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The Virtues and Downsides of Online Dating

30% of U.S. adults say they have used a dating site or app. A majority of online daters say their overall experience was positive, but many users – particularly younger women – report being harassed or sent explicit messages on these platforms

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How we did this

Pew Research Center has long studied the changing nature of romantic relationships and the role of digital technology in how people meet potential partners and navigate web-based dating platforms. This particular report focuses on the patterns, experiences and attitudes related to online dating in America. These findings are based on a [survey](#) conducted Oct. 16 to 28, 2019, among 4,860 U.S. adults. This includes those who took part as members of Pew Research Center's [American Trends Panel](#) (ATP), an online survey panel that is recruited through national, random sampling of residential addresses, as well as respondents from the Ipsos KnowledgePanel who indicated that they identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB). The margin of sampling error for the full sample is plus or minus 2.1 percentage points.

Recruiting ATP panelists by phone or mail ensures that nearly all U.S. adults have a chance of selection. This gives us confidence that any sample can represent the whole U.S. adult population (see our [Methods 101 explainer](#) on random sampling). To further ensure that each ATP survey reflects a balanced cross-section of the nation, the data are weighted to match the U.S. adult population by gender, race, ethnicity, partisan affiliation, education and other categories.

For more, see the report's [methodology](#) about the project. You can also find the questions asked, and the answers the public provided in [this topline](#).

The Virtues and Downsides of Online Dating

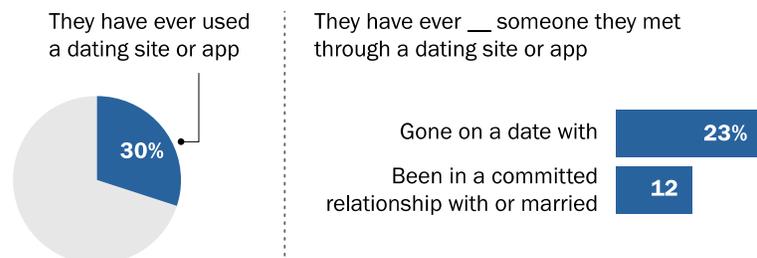
30% of U.S. adults say they have used a dating site or app. A majority of online daters say their overall experience was positive, but many users – particularly younger women – report being harassed or sent explicit messages on these platforms.

From [personal ads](#) that began appearing in publications around the 1700s to [videocassette dating services](#) that sprang up decades ago, the platforms people use to seek out romantic partners have evolved throughout history. This evolution has continued with the rise of online dating sites and mobile apps.

Today, three-in-ten U.S. adults say they have ever used an online dating site or app – including 11% who have done so in the past year, according to a new Pew Research Center survey conducted Oct. 16 to 28, 2019. For some Americans, these platforms have been instrumental in forging meaningful connections: 12% say they have married or been in a committed relationship with someone they first met through a dating site or app. All in all, about a quarter of Americans (23%) say they have ever gone on a date with someone they first met through a dating site or app.

Three-in-ten Americans have used a dating site or app; 12% have married or been in a committed relationship with someone they met through online dating

% of U.S. adults who say ...



Note: Those who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019.
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Previous Pew Research Center studies about online dating indicate that the share of Americans who have used these platforms – as well as the share who have found a spouse or partner through them – has risen over time. In 2013, 11% of U.S. adults said they had ever used a dating site or app, while just 3% reported that they had entered into a long-term relationship or marriage with someone they first met through online dating. It is important to note that there are some changes

in question wording between the Center's 2013 and 2019 surveys, as well as differences in how these surveys were fielded.¹ Even so, it is clear that websites and mobile apps are playing a larger role in the dating environment than in previous years.²

The current survey finds that online dating is especially popular among certain groups – particularly younger adults and those who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB). Roughly half or more of 18- to 29-year-olds (48%) and LGB adults (55%) say they have ever used a dating site or app, while about 20% in each group say they have married or been in a committed relationship with someone they first met through these platforms.

Americans who have used online dating offer a mixed look at their time on these platforms. On a broad level, online dating users are more likely to describe their overall experience using these platforms in positive rather than negative terms. Additionally, majorities of online daters say it was at least somewhat easy for them to find others that they found physically attractive, shared common interests with, or who seemed like someone they would want to meet in person.

But users also share some of the downsides to online dating. Roughly seven-in-ten online daters believe it is very common for those who use these platforms to lie to try to appear more desirable. And by a wide margin, Americans who have used a dating site or app in the past year say the experience left them feeling more frustrated (45%) than hopeful (28%).

Other incidents highlight how dating sites or apps can become a venue for bothersome or harassing behavior – especially for women under the age of 35. For example, 60% of female users ages 18 to 34 say someone on a dating site or app continued to contact them after they said they were not interested, while a similar share (57%) report being sent a sexually explicit message or image they didn't ask for.

Online dating has not only disrupted more traditional ways of meeting romantic partners, its rise also comes at a time when [norms and behaviors around marriage](#) and cohabitation also are changing as more people delay marriage or choose to remain single.

¹ Pew Research Center's 2013 survey about online dating was conducted via telephone, while the 2019 survey was fielded online through the Center's [American Trends Panel](#). In addition, there were some changes in question wording between these surveys. Please read the [Methodology section](#) for full details on how the 2019 survey was conducted.

² Other studies show that online dating is playing a larger role in how romantic partners meet. See Rosenfeld, Michael J., Reuben J. Thomas, and Sonia Hausen. 2019. "[Disintermediating your friends: How online dating in the United States displaces other ways of meeting.](#)" Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America.

These shifting realities have sparked a broader debate about the impact of online dating on romantic relationships in America. On one side, some highlight the [ease and efficiency](#) of using these platforms to search for dates, as well as the sites' ability to expand users' dating options beyond their traditional social circles. Others offer a less flattering narrative about online dating – ranging from concerns about [scams or harassment](#) to the belief that these platforms facilitate superficial relationships rather than meaningful ones. This survey finds that the public is somewhat ambivalent about the overall impact of online dating. Half of Americans believe dating sites and apps have had neither a positive nor negative effect on dating and relationships, while smaller shares think its effect has either been mostly positive (22%) or mostly negative (26%).

Terminology

Throughout this report, “online dating users” and “online daters” are used interchangeably to refer to the 30% of respondents in this survey who answered yes to the following question: “Have you ever used an online dating site or dating app?”

These findings come from a nationally representative survey of 4,860 U.S. adults conducted online Oct. 16 to 28, 2019, using Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel. The following are among the major findings.

Younger adults – as well as those who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual – are especially likely to use online dating sites or apps

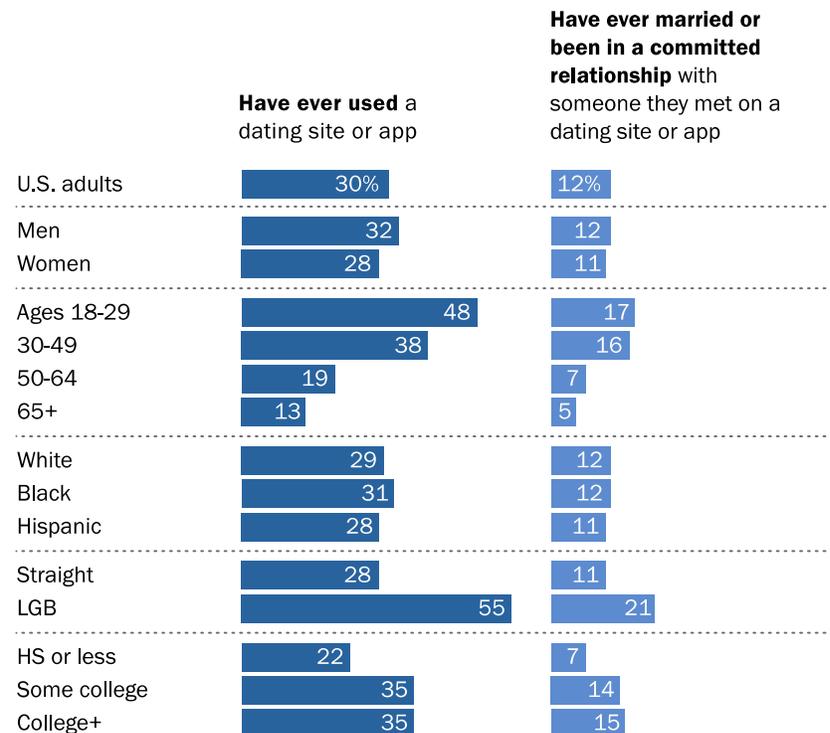
Some 30% of Americans say they have ever used an online dating site or app. Out of those who have used these platforms, 18% say they are currently using them, while an additional 17% say they are not currently doing so but have used them in the past year.

