



American Perceptions of Appropriate Workplace Behavior

Ipsos Poll on Behalf of NPR

Washington DC, February 1, 2018 — Inspired by the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, Ipsos, in partnership with National Public Radio (NPR), investigated Americans' perceptions of, and experiences with, different examples of possible workplace sexual harassment. A [recent Ipsos/NPR poll](#) fielded in December suggested that most Americans believe it can be hard sometimes to tell what is sexual harassment and what is not. The present findings address this by measuring how Americans perceive different workplace scenarios that represent a range of sexual harassment severity.

When asked to rate the "appropriateness" of 12 different workplace scenarios, on a 7-point scale from always inappropriate to always appropriate, a coworker asking another coworker of equal rank on a date is seen as the most appropriate of all scenarios listed (28% appropriate). The scenarios perceived as least appropriate are spreading rumors about a coworker's romantic/sex life (97% inappropriate), deliberate touching, leaning over, or cornering someone at work, and talking about someone's sexual preferences or history at work, (both 93% inappropriate).

Power dynamics play a large role in respondents' ratings of appropriateness. While a coworker asking another coworker of equal rank on a date is the most acceptable scenario, only 4% feel that a supervisor asking an employee on a date is appropriate. Gender has little effect on coworkers commenting on others' appearances: 17% of respondents feel that a female commenting on a male coworker's appearance is appropriate, compared to 15% of respondents who feel that a male commenting on a female coworker's appearance is appropriate.

To gauge Americans' social proximity to harassing behaviors, we asked whether respondents had ever seen these scenarios happen to others. Nearly three quarters (72%) have witnessed a male coworker comment on a female coworker's appearance, and 70% have seen someone asking questions about a coworker's social life. "Pet names" for women are also relatively common: 58% report witnessing someone referring to an adult female coworker as a "girl," "babe," "sweetie," or "honey."

Finally, we assessed experiences with harassing behaviors, both receiving and perpetrating. 55% said that asking questions about a coworker's social life happened to them, while 41% admit to asking these questions about a coworker. One in four report that they have been touched, leaned over, or cornered at work, while 15% admit to telling sexually suggestive stories or jokes of a sexual nature in a professional setting. 14% have been asked out on a date by a supervisor, while only 5% admit to being a supervisor asking a subordinate on a date.

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1. For each of the following, please indicate how appropriate you believe the behavior to be:
 (Note: a lower mean rating means more respondents answered that the particular action was inappropriate.)

	Total appropriate	It depends	Total inappropriate	Don't Know	Mean rating (excludes DK)
A coworker asking another coworker of equal rank on a date	28%	40%	30%	2%	3.8
Asking questions about a coworker's social life	18%	36%	45%	1%	3.4
A female coworker commenting on a male coworker's appearance	17%	37%	46%	1%	3.3
A male coworker commenting on a female coworker's appearance	15%	36%	49%	0%	3.2
A supervisor flirts with an employee and believes the feelings are mutual	5%	12%	82%	1%	2
Referring to an adult female coworker as a girl, babe, sweetie, or honey	5%	11%	83%	1%	1.9
Standing close to or brushing up against a coworker	4%	17%	79%	0%	2.1
A supervisor asking an employee on a date	4%	16%	79%	1%	2
Telling sexually suggestive stories or jokes of a sexual nature in a professional setting	4%	5%	91%	0%	1.6
Deliberate touching, leaning over, or cornering someone at work	3%	4%	93%	0%	1.4
Talking about someone's sexual preferences or history at work	2%	5%	93%	1%	1.5
Spreading rumors about a coworker's romantic/sex life	2%	1%	97%	0%	1.2

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2. For each of the actions listed, have you ever seen them happening to others?

	Yes	No	Don't know
A male coworker commenting on a female coworker's appearance	72%	24%	5%
Asking questions about a coworker's social life	70%	24%	6%
A female coworker commenting on a male coworker's appearance	65%	29%	6%
Referring to an adult female coworker as a girl, babe, sweetie, or honey	58%	38%	4%
Telling sexually suggestive stories or jokes of a sexual nature in a professional setting	55%	41%	5%
A coworker asking another coworker of equal rank on a date	53%	42%	5%
Standing close to or brushing up against a coworker	48%	46%	6%
Talking about someone's sexual preferences or history at work	45%	50%	6%
Spreading rumors about a coworker's romantic/sex life	39%	55%	6%
A supervisor flirts with an employee and believes the feelings are mutual	38%	53%	9%
Deliberate touching, leaning over, or cornering someone at work	35%	59%	6%
A supervisor asking an employee on a date	28%	64%	8%

3. For each of the actions listed, have they ever happened to you?

	Yes	No	Don't know
Asking questions about a coworker's social life	55%	42%	3%
A male coworker commenting on a female coworker's appearance	52%	45%	3%
A female coworker commenting on a male coworker's appearance	44%	51%	3%
Telling sexually suggestive stories or jokes of a sexual nature in a professional setting	39%	59%	2%
Referring to an adult female coworker as a girl, babe, sweetie, or honey	37%	61%	2%
A coworker asking another coworker of equal rank on a date	36%	61%	2%
Standing close to or brushing up against a coworker	33%	63%	3%
Talking about someone's sexual preferences or history at work	26%	71%	3%
Deliberate touching, leaning over, or cornering someone at work	25%	72%	3%
A supervisor flirts with an employee and believes the feelings are mutual	19%	77%	4%
Spreading rumors about a coworker's romantic/sex life	18%	78%	4%
A supervisor asking an employee on a date	14%	83%	3%

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4. [Each asked only of those who said “yes” to that action in Q.3] For each of the actions listed, please indicate whether they were done to you by a manager or person in a higher-ranking position.

