	36.0%
			No	144	64.0%
	3.	He or she used to remind me of his love every time we talked...	Yes	80	35.6%
			No	145	64.4%
	4.	Very soon he or she started making things official...	Yes	80	35.6%
			No	145	64.4%
	5.	He or she wanted to spend every moment with me. He or she would constantly text me or call me	Yes	111	<b>49.3%</b>
			No	114	50.7%
6.	He or she gave expensive gifts in the first few weeks.	Yes	37	16.4%	
		No	188	83.6%	
7.	He or she treated me so nicely that it didn't feel real.	Yes	118	<b>52.4%</b>	
		No	107	47.6%	
8.	He or she would get upset when I wanted to spend time with other friends or family.	Yes	77	34.2%	
		No	148	65.8%	
9.	Compliments used to come all the time. The attention could feel overwhelming and unreal.	Yes	74	32.9%	
		No	151	67.1%	
10.	The person would steer the conversation when we had a bad argument.	Yes	86	38.2%	
		No	139	61.8%	
		Questions	Answers	<i>n</i>	%
GHOSTING QUESTION LIST	1.	He used to respond to my messages briefly and indifferently.	Yes	104	<b>46.2%</b>
			No	121	53.8%
	2.	Routines changed for no reason, and I no longer received messages or calls	Yes	101	44.9%
			No	124	55.1%
	3.	He or she would either cancel our plans to meet or not come.	Yes	72	32.0%
			No	153	68.0%
	4.	He or she communicated with me less than before.	Yes	118	<b>52.4%</b>
			No	107	47.6%

5. I couldn't reach or communicate with him or her for days.	Yes	59	26.2%
	No	164	72.9%
6. He or she didn't respond to my messages.	Yes	70	31.1%
	No	155	68.9%
7. He or she unfollowed or blocked me on social media.	Yes	58	25.8%
	No	167	74,2%
8. He or she was online on social media but ignored me.	Yes	97	43.1%
	No	128	56.9%
9. He or she saw my message but didn't respond.	Yes	83	36.9%
	No	142	63.1%
10. Everything was fast and dazzling until we started having communication problems.	Yes	110	<b>48.9%</b>
	No	115	51.1%
11. He or she completely cut off communication with me for no reason.	Yes	74	32.9%
	No	151	67.1%
12. I couldn't decide what to do.	Yes	101	44.9%
	No	124	55.1%

### Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistics for SERR Scale are presented in the table below.

**Table 4.** Descriptive Statistics

Scale	n	Min	Max	$\bar{X}$	Sd	Skewness	Kurtosis
SERR Total	225	19,00	90,00	61,83	12,59	-,254	-,238
<i>N</i>	225						

As can be seen in Table 4, university students got (61,83±12,59) points on the SERR scale. This value is above the middle score of the scale. Higher scores on the scale indicate a higher level of relational self-efficacy.

### Comparative Analysis

In this section, comparative analysis results for love-bombing experiences, ghosting experiences, and self-efficacy scale will be presented, respectively.

#### *Comparative Analysis For Love-Bombing Experiences*

An independent sample T-test analysis was conducted to find out if there are significant differences in participants' love-bombing results according to socio-demographic variables. The results are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5.** T-test Analysis Results of Love-Bombing Experiences

	18-24 years		25-30 years		t(223)	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
	$\bar{x}$	Sd	$\bar{x}$	Sd			
Love-bombing Experiences	1,60	,49	1,55	,50	,643	.521	.001
	<u>Female</u>		<u>Male</u>				



$\bar{x}$	Sd	$\bar{x}$	Sd			
1,65	,47	1,41	,49	3,248	,001*	.045
<u>Undergraduate</u>		<u>Graduate</u>				
$\bar{x}$	Sd	$\bar{x}$	Sd			
1,61	,48	1,48	,50	1,561	,120	.010
<u>Unemployed</u>		<u>Employed</u>				
$\bar{x}$	Sd	$\bar{x}$	Sd			
1,61	,48	1,47	,50	-1,617	,107	.011