Experience with online dating varies substantially by age. While 48% of 18- to 29-year-olds say they have ever used a dating site or app, that share is 38% among 30- to 49-year-olds, and it is even smaller among those ages 50 and older. Still, online dating is not completely foreign to those in their 50s or early 60s: 19% of adults ages 50 to 64 say they have used a dating site or app.

Beyond age, there also are striking differences by sexual orientation.³ LGB adults are about twice as likely as straight adults to say they have used a dating site or app (55% vs. 28%).⁴ And in a pattern consistent with previous [Pew Research Center surveys](#), college graduates and those with some college experience are more likely than those with a high school education or less to say they've ever online dated.

Online dating and finding a partner through these platforms are more common among adults who are younger or lesbian, gay or bisexual

% of U.S. adults who say they ...



Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race. LGB indicates those who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019.

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³ This survey includes an [oversample](#) of lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) adults. For more details, see the [Methodology section](#) of the report.

⁴ Other research suggests that online dating is an especially important way for populations with a small pool of potential partners – such as those who identify as gay or lesbian – to identify and meet partners. See Rosenfeld, Michael J., and Thomas, Reuben J. 2012. "[Searching for a Mate: The Rise of the Internet as a Social Intermediary.](#)" American Sociological Review.

There are only modest differences between men and women in their use of dating sites or apps, while white, black or Hispanic adults all are equally likely to say they have ever used these platforms.

At the same time, a small share of U.S. adults report that they found a significant other through online dating platforms. Some 12% of adults say they have married or entered into a committed relationship with someone they first met through a dating site or app. This too follows a pattern similar to that seen in overall use, with adults under the age of 50, those who are LGB or who have higher levels of educational attainment more likely to report finding a spouse or committed partner through these platforms.

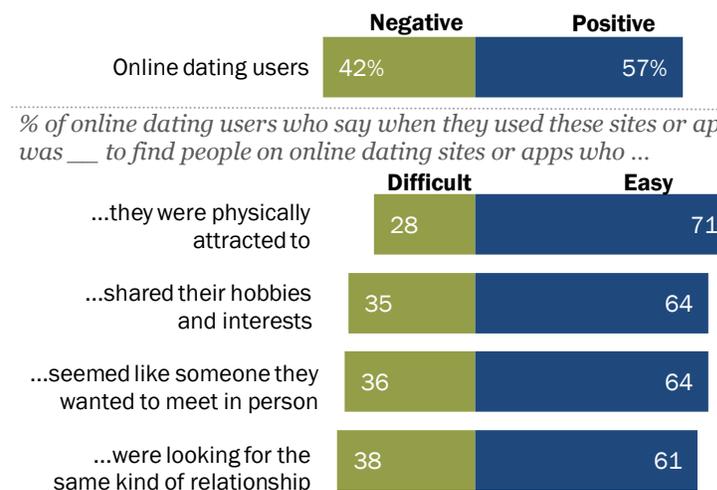
A majority of online daters say they found it at least somewhat easy to come across others on dating sites or apps that they were physically attracted to or shared their interests

Online dating users are more likely to describe their overall experience with using dating sites or apps in positive, rather than negative, terms. Some 57% of Americans who have ever used a dating site or app say their own personal experiences with these platforms have been very or somewhat positive. Still, about four-in-ten online daters (42%) describe their personal experience with dating sites or apps as at least somewhat negative.

For the most part, different demographic groups tend to view their online dating experiences similarly. But there are some notable exceptions. College-educated online daters, for example, are far more likely than those with a high school diploma or less to say that their

About six-in-ten online daters say their experience was positive; majorities say it was easy to find other users they found attractive, shared their interests

% of online dating users who say their own personal experiences with dating sites or apps have been ...



Note: Very/somewhat positive or negative and very/somewhat easy or difficult responses are combined. Online dating users refers to respondents who say they have ever used an online dating site or app. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019.

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own personal experience with dating sites or apps is very or somewhat positive (63% vs. 47%).

At the same time, 71% of online daters report that it was at least somewhat easy to find people on dating sites or apps that they found physically attractive, while about two-thirds say it was easy to find people who shared their hobbies or interests or seemed like someone they would want to meet in person.

While majorities across various demographic groups are more likely to describe their searches as easy, rather than difficult, there are some differences by gender. Among online daters, women are more likely than men to say it was at least somewhat difficult to find people they were physically attracted to (36% vs. 21%), while men were more likely than women to express that it was difficult to find others who shared their hobbies and interests (41% vs. 30%).

Men who have online dated in the past five years are more likely than women to feel as if they did not get enough messages from other users

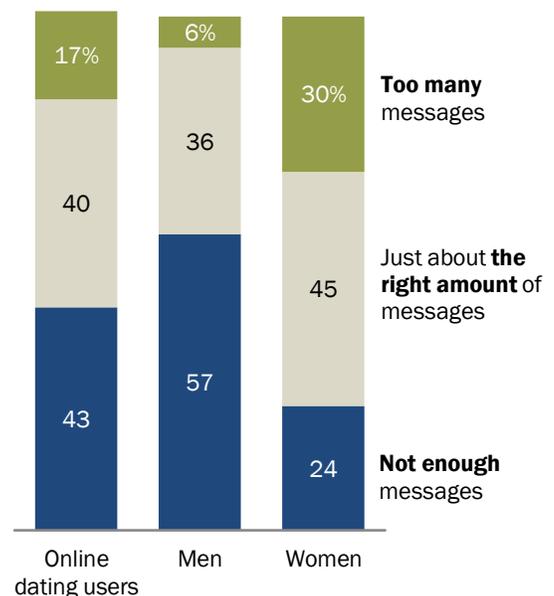
When asked if they received too many, not enough or just about the right amount of messages on dating sites or apps, 43% of Americans who online dated in the past five years say they did not receive enough messages, while 17% say they received too many messages. Another 40% think the amount of messages they received was just about right.

There are substantial gender differences in the amount of attention online daters say they received on dating sites or apps. Men who have online dated in the past five years are far more likely than women to feel as if they did not get enough messages (57% vs. 24%). On the other hand, women who have online dated in this time period are five times as likely as men to think they were sent too many messages (30% vs. 6%).

The survey also asked online daters about their experiences with getting messages *from people they were interested in*. In a similar pattern, these users are more likely to report receiving too few rather than

Men who have online dated in the past five years are more likely than women to say they didn't get enough messages

Among those who have used online dating sites or apps in the past five years, % who say they received ...



Note: Those who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019.
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too many of these messages (54% vs. 13%). And while gender differences remain, they are far less pronounced. For example, 61% of men who have online dated in the past five years say they did not receive enough messages from people they were interested in, compared with 44% of women who say this.