	Yes	No	Don't know
A supervisor flirts with an employee and believes the feelings are mutual	73%	25%	2%
A supervisor asking an employee on a date	69%	27%	4%
Referring to an adult female coworker as a girl, babe, sweetie, or honey	62%	34%	4%
Asking questions about a coworker's social life	57%	39%	4%
Standing close to or brushing up against a coworker	58%	40%	2%
A male coworker commenting on a female coworker's appearance	56%	41%	3%
Deliberate touching, leaning over, or cornering someone at work	55%	40%	4%
Telling sexually suggestive stories or jokes of a sexual nature in a professional setting	55%	42%	3%
A female coworker commenting on a male coworker's appearance	47%	50%	3%
Talking about someone's sexual preferences or history at work	45%	48%	7%
A coworker asking another coworker of equal rank on a date	41%	53%	5%
Spreading rumors about a coworker's romantic/sex life	38%	54%	7%

5. For each of the actions listed, have you ever done this?

	Yes	No	Don't know
Asking questions about a coworker's social life	41%	56%	3%
A female coworker commenting on a male coworker's appearance	26%	72%	2%
A male coworker commenting on a female coworker's appearance	23%	75%	2%
A coworker asking another coworker of equal rank on a date	17%	81%	2%
Telling sexually suggestive stories or jokes of a sexual nature in a professional setting	15%	83%	2%
Referring to an adult female coworker as a girl, babe, sweetie, or honey	12%	86%	2%
Talking about someone's sexual preferences or history at work	12%	86%	2%
Standing close to or brushing up against a coworker	11%	86%	2%
A supervisor flirts with an employee and believes the feelings are mutual	7%	91%	2%
Spreading rumors about a coworker's romantic/sex life	6%	92%	2%
Deliberate touching, leaning over, or cornering someone at work	5%	93%	2%
A supervisor asking an employee on a date	4%	94%	2%

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6. How would you describe the area in which you live?

	Total
Rural	22%
Suburban	49%
Urban	29%

7. How would you describe your employment status?

	Total
Employed – full time	47%
Employed – part time	8%
Not employed	25%
Retired	20%

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About the Study

These are findings from an Ipsos poll conducted January 25-30, 2018, on behalf of NPR. For the survey, a sample of 1,130 adults age 18+ from the continental U.S., Alaska and Hawaii was interviewed online in English. The sample includes 545 males and 585 females.

The sample for this study was randomly drawn from Ipsos's online panel (see link below for more info on "Access Panels and Recruitment"), partner online panel sources, and "river" sampling (see link below for more info on the Ipsos "Ampario Overview" sample method) and does not rely on a population frame in the traditional sense. Ipsos uses fixed sample targets, unique to each study, in drawing sample. After a sample has been obtained from the Ipsos panel, Ipsos calibrates respondent characteristics to be representative of the U.S. population using standard procedures such as raking-ratio adjustments. The source of these population targets is U.S. Census 2016 American Community Survey data. The sample drawn for this study reflects fixed sample targets on demographics. Post-hoc weights were made to the population characteristics on gender, age, race/ethnicity, region, and education.

Statistical margins of error are not applicable to online polls. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error and measurement error. Where figures do not sum to 100, this is due to the effects of rounding. An asterisk (*) denotes less than 1%. The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll has a credibility interval of plus or minus 3.3 percentage points for all respondents. Ipsos calculates a design effect (DEFF) for each study based on the variation of the weights, following the formula of Kish (1965). This study had a credibility interval adjusted for design effect of the following (n=1,130, DEFF=1.3, adjusted Confidence Interval=4.6).

For more information about conducting research intended for public release or Ipsos' online polling methodology, please visit our [Public Opinion Polling and Communication](#) page where you can download our brochure, see our public release protocol, or contact us.

For more information on this news release, please contact:

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Ipsos researchers assess market potential and interpret market trends. They develop and build brands. They help clients build long-term relationships with their customers. They test advertising and study audience responses to various media and they measure public opinion around the globe.

Ipsos has been listed on the Paris Stock Exchange since 1999 and generated global revenues of €1,782.7 million in 2016.

GAME CHANGERS

« Game Changers » is the Ipsos signature.

At Ipsos we are passionately curious about people, markets, brands and society.
We make our changing world easier and faster to navigate and inspire clients to make smarter decisions.
We deliver with security, speed, simplicity and substance. We are Game Changers.

Ipsos is listed on Euronext Paris.
The company is part of the CAC Mid & Small index
and is eligible for the Deferred Settlement Service (SRD).

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