\* $p < .05$

There was no significant difference in love-bombing experiences between participants aged 18-24 ( $M = 1.60$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ) and those aged 25-30 ( $1.55 \pm 0.50$ ),  $t(223) = 0.643$ ,  $p = .521$ ,  $\eta^2 = .001$ . The t-test revealed a significant difference in love-bombing experiences between females ( $1.65 \pm 0.47$ ) and males ( $1.41 \pm 0.49$ ),  $t(223) = 3.248$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .045$ , with females reporting higher love-bombing experiences than males. No significant difference was found in love-bombing experiences between undergraduate ( $M = 1.61$ ,  $SD = 0.48$ ) and graduate participants ( $1.48 \pm 0.50$ ),  $t(223) = 1.561$ ,  $p = .120$ ,  $\eta^2 = .010$ . There was no significant difference in love-bombing experiences between unemployed ( $1.61 \pm 0.48$ ) and employed participants ( $1.47 \pm 0.50$ ),  $t(223) = 1.617$ ,  $p = .107$ ,  $\eta^2 = .011$ .

The difference between the love-bombing experiences according to income status was examined by one-way ANOVA variance analysis (see Table 6).

**Table 6.** One-way ANOVA Analysis Results of the Love-Bombing Experiences

Scale	<u>High income</u>		<u>Middle income</u>		<u>Low income</u>		F(2,222)	p	$\eta^2$
	$\bar{x}$	Sd	$\bar{x}$	Sd	$\bar{x}$	Sd			
Love-bombing Experiences	1,53	,51	1,63	,48	1,47	,50	2,292	.103	0.020

In the results of the ANOVA analysis, the level of exposure to love-bombing does not show a significant differentiation according to income status,  $F(2,222) = 2,292$ ,  $p = .103$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0,020$ .

### **Comparative Analysis of the Ghosting Experiences**

An independent sample t-test analysis was conducted to find out if there are significant differences in participants' ghosting experiences according to socio-demographic variables. The results are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7.** T-test Analysis Results of Ghosting Experiences

	18-24 years		25-30 years		t(223)	p	$\eta^2$
	$\bar{x}$	Sd	$\bar{x}$	Sd			
	1,58	,49	1,53	,50	,681	.496	.002
	<u>Female</u>		<u>Male</u>				
Ghosting Experiences	$\bar{x}$	Sd	$\bar{x}$	Sd			
	1,59	,49	1,50	,50	1,310	,192	.007
	<u>Undergraduate</u>		<u>Graduate</u>				

$\bar{x}$	Sd	$\bar{x}$	Sd			
1,60	,49	1,46	,50	1,620	,107	.011
<u>Unemployed</u>		<u>Employed</u>				
$\bar{x}$	Sd	$\bar{x}$	Sd			
1,58	,49	1,52	,50	-,641	,522	.001

According to the results in Table 7, there is no significant difference in ghosting experiences between participants aged 18-24 ( $1.58 \pm 0.49$ ) and those aged 25-30 ( $1.53 \pm 0.50$ ),  $t(223) = 0.681$ ,  $p = .496$ ,  $\eta^2 = .002$ . The analysis also showed no significant difference in ghosting experiences between female ( $1.59 \pm 0.49$ ) and male participants ( $1.50 \pm 0.50$ ),  $t(223) = 1.310$ ,  $p = .192$ ,  $\eta^2 = .007$ . There was no significant difference in ghosting experiences between undergraduate ( $1.60 \pm 0.49$ ) and graduate participants ( $1.46 \pm 0.50$ ),  $t(223) = 1.620$ ,  $p = .107$ ,  $\eta^2 = .011$ . Similarly, no significant difference was found in ghosting experiences between unemployed ( $1.58 \pm 0.49$ ) and employed participants ( $1.52 \pm 0.50$ ),  $t(223) = 0.641$ ,  $p = .522$ ,  $\eta^2 = .001$ .