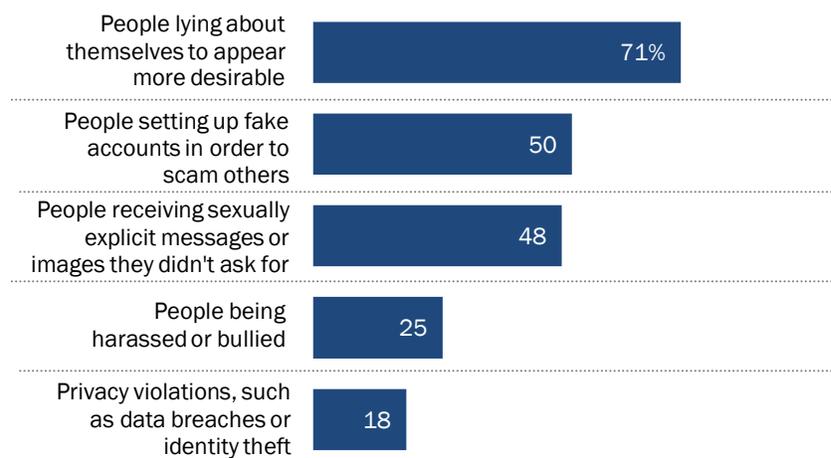
Roughly seven-in-ten online daters think people lying to appear more desirable is a very common occurrence on online dating platforms

Online daters widely believe that dishonesty is a pervasive issue on these platforms. A clear majority of online daters (71%) say it is very common for people on these platforms to lie about themselves to appear more desirable, while another 25% think it is somewhat common. Only 3% of online daters think this is not a common occurrence on dating platforms.

Smaller, but still substantial shares, of online daters believe people setting up fake accounts in order to scam others (50%) or people receiving sexually explicit messages or images they did not ask for (48%) are very common on dating sites and apps. By contrast, online daters are less likely to think harassment or bullying, and privacy violations, such as data breaches or identify theft, are very common occurrences on these platforms.

A majority of online daters think it is very common for users to lie to appear more desirable

*% of online dating users who say ___ on dating sites and apps is **very common***



Note: Online dating users refers to respondents who say they have ever used an online dating site or app. Those who did not give an answer or who gave other responses are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019.
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Some users – especially younger women – report being the target of rude or harassing behavior while on these platforms

Some experts contend that the [open nature of online dating](#) — that is, the fact that many users are strangers to one another — has created a less civil dating environment and therefore makes it difficult to hold people accountable for their behavior. This survey finds that a notable share of online daters have been subjected to some form of harassment measured in this survey.

Roughly three-in-ten or more online dating users say someone through a dating site or app continued to contact them after they said they were not interested (37%), sent them a sexually explicit message or image they didn't ask for (35%) or called them an offensive name (28%). Fewer online daters say someone via a dating site or app has threatened to physically harm them.

Younger women who have used dating sites or apps are especially likely to report having negative interactions with others on these platforms

% of online dating users in each group who say someone ___ on a dating site or app

	Continued to contact them after saying they were not interested	Sent them a sexually explicit message or image they didn't ask for	Called them an offensive name	Threatened to physically harm them
Online dating users	37%	35%	28%	9%
Men	27	26	22	6
Women	48	46	33	11
Ages 18-34	43	42	33	13
35-49	36	37	30	8
50+	29	22	15	3
Men 18-34	27	28	23	9
Women 18-34	60	57	44	19
Men 35-49	25	24	26	6
Women 35-49	49	53	34	10
Men 50+	27	24	15	3
Women 50+	29	20	13	2

Note: Online dating users refers to respondents who say they have ever used an online dating site or app. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019.

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Younger women are particularly likely to encounter each of these behaviors. Six-in-ten female online dating users ages 18 to 34 say someone via a dating site or app continued to contact them after they said they were not interested, while 57% report that another user has sent them a sexually explicit message or image they didn't ask for. Other negative interactions are more violent in nature: 19% of younger female users say someone on a dating site or app has threatened to physically harm them – roughly twice the rate of men in the same age range who say this.

The likelihood of encountering these kinds of behaviors on dating platforms also varies by sexual orientation. Fully 56% of LGB users say someone on a dating site or app has sent them a sexually explicit message or image they didn't ask for, compared with about one-third of straight users (32%). LGB users are also more likely than straight users to say someone on a dating site or app continued to contact them after they told them they were not interested, called them an offensive name or threatened to physically harm them.

Online dating is not universally seen as a safe way to meet someone

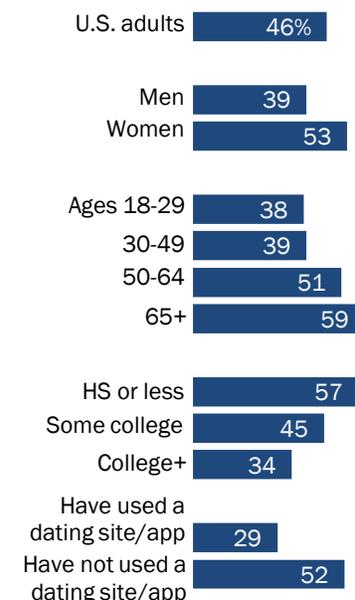
The creators of online dating sites and apps [have at times struggled](#) with the perception that these sites could facilitate troubling – or even dangerous – encounters. And although there is [some evidence](#) that much of the stigma surrounding these sites has diminished over time, close to half of Americans still find the prospect of meeting someone through a dating site unsafe.

Some 53% of Americans overall (including those who have and have not online dated) agree that dating sites and apps are a very or somewhat safe way to meet people, while a somewhat smaller share (46%) believe these platforms are a not too or not at all safe way of meeting people.

Americans who have *never* used a dating site or app are particularly skeptical about the safety of online dating. Roughly half of adults who have never used a dating or app (52%) believe that these platforms are a not too or not at all safe way to meet others, compared with 29% of those who have online dated.

Roughly half of women think dating sites or apps are an unsafe way to meet people

*% of U.S. adults who say they think dating sites and apps are a **not too or not at all** safe way to meet people*



Note: Those who did not give an answer or who gave other responses are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019.
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There are some groups who are particularly wary of the idea of meeting someone through dating platforms. Women are more inclined than men to believe that dating sites and apps are not a safe way to meet someone (53% vs. 39%).

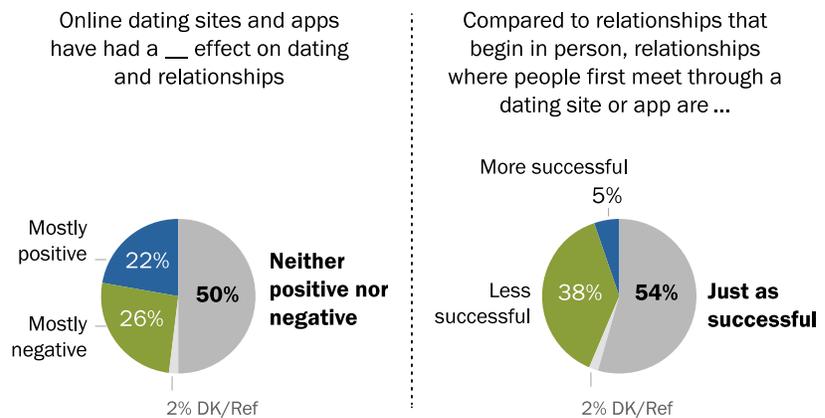
Age and education are also linked to differing attitudes about the topic. For example, 59% of Americans ages 65 and older say meeting someone this way is not safe, compared with 51% of those ages 50 to 64 and 39% among adults under the age of 50. Those who have a high school education or less are especially likely to say that dating sites and apps are not a safe way to meet people, compared with those who have some college experience or who have at bachelor's or advanced degree. These patterns are consistent regardless of each group's own personal experience with using dating sites or apps.

Pluralities think online dating has neither helped nor harmed dating and relationships and that relationships that start online are just as successful as those that begin offline

Americans – regardless of whether they have personally used online dating services or not – also weighed in on the virtues and pitfalls of online dating. Some 22% of Americans say online dating sites and apps have had a mostly positive effect on dating and relationships, while a similar proportion (26%) believe their effect has been mostly negative. Still, the largest share of adults – 50% – say online dating has had neither a positive nor negative effect on dating and relationships.

Half of Americans say online dating has had neither a positive nor negative effect on dating, relationships

% of U.S. adults who say ...



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019. "The Virtues and Downsides of Online Dating"

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Respondents who say online dating's effect has been mostly positive or mostly negative were asked to explain in their own words why they felt this way. Some of the most common reasons provided by those who believe online dating has had a positive effect focus on its ability to expand people's dating pools and to allow people to evaluate someone before agreeing to meet in person. These

users also believe dating sites and apps generally make the process of dating easier. On the other hand, people who said online dating has had a mostly negative effect most commonly cite dishonesty and the idea that users misrepresent themselves.

Pluralities also believe that whether a couple met online or in person has little effect on the success of their relationship. Just over half of Americans (54%) say that relationships where couples meet through a dating site or app are just as successful as those that begin in person, 38% believe these relationships are less successful, while 5% deem them more successful.

Public attitudes about the impact or success of online dating differ between those who have used dating platforms and those who have not. While 29% of online dating users say dating sites and apps have had a mostly positive effect on dating and relationships, that share is 21% among non-users. People who have ever used a dating site or app also have a more positive assessment of relationships forged online. Some 62% of online daters believe relationships where people first met through a dating site or app are just as successful as those that began in person, compared with 52% of those who never online dated.

1. Americans' personal experiences with online dating

Digital technology permeates almost every facet of society – from how people get news and information to the way they shop or apply for jobs and even how they seek romantic partners. Since online dating sites' humble [beginnings in the mid-1990s](#), these platforms have risen to become a [multibillion-dollar industry](#) that serves [customers](#) around the world.

Today, 30% of adults say they have ever used a dating site or app, but people's experiences with online dating vary substantially across demographic groups.

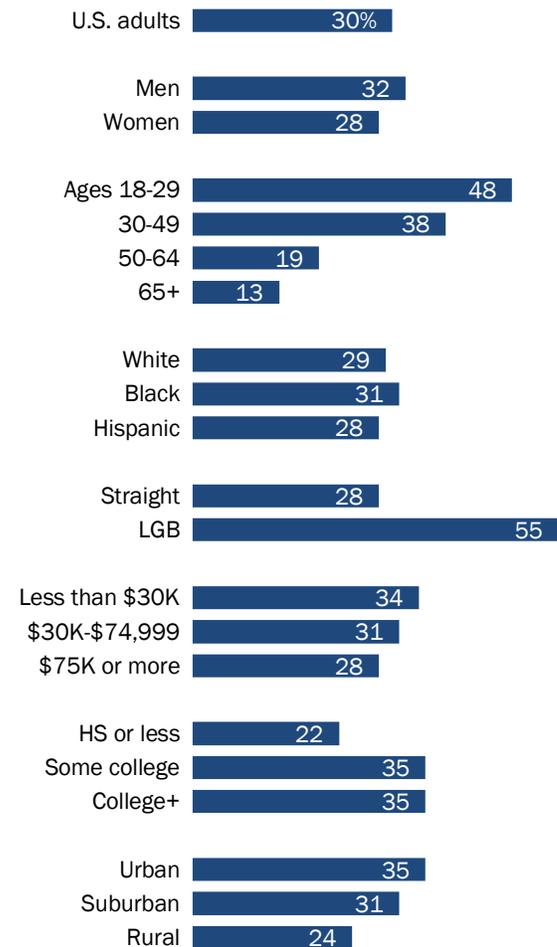
To begin with, adults under the age of 30 are particularly likely to say they have used these dating platforms. Roughly half of 18- to 29-year-olds (48%) say they have ever used a dating site or app, compared with 38% of those ages 30 to 49, and 16% of those ages 50 and older. At the same time, there are significant differences in online dating experience by sexual orientation. More than half of LGB Americans (55%) report ever using these platforms, compared with 28% of those who are straight.

Use of online dating platforms also varies substantially by current marital status. Fully 52% of Americans who have never been married say they have ever used a dating site or app, compared with around one-third of those who are divorced, separated or widowed (35%) and just 21% of those who are married or living with a partner.

Although less pronounced, experiences with online dating also differ by educational attainment and

Three-in-ten Americans have used online dating apps or sites, but this varies widely by age, sexual orientation

% of U.S. adults who say they have ever used an online dating site or app



Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race. LGB indicates those who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Those who did not give an answer are not shown. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019. "The Virtues and Downsides of Online Dating"

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community type. For example, 35% of those who have at least a bachelor’s degree have ever used a dating site or app, compared with 22% of those with a high school education or less. Additionally, those living in urban or suburban communities are more likely than those living in rural areas to say they have used these platforms.

Roughly one-in-five online dating users say they are currently using these platforms

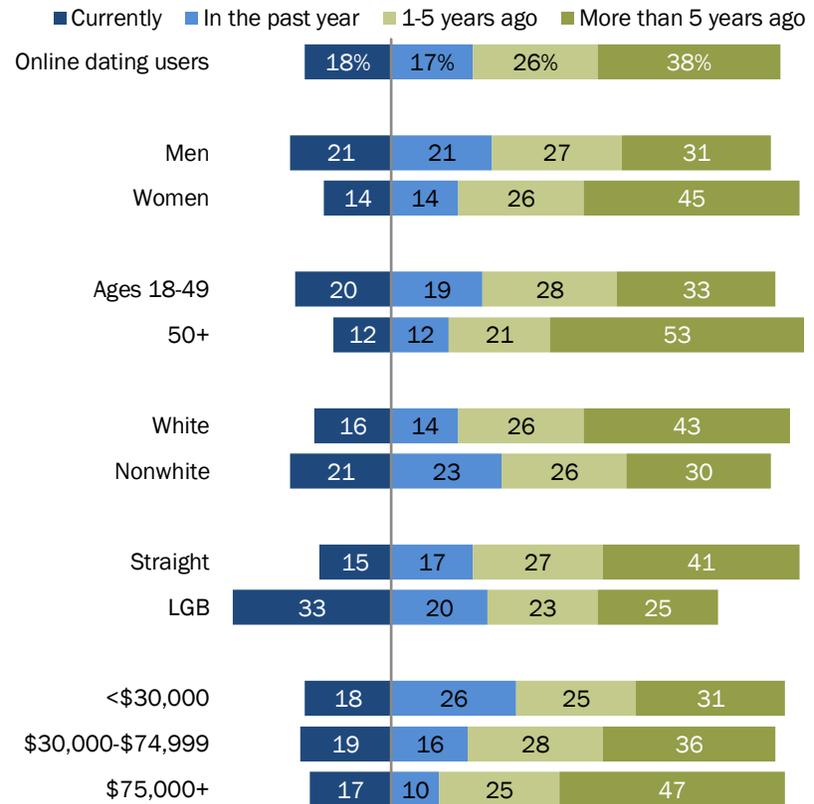
Some 18% of Americans who have ever used a dating site or app say they are currently using these platforms, while another 17% report that they are not currently doing so but have in the past year. Still, a majority of people who have ever used these platforms report that the last time they did so was either between one and five years ago (26%) or more than five years ago (38%).