The difference between the ghosting experiences according to income status was examined by one-way ANOVA variance analysis (see Table 8). In the results of the ANOVA analysis, ghosting experiences do not show a significant differentiation according to income status,  $F(2,222) = 1,169$ ,  $p = .313$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0,010$ .

**Table 8.** One-way ANOVA Analysis Results of the Ghosting Experiences

Scale	<u>High</u>		<u>Middle</u>		<u>Low</u>		F(2,222)	p	$\eta^2$
	$\bar{x}$	Sd	$\bar{x}$	Sd	$\bar{x}$	Sd			
Ghosting Experiences	1,40	,50	1,59	,49	1,54	,50	1,169	.313	0.010

### **Comparative Analysis of SERR Scale**

An independent sample T-test analysis was conducted to find out if there are age-based differences in participants' self-efficacy results. The results are presented in Table 9.

**Table 9.** T-test Analysis Results of the SERR Scale

	18-24 years		25-30 years		t(223)	p	$\eta^2$
	$\bar{x}$	Sd	$\bar{x}$	Sd			
	62,91	12,16	57,95	13,44	2,464	.015*	.026
	<u>Female</u>		<u>Male</u>				
	$\bar{x}$	Sd	$\bar{x}$	Sd			
	62,95	11,81	58,62	14,22	2,278	,024*	.022
SERR Scale	<u>Undergraduate</u>		<u>Graduate</u>				
	$\bar{x}$	Sd	$\bar{x}$	Sd			
	63,01	12,01	57,11	13,83	2,858	,005*	.035
	<u>Unemployed</u>		<u>Employed</u>				
	$\bar{x}$	Sd	$\bar{x}$	Sd			
	62,31	12,25	59,47	14,09	-1,270	,205	.007

\* $p < .05$

The results show that there is a significant age-based difference in participants' self-efficacy levels,  $t(223) = 2,464$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .026$ . 18-24 years old students ( $62,91 \pm 12,16$ ) have significantly higher self-efficacy than 25-30 years old students ( $57,95 \pm 13,44$ ). There is also a significant sex-based difference in participants' self-efficacy levels,

$t(223) = 2,278, p < .05, \eta^2 = .022$ . Females ( $62,95 \pm 11,81$ ) have significantly higher self-efficacy than males ( $58,62 \pm 14,22$ ). Moreover, the level of self-efficacy differs significantly according to education level,  $t(223) = 2,858, p < .05, \eta^2 = .035$ . Undergraduate (Bachelor) students ( $60,01 \pm 12,01$ ) have significantly higher self-efficacy than graduate (Master and PhD) students ( $57,11 \pm 13,83$ ). Lastly, there is no significant employment status-based difference in participants' self-efficacy levels,  $t(223) = -1,270, p > .05, \eta^2 = .007$ .

The difference between the self-efficacy levels according to income status was examined by one-way ANOVA variance analysis (see Table 10). In the results of the ANOVA analysis, the self-efficacy levels do not show a significant differentiation according to income status,  $F(2,222) = .643, p = .527, \eta^2 = 0,005$ .

**Table 10.** One-way ANOVA Analysis Results of the SERR Scale

Scale	<u>High income</u>		<u>Middle income</u>		<u>Low income</u>		F(2,222)	p	$\eta^2$
	$\bar{x}$	Sd	$\bar{x}$	Sd	$\bar{x}$	Sd			
SERR Total	61,40	13,36	62,42	12,10	60,13	13,91	,643	.527	0.005

### **Comparative Analysis of SERR Scale According to Ghosting And Love-Bombing Experiences**

An independent sample T-test analysis was conducted to find out if there are significant differences in participants' self-efficacy levels according to their love-bombing and ghosting experiences. The results are presented in Table 11.