People who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual are particularly likely to be current users of these platforms. One-in-three LGB Americans who have online dated are currently using a dating site or app, compared with 15% of straight users.

At the same time, online dating users ages 18 to 49 are more likely than those ages 50 and older to say they are currently using these platforms (20% vs. 12%), while men who say

About one-in-five online daters say they are currently using a dating site or app

% of online dating users who report using a dating site or app ...



Note: Online dating users refers to respondents who say they have ever used an online dating site or app. Nonwhite includes those who identify as black, Asian, Hispanic, some other race or multiple races. LGB indicates those who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Those who did not give answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019.

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they've used these platforms are more likely than women to be current users of dating sites or apps (21% vs. 14%).

39% of online daters – and 12% of Americans overall – have married or been in a committed relationship with someone they first met through a dating site or app

Fully 77% of online dating users – and 23% of Americans overall – say they have gone on a date with someone they first met through a dating app or website. Interestingly, about one-in-four Americans who have used a dating site or app (23%) say they have never been on a date with someone they met through these platforms.

And while a majority of online daters have never forged a committed relationship with someone they first encountered through these platforms, 39% of online dating users (representing 12% of all U.S. adults) say they have been in a committed relationship or married someone they met on a dating site or app.

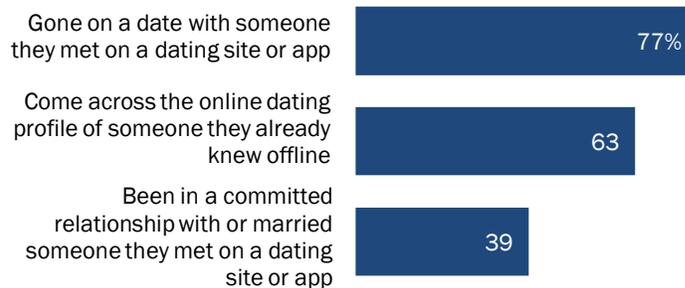
It also is fairly common for online daters to encounter people on these platforms that they already know: 63% of online daters (or 19% of all U.S. adults) say they have come across the profile of someone they already know offline.

Dating and its outcomes tend to vary by online daters' level of education

Not only are those who have attended college more likely to use dating sites or apps compared with those who have less formal education, they also are more likely to have met or formed a committed relationship with the help of these sites.

39% of online daters say they've been in a committed relationship or married someone they met on a dating site or app

% of online dating users who say they have ...



Note: Online dating users refers to respondents who say they have ever used an online dating site or app. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

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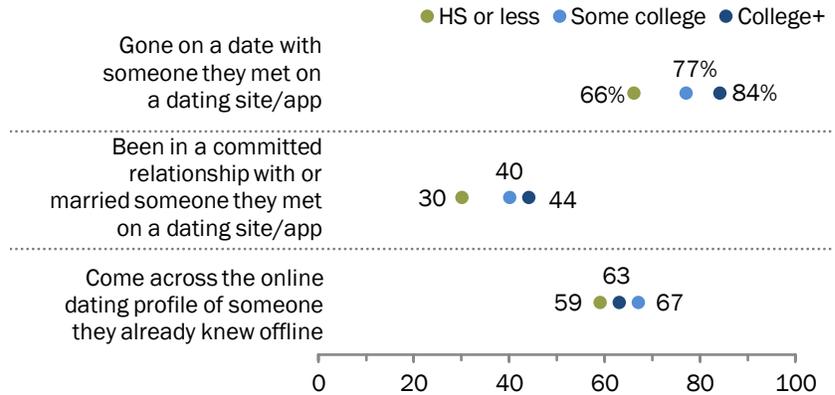
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Majorities across educational levels say they have gone on a date with someone they met through online dating, but these shares are higher among those with a college degree. Fully 84% of online dating users with at least a bachelor's degree report going out with someone they met on a dating site or app, compared with 77% of those with some college experience, and 66% of those with a high school diploma or less.

College graduates and those with some college experience who used these platforms also are more likely than those with a high school education or less to say they have been in a committed relationship or married someone they met through an online dating site or app. These educational differences are similar when looking at just online daters ages 25 and older.

Online dating users who are college graduates are particularly likely to have gone on a date or been in a committed relationship with someone they met online

% of online dating users, by educational attainment, who say they have ...



Note: Online dating users refers to respondents who say they have ever used an online dating site or app. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019.

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2. Users of online dating platforms experience both positive – and negative – aspects of courtship on the web

Over the [past two decades](#), the internet and smartphones have transformed where, when and how people meet potential romantic partners. But, as many aspects of dating have migrated online, how do online daters themselves feel about their time spent using these platforms?

Overall, online daters are more likely to rate their experiences in positive rather than negative terms, and majorities of these users say that it is was easy to find others who shared their interests or wanted to meet in person. But users also describe a more troubling and frustrating side of online dating, including their own encounters with harassing behaviors on these platforms.

Roughly six-in-ten online daters say they have had an overall positive experience with these platforms

Some 57% of Americans who have ever used an online dating site or app say their own personal experiences with these platforms have been very (14%) or somewhat (43%) positive. Smaller shares of users – though still about four-in-ten – describe their time with online dating as at least somewhat negative, including 9% who say it was a very negative.

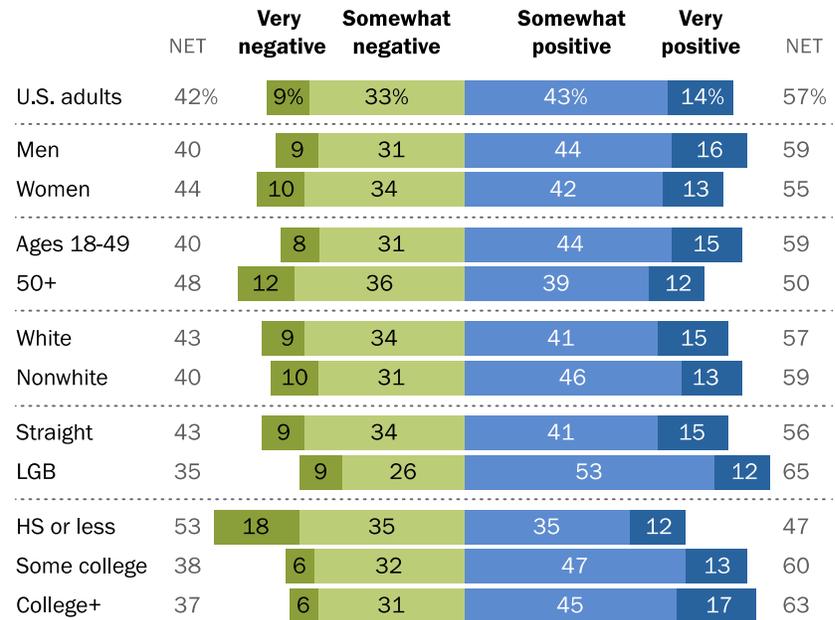
The way people assess their online dating experiences varies widely by socioeconomic factors. Fully 63% of online daters with a bachelor’s or advanced degree say their experience has been very or somewhat positive, compared with 47% among those who have a high school diploma or less. A similar pattern ties to users’ income: Online dating users whose annual family

income is \$75,000 or more a year are far more likely than those whose yearly family income falls below \$30,000 to describe their experience as at least somewhat positive (70% vs. 44%).

By comparison, there are more modest differences by sexual orientation or age. LGB users are more likely than straight users to describe their own experience with dating sites or apps as very or somewhat positive (65% vs. 56%), while users ages 18 to 49 are more likely than those ages 50 and older to say their online dating experience has been at least somewhat positive (59% vs. 50%). By

57% of online daters say their overall experience with using these platforms has been positive – but this varies substantially by educational attainment

% of online dating users who say their own personal experiences with dating sites or apps have been ...



Note: Online dating users refers to respondents who say they have ever used an online dating site or app. Nonwhite includes those who identify as black, Asian, Hispanic, some other race or multiple races. LGB refers to those who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Figures may not add up to subtotals due to rounding. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019. "The Virtues and Downsides of Online Dating"

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contrast, the way online daters rate their overall experience does not statistically vary by gender or race and ethnicity.

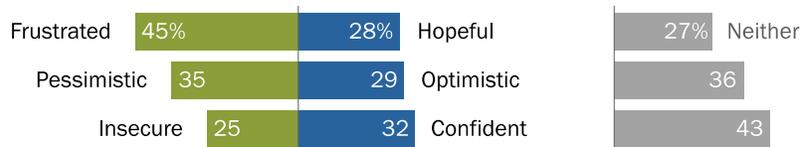
Current or recent users of these platforms say online dating leaves them feeling more frustrated than hopeful

Online dating often requires individuals to make themselves noticeable in a large pool of other daters who either accept or reject them based on quick assessments. For some, this fast-paced approach to dating may have a positive impact on their outlook and self-esteem, while others may feel more dispirited.

To better understand users' experiences, the survey presented those who have used online dating sites or apps within the past year with three pairs of words and asked them to choose the sentiment that most closely matched how they felt when using these platforms. Larger shares of Americans who are currently using dating sites or apps or who have done so in the past year say the experience left them feeling more frustrated (45%) than hopeful (28%). Another 27% of these users say they felt neither hopeful nor frustrated.

45% of current or recent users of dating sites or apps say using these platforms made them feel frustrated

Among those who have used a dating site or app in the past year, the % who say that in the past year it made them feel more ...



Note: Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019.

"The Virtues and Downsides of Online Dating"

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Other sentiments are more evenly balanced between positive and negative feelings. Some 35% of current or recent users say that in the past year online dating has made them feel more pessimistic, while 29% say these platforms left them feeling more optimistic. At the same time, 32% of current or recent online daters report that in the past year, dating sites or apps made them feel more confident, while 25% say dating sites or apps made them feel more insecure. Still, for each of these pairs of words, nearly four-in-ten or more of these users say that neither of the emotions offered reflects how they felt when using a dating site or app in the past year.

Online dating users across most demographic groups report similar emotions while using these platforms, but there are some differences by race and ethnicity. Among those who have used a

dating site or app in the past year, white users are more likely than nonwhite users to say that these platforms have made them feel more frustrated (53% vs. 36%) or more pessimistic (40% vs. 29%).⁵

Majorities of online dating users found it easy to come across others who shared their interests or were looking for the same kind of relationship

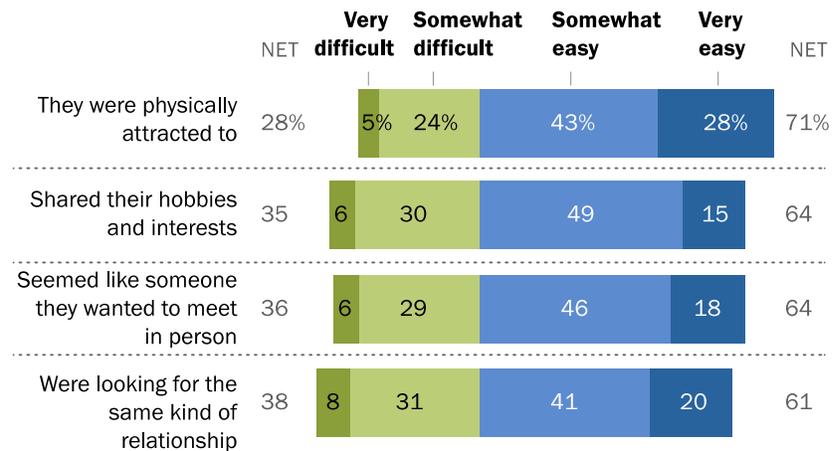
There have been [numerous accounts](#) detailing some of the struggles of online dating – including the difficulty that users may encounter when trying to find someone compatible. Overall, online daters are more likely to say that finding desirable or like-minded people was an easy rather than difficult endeavor, but there are some groups who find these aspects of online dating more daunting.

Fully 71% of Americans who have ever used a dating site or app say it was at least somewhat easy to find people on these platforms that they were physically attracted to, including 28% who say that this was a very easy task for

them. A majority of online daters also said it was very or somewhat easy to find people who shared their hobbies and interests (64%), seemed like someone they would want to meet in person (64%) or were looking for the same kind of relationship as them (61%).

A majority of online daters say it was at least somewhat easy to find people on dating sites or apps that they found attractive, shared common interests

% of online dating users who say it was ___ to find people on dating sites or apps who ...



Note: Online dating users refers to respondents who say they have ever used an online dating site or app. Figures may not add up to subtotals due to rounding. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019. "The Virtues and Downsides of Online Dating"

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⁵ Nonwhite includes those who identify as black, Asian, Hispanic, some other race or multiple races; these groups cannot be reported on separately in this survey due to sample size limitations.

Online daters' assessments of how hard or easy it was to find compatible users varies by gender. Women who have ever used a dating site or app are more likely than men to say they have found it very or somewhat difficult to find people that they were physical attracted to (36% vs. 21%) or seemed like someone they would want to meet in person (39% vs. 32%). On the other hand, 41% of male users say they found it at least somewhat difficult to find people who shared their hobbies and interests, compared with three-in-ten female users.

There are some educational differences as well. Online daters who have a high school education or less, for example, are more likely than those with a bachelor's or advanced degree to say that it was very or somewhat difficult to find people who were looking for the same kind of relationship as them (45% vs. 32%) or who shared their hobbies or interests (39% vs. 30%).

Women are more likely than men to say it was difficult finding people on dating sites or apps they were attracted to

*% of online dating users, by gender, who say when they used these sites or apps that it was **very or somewhat difficult** to find people on dating sites or apps who...*

	Among online dating users		Women-Men DIFF.
	Women	Men	
They were physically attracted to	36%	21%	+15
Seemed liked someone you would want to meet in person	39	32	+7
Were looking for the same kind of relationship as you	40	36	+4
Shared your hobbies and interests	30	41	-11

Note: Online dating users refers to respondents who say they have ever used an online dating site or app. Statistically significant differences between men and women online dating users are highlighted in **bold**. Those who did not give an answer or gave other responses are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019. "The Virtues and Downsides of Online Dating"

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Men and women who have used online dating in the past five years have contrasting experiences with the amount of messages they received

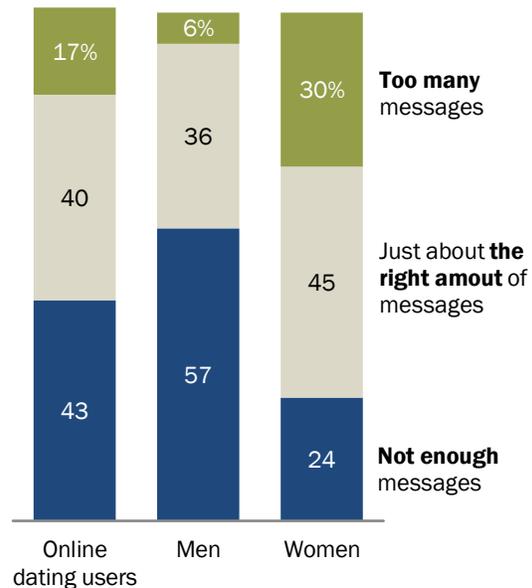
When asked if they received too many, too few or just about the right amount of messages, 43% of Americans who have used an online dating site or app in the past five years say they did not receive enough messages, 40% think the amount was just about right, and fewer – 17% – say they received too many messages.