**Table 11.** T-test Analysis Results of the Self-Efficacy Scale According to Ghosting and Love-Bombing Experiences

	Ghosting-Yes		Ghosting-No		t(223)	p	$\eta^2$
	$\bar{x}$	Sd	$\bar{x}$	Sd			
	56,97	11,71	65,44	12,03	-5,281	,000**	.111
SERR Total	<u>Love-bombing Yes</u>		<u>Love-bombing No</u>				
	$\bar{x}$	Sd	$\bar{x}$	Sd			
	57,05	11,69	65,14	12,16	-4,982	,000**	.100

\*\* $p < .001$

Independent sample T-test results show that the level of self-efficacy differs statistically highly according to being exposed to ghosting,  $t(223) = -5,281, p < .001, \eta^2 = .111$ . Participants who do not experience ghosting ( $65,44 \pm 12,03$ ) have significantly higher self-efficacy scores than those who experience ghosting ( $56,97 \pm 11,71$ ). Besides, the level of self-efficacy differs statistically highly according to being exposed to love-bombing,  $t(223) = -4,982, p < .001, \eta^2 = .100$ . Participants who do not experience love-bombing ( $65,14 \pm 12,16$ ) have significantly higher self-efficacy than those who experience love-bombing ( $57,05 \pm 11,69$ ).

After this very important ghosting and love-bombing finding of the study, correlation analysis was conducted for investigating the relationship between these variables.

### **Correlation Analysis**

Pearson correlation analysis was applied to examine the relationship between self-efficacy, ghosting, and love-bombing. Results are shown in Table 12.

**Table 12.** Pearson Correlation Analysis Results

	1	2	3
<sup>1</sup> Ghosting Experiences <sup>a</sup>	1	-	-

<sup>2</sup> Love-bombing Experiences <sup>b</sup>	,416**	1	-
<sup>3</sup> Self-Efficacy in Romantic Relationships Total <sup>c</sup>	-,333**	-,316**	

\*\*p<.001

<sup>a</sup> N=225, <sup>b</sup> N=225, <sup>c</sup> N=225

There is a highly significant, positive, moderate-linear correlational relationship between love-bombing and ghosting experiences,  $r(223) = .416, p < .001$ .

Moreover, there is a highly significant, negative and weak-linear correlational relationship between self-efficacy and ghosting experiences,  $r(223) = -.333, p < .001$ . There is also a highly significant, negative and weak-linear correlational relationship between self-efficacy and love-bombing experiences,  $r(223) = -.316, p < .001$ .

### Discussion and Conclusion

According to research results, 40.9% of participants answered love-bombing questions by choosing (yes) options, and 59.1% answered questions by selecting (no) options. 42.7% of participants answered the ghosting questions as yes and 57.3% of them as no. Based on this, it can be said that 40.9% of participants have been exposed to love-bombing, and 42.7% of them have been exposed to ghosting. This finding revealed that love-bombing and ghosting behaviors were observed at a remarkable level (approximately one in two people) in relationships.

When comparison analyzes are evaluated, the results of this study show that love-bombing scores do not differ according to age groups, education level, employment status, or socio-economic status, but they do differ according to sex. Females are exposed to love-bombing more than males. There is no research in the literature that examines the love-bombing experience in relation to the independent variables mentioned above (age groups etc.). There do not appear to be specific and comprehensive academic studies on whether this behavior is more common between sexes. However, general observations on social media usage habits provide some clues that girls are more exposed to love-bombing behavior pattern. This current finding supports this observation.

In terms of ghosting, the level of exposure to ghosting does not differ according to independent variables such as age, sex, education level, employment status, and socio-economic status. There is no specific research in the literature that has studied ghosting phenomena in relation to all the independent variables mentioned above. Only Navarro et al.'s (2020) research concludes that there are no significant gender- or age-based differences in ghosting. The findings of the study support Navarro et al.'s (2020).

When the comparison analyses regarding the third variable (self-efficacy) of the study were evaluated, it was also found that the self-efficacy levels of participants differed according to some independent variables such as age, sex, and educational level. The self-efficacy levels of the (18–24) age group are higher than those of the (25–30) age group; females self-efficacy levels are higher than males; and undergraduate (Bachelor) students self-efficacy levels are higher than those of graduate school (Master + PhD) students. There is no research that has studied self-efficacy levels in relation to the independent variables mentioned above. There are studies about self-efficacy that study this phenomenon in relation to other topics and subjects.