But there are stark gender differences in the amount of attention users report receiving. Some 57% of men who have online dated in the past five years report that they did not receive enough messages, while just 6% state they received too many messages. By contrast, women who have used dating sites or apps in this time period are five times as likely as men to report they were sent too many messages (30% vs. 6%) and are far less likely than men to say they did not receive enough messages (24% express this view).

The survey also asked online daters about their experiences with getting messages *from people they were interested in*. Similarly, these users are more likely to report receiving too few rather than too many of these messages (54% vs. 13%). And while gender differences remain, they are less pronounced. For example, 61% of men who have online dated in the past five years say they did not receive enough messages from people they were interested in, compared with 44% of women who say this.

Roughly six-in-ten men who have used a dating site in the past five years feel as if they didn't receive enough messages

Among those who have used online dating sites or apps in the past five years, % who say they received ...



Note: Online dating users in the past five years refers to respondents who say they have used an online dating site or app in the past five years. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019. "The Virtues and Downsides of Online Dating"

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Online daters place a high level of importance on seeing other users' photos, finding out the kind of relationship they're interested in

Online dating allows users to quickly evaluate dozens of potential partners and scour profiles for all kinds of information – from the way someone looks to how they spend their free time and even their political leanings. But what are the most important things people look for as they scroll or swipe through profiles?

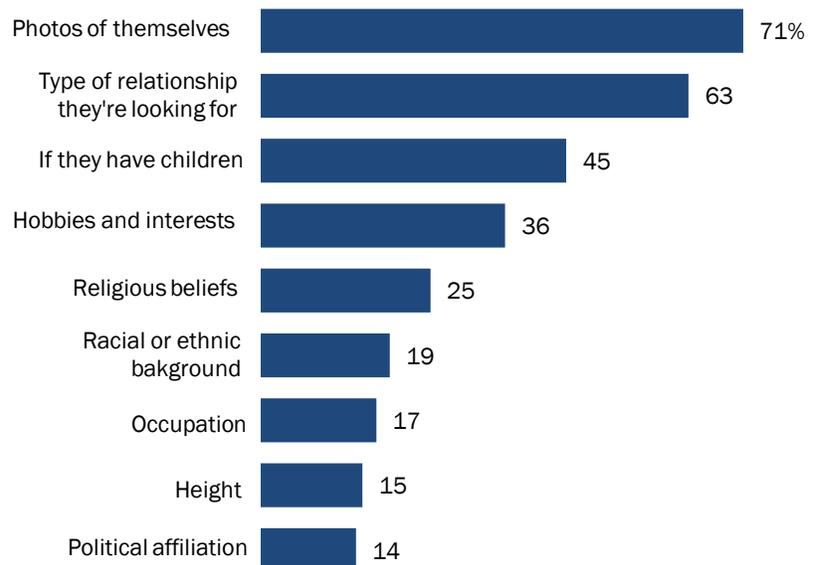
Online daters find it especially important to be able to view someone's photo. Fully 71% of users say it was very important to them that the profiles they looked at included the other user's photo.

A majority of online dating users also felt it was necessary to gauge other users' intentions: 63% say it was very important that the profiles they looked through included the type of relationship the other person was looking for. Additionally, 45% of users say it was very important that profiles included whether the person had any children; 36% say this about hobbies and interests; and 25% feel this way about religious beliefs.

Smaller shares of users consider a person's racial or ethnic background, occupation, height or political affiliation to be very important information to discover when looking through online dating profiles.

A majority of online daters say it is very important to them that users include photos, the type of relationship they're looking for in the profile

% of online dating users who say it was very important that the profiles they looked at include the following



Note: Online dating users refers to respondents who say they have ever used an online dating site or app. Those who did not give an answer or gave other responses are not shown. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019.

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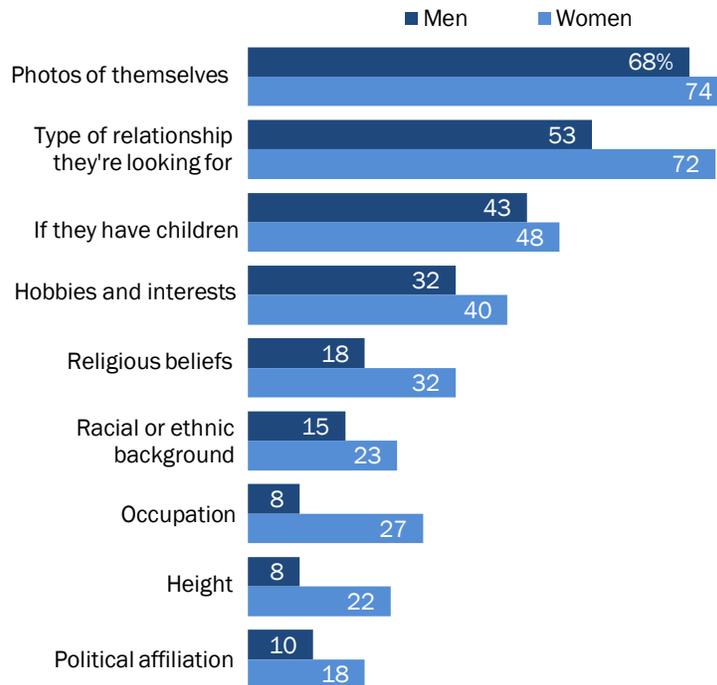
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Across several measures, women are more likely than men to describe certain information as essential to glean from someone's profile. Roughly seven-in-ten female users (72%) say that it was very important to them that the profiles they looked at included the type of relationship the person was looking for, while about half of male users say this (53%). Among online daters, women also are more likely than men to say that it was very important to them that the profiles included a person's religious beliefs (32% vs. 18%), occupation (27% vs. 8%) or height (22% vs. 8%).

Other gender differences – such as the importance of users including in their profiles hobbies and interests, racial or ethnic background, or political affiliation – are more modest.

Among online daters, women more likely than men to say it is very important that profiles include the type of relationship the person wants, religious beliefs, job

*% of online dating users, by gender, who say that it was **very important** that the profiles they looked at included the following*



Note: Online dating users refers to respondents who say they have ever used an online dating site or app. Those who did not give an answer or gave other responses are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019. "The Virtues and Downsides of Online Dating"

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The level of importance that users place on certain content also varies by age. Online dating users ages 50 and older are more likely than users ages 18 to 49 to say that it is very important that the profiles they looked at included the person's race or ethnicity (26% vs. 16%) or their political affiliation (21% vs. 12%). Younger users, on the other hand, are more likely than older users to say that it was very important to them that profiles they came across included whether the person had children (48% vs. 37%).

Users of dating sites or apps generally believe embellishment is a very common part of the online dating experience

Even as users of dating sites and apps generally rate their overall experiences positively, they also believe that certain negative behaviors are especially prevalent on these platforms.

Indeed, a majority of users characterize lying as a prevalent feature of the online dating environment. Fully 71% of adults who have used an online dating site or app say it is very common for people on these platforms to lie about themselves to appear more desirable.