When the correlational analyses of the study were evaluated, it was revealed that there was a significant and weak-negative-linear correlational relationship between self-efficacy and love-bombing and self-efficacy and ghosting. At the same time, it was observed that the levels of self-efficacy of participants who were not exposed to love-bombing and ghosting were higher than those of those who were exposed. There is also a lack of research about these findings in the literature. There are studies that show that being a victim of ghosting behavior is associated with negative emotions related to mental health, such as sadness, injury, anger, and frustration. (Astleitner et al., 2023; Timmermans et al., 2020). There are also some findings about love-bombing. According to Psychology Today (n.d.), victims of love bombing acts may be negatively affected emotionally and behaviorally, and they may have difficulties interacting with others. Based on all the research mentioned above, it can be said that ghosting and love-bombing actions have devastating and negative effects on victims, and based on this research, it can be said that being exposed to love-bombing and ghosting also negatively affects the level of self-efficacy in romantic relationships. Finally, this study found a positive, moderately linear

correlational relationship between love-bombing and ghosting. The participants who were observed to be exposed to love-bombing were also observed to be exposed to ghosting. Participants with high love-bombing scores also have high ghosting scores. According to the GWI (2024) Global Social Media Trend Report, love-bombing and ghosting are among the most talked-about topics. Some research (e.g., Smith & Brown, 2023) shows that love-bombing behavior may be followed by ghosting. This may be a manipulation strategy, especially employed by individuals with narcissistic personality traits. It may occur by first showing excessive interest to bind the partner, then ghosting to gain control and disrupt the partner's emotional balance.

To conclude, it is seen that love-bombing and ghosting are frequently talked about on social media. However, these two concepts have not yet received the attention in academic literature that they receive on social media. These two concepts have an important place in understanding the problems and dynamics experienced in modern relations. The fact that people frequently describe and discuss ghosting and love-bombing experiences on social media is a reflection of users' desire to connect with and support each other over shared experiences. Therefore, addressing issues such as love-bombing and ghosting in the academic world is of great importance for the emotional health of individuals, social awareness, and the quality of relationships. Such behavior needs to be examined and understood comprehensively.

### Suggestions

As a result of this study, suggestions can be listed as follows: Repeating the research with a larger sample group, repeating the research with university students in different countries, determining whether the results differ according to countries, and conducting a qualitative, in-depth study using the interview method to understand how and why love bombing and ghosting are done.

### Limitations

The limitations of this study can be listed as follows: The number of participants is in a 95% confidence interval with a 6.5% margin of error in an unknown universe. Research results are limited to students studying at universities in Turkey. Research results are based on individuals's self-reports. There is a possibility that the participants may have avoided expressing their real experiences in their romantic relationships or that exaggerating the experiences led them to not answer honestly. There is insufficient research in the literature on this subject. The imbalance in the number of individuals falling into the categories creates issues related to the homogeneity of variances. This is a limitation of this study. Future research should aim for more balanced sample distributions.

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## GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Günümüzde gerçekleşen teknolojik gelişmelerle beraber ilişkilerde love-bombing ve ghosting deneyimlerinde artış olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. “Aşırı sevgi bombardımanı” veya “*Love-Bombing*” terimi, tipik olarak bir ilişkinin başlangıcında ortaya çıkan, genellikle romantik bir ilişki olan ve bir tarafın diğerini aşırı hayranlık ve ilgi gösterileriyle, aşırı iletişim varlığıyla karakterize bir davranış modelidir (Strutzenberg, 2016). “Sessizlik/görünmezlik modu” veya “*Ghosting*” terimi ise herhangi bir açıklama yapılmadan bir ilişkiyi bitirmeyi ve partnerin tüm ulaşım kanallarını kapatarak adeta bir “yok olma” eylemini ifade etmektedir (Erkan, Şık ve Karataş, 2023). Kıvanç (2022) araştırması ghosting kelimesini “hayaletleme” olarak ifade etmiştir.

Terimlerin literatüre yakın zaman öncesinde geçmesi nedeniyle alanyazında *love-bombing* ile ilgili yeterli düzeyde araştırma bulunmamaktadır. Strutzenberg vd. (2017) araştırması sonucuna göre love bombing stratejisi genellikle narsisizm düzeyi yüksek ve benlik saygısı düşük olan bireyler tarafından uygulanmaktadır. Literatürde ghosting olgusu cinsiyet, bağlanma ve nevrozizm gibi konularla ilişkilendirilerek incelenmiştir. Literatürde bulunan araştırma sonuçlarına göre ghosting eylemine maruz kalma bireyleri olumsuz etkilemektedir. Ghosting eylemi yeni bir ayrılma stratejisi olarak literatürde tanımlanmaktadır (Timmermans vd., 2020). Powell (2021) araştırma sonuçlarına göre ghosting eylemine maruz kalan bireylerde anksiyete oranı maruz kalmayanlara kıyasla daha yüksektir. Yine aynı araştırmaya göre ghosting eylemine maruz kalmayan bireylerde kaçınanlık düzeyi maruz kalan bireylere kıyasla daha düşüktür. Petric (2022) araştırmasına göre ghosting eylemine maruz kalmak kişinin zihinsel ve ruhsal sağlığı ve özgüveni üzerinde olumsuz bir etki bırakabilmektedir. Diğer araştırmalar ghosting eylemini maruz kalmayı üzüntü, incinme, öfke ve hayal kırıklığı gibi olumsuz duygularla sonuçlanabileceği sonucuna varmıştır (Kaygas & Candemir, 2023; Astleitner vd., 2023; Timmermans vd., 2020). Romantik ilişkilerde öz yeterlik kavramı ise, bireylerin romantik ilişkide yaşananlarla baş etme becerileri ve yeterlilikleri ile ilgili algılarını ifade etmektedir. Araştırmalara göre romantik ilişkilerde öz yeterliliğin ilişkiyi sürdürme ve ilişki tatmini ile pozitif yönde ilişkilidir (Weiser ve Weigel, 2016).

Bu çalışma insanların aşk bombalaması (love-bombing) ve hayaletleme ya da görünmezlik modu (ghosting) davranış modellerine ilişkin farkındalık düzeylerini artırabileceği ve psikolojik danışmanlık ve ruh sağlığı alanındaki hizmetlere olumlu katkı sağlayabileceği için önemlidir. Üstelik ilişkilerde “aşk bombalaması” ve “hayaletleme” deneyimlerine değinmek önemlidir çünkü bu davranışlar hem bireysel hem de toplumsal düzeyde çeşitli olumsuz etkilere sahip olabilir. Bu iki kavramı anlamak ve tartışmak ilişkilerde sağlıklı dinamiklerin kurulmasına ve sürdürülmesine yardımcı olabilir. Bu çalışma, ele aldığı konularla insanlara romantik ilişkilerde duygusal sağlıklarını korumayı öğretmeye yardımcı olacaktır. Çalışma aynı zamanda ele aldığı konulara ilişkin toplumsal farkındalığın artırılması, eğitim programlarının hazırlanması ve mağdurlara yönelik destek mekanizmalarının oluşturulması konularında da öncü çalışmalardan biri olacak. Aşk bombalaması ve hayaletleme ile öz-yeterlik arasındaki bağlantı hakkında farkındalığın artırılması, hem bireylerin kendi ilişkilerinde hem de genel olarak toplumda daha sağlıklı ve daha saygılı bir iletişim kültürünün gelişmesine katkıda bulunacaktır.

Bu çalışmanın amacı üniversite öğrencilerinin aşırı sevgi bombardımanı (love-bombing) ve sessizlik/görünmezlik modu (ghosting) deneyimleri ile romantik ilişkilerde öz-yeterlilik düzeyleri arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemektir. Üniversite öğrencilerinin love-bombing, ghosting deneyimleri ve romantik ilişkilerde özyeterlilik düzeylerinin sosyo-demografik değişkenlere göre farklılaşp farklılaşmadı ve bu değişkenler arası korelasyonel ilişkilerin olup olmadığı ele alınacaktır. Bu amaçla 18-30 yaş aralığındaki 167’si kadın, 58’i erkek olmak üzere toplam 225 üniversite öğrencisinden veri toplanmıştır. Veri toplama aracı olarak; “Sosyo-Demografik Bilgi Formu”, “Aşırı Sevgi Bombardımanı (Love-Bombing) Soru Listesi”, “Görünmezlik Modu (Ghosting) Soru Listesi” ve “Romantik İlişkilerde Öz-yeterlilik Ölçeği” kullanılmıştır. “Sosyo-Demografik Bilgi Formu”, “Aşırı Sevgi Bombardımanı (Love-Bombing) Soru Listesi”, “Görünmezlik Modu (Ghosting) Soru Listesi” literatürdeki araştırmalardan yararlanılarak araştırmacılar tarafından hazırlanmıştır. Katılımcıların romantik ilişkilerde özyeterlilik düzeyini ölçmek için ise Riggio ve diğerleri (2011) tarafından geliştirilen ve Öz Sosyal ve diğerleri (2019) tarafından Türkçeye uyarlanan romantik işlemlerde özyeterlilik ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Araştırma modeli olarak ilişkisel tarama modeli kullanılmıştır. Veriler SPSS Windows 25.0 programına aktarılarak analiz edilmiştir. Veri setinin normal dağılım göstermesi nedeniyle parametrik yöntemlerden Bağımsız örneklem t-testi, Tek yönlü varyans analizi (ANOVA) ve Pearson korelasyon analizi kullanılmıştır.

Araştırma sonuçlarında, gençlerin romantik ilişkilerindeki öz-yeterlilik düzeyi yüksek çıkmış olup; %40,9’unun ghosting; %42,7’sinin love-bombing deneyimledikleri gözlemlenmiştir. Sonuçlara göre kadınların erkeklere göre



anlamli düzeyde daha yu'ksek a'siri sevgi bombardımanı yařadıkları g'or'ulmuřtur. Love-bombing deneyimleri yař, eđitim seviyesi, alıřma durumuna ve gelir düzeyine g'ore anlamli farklılık g'ostermemiřtir. Ghosting ya da g'or'unmezlik modu deneyimleri aısından sosyo-demografik deđiřkenlere g'ore anlamli farklılařma bulunmamıřtır. Katılımcıların romantik iliřkilerde z-yeterlik d'uzeyleri ise yař, cinsiyet ve eđitim d'uzeylerine g'ore anlamli düzeyde farklılařmaktadır. 18-24 yař grubunun 25-30 yař grubuna g'ore; kadınların erkeklere g'ore; lisans đrencilerinin ise lisans'ust'u đrencilerine g'ore romantik iliřkilerde z-yeterlik d'uzeyleri anlamli düzeyde daha yu'ksek bulunmuřtur. Korelasyonel analiz sonularına g'ore, romantik iliřkilerdeki z-yeterlik d'uzeyi ile a'siri sevgi bombardımanı ve g'or'unmezlik modu deneyimleri arasında anlamli düzeyde, negatif y'onlu, zayıf dođrusal korelasyon iliřki bulunmuřtur. Love-bombing ve ghosting ya da g'or'unmezlik modu eylemlerine maruz kalmayan katılımcıların romantik iliřkilerde z-yeterlik d'uzeyleri maruz kalanlara kıyasla daha yu'ksek olduđu g'ozlemlenmiřtir. Aynı zamanda Love-bombing ile ghosting deneyimleri arasında anlamli, pozitif y'onlu orta řiddette korelasyonel iliřki bulunmuřtur. alıřmanın gelecek alıřmalara kaynak niteliđinde olması hedeflenmiřtir.