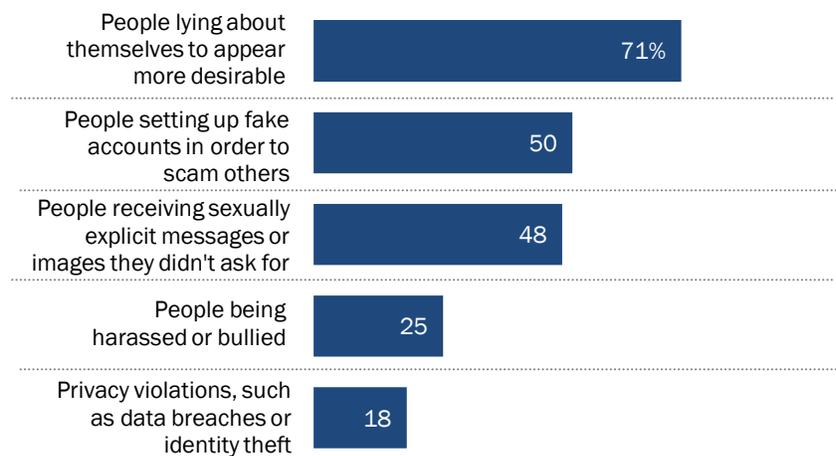
Smaller shares – though still about half of all users – believe that it is very common for people on dating sites and apps to set up fake accounts in order to scam others (50%) or for people to receive sexually explicit messages or images they did not ask for (48%).

Fewer users believe that

people being harassed or bullied (25%) or data privacy violations (18%) are very common occurrences on online dating sites or apps.

A majority of online dating users think it is very common for users to tell lies to appear more desirable

*% of online dating users who say ___ on dating sites and apps is **very common***



Note: Online dating users refers to respondents who say they have ever used an online dating site or app. Those who did not give an answer or who gave other responses are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019.
"The Virtues and Downsides of Online Dating"

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Views about the pervasiveness of certain behaviors on dating platforms varies substantially by educational attainment. For example, 61% of online daters who have a high school diploma or less education say it is very common for people to receive sexually explicit images or messages on dating sites or apps, compared with 49% of those with some college experience and 37% of those who have bachelor's degree or more education. At the same time, users with a high school education or less are also more likely than those with a college degree to believe that people setting

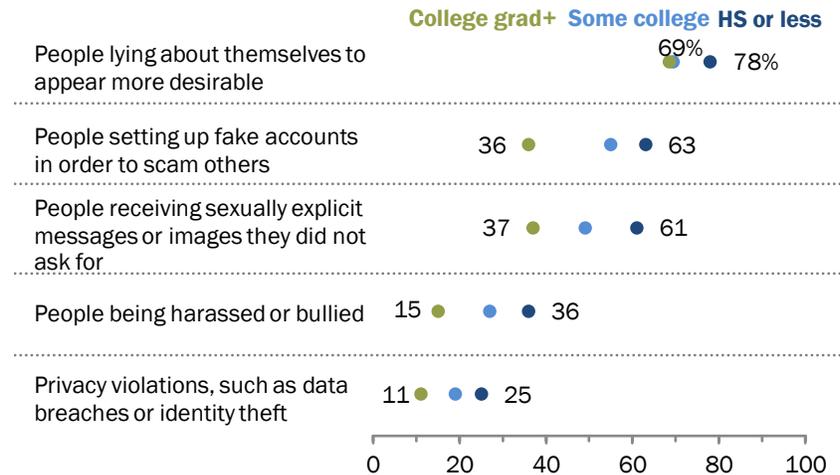
up fake accounts for scams, people being harassed or bullied, or privacy violations are a very common aspect of online dating.

Men and women also hold somewhat differing views on the prevalence of these issues. Some 57% of women say that people setting up fake accounts in order to scam others is very common, compared with 44% of men who say this. And while about one-in-three female users (32%) think harassment is a very common occurrence on online dating platforms, that share falls to 19% among male users. Among online daters, women are also more likely than men to say it is very common for people on dating sites and apps to lie about themselves to appear more desirable (76% vs. 67%), receive sexually explicit messages or images they didn't ask for (55% vs. 42%) or for privacy violations to occur (22% vs. 14%).

There also are large differences by age when respondents are asked about the prevalence of nonconsensual sexual messages: 56% of online dating users ages 18 to 49 say this is very common on these platforms, compared with just 27% of users ages 50 and older who say this.

A majority of online daters with a high school diploma or less think people receiving nonconsensual explicit messages is very common on dating sites and apps

*% of online dating users, by educational attainment, who say ___ on dating sites and apps is **very common***



Note: Online dating users refers to respondents who say they have ever used an online dating site or app. Those who did not give an answer or who gave other responses are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019.
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Younger women are especially likely to be the target of harassing behaviors when using these platforms

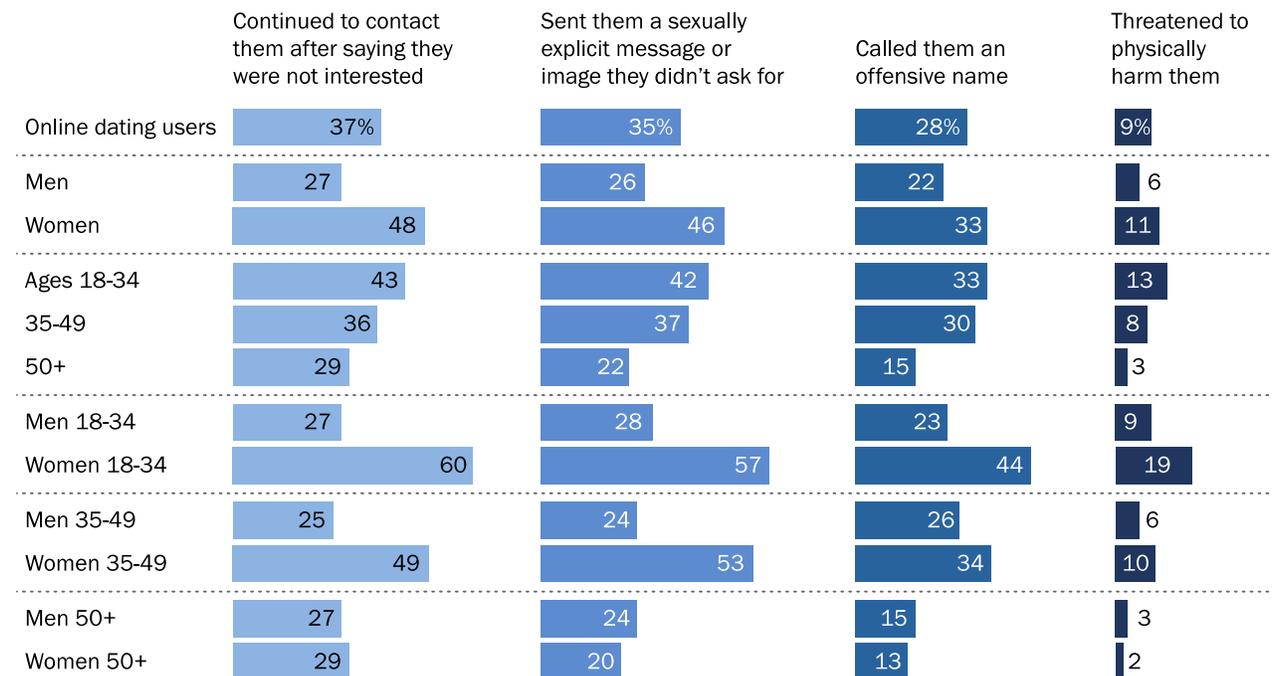
[Online harassment](#) has become a regular feature of life on the internet, from social media sites to comments sections – and dating platforms.

This survey finds that online daters encounter a range of negative behaviors while using these platforms. Some 37% of online dating users say someone on a dating site or app has continued to contact them after they said they weren't interested, while 28% say they have been called an offensive name while using these platforms. About one-in-ten users (9%) also say that someone on a dating site or app has threatened to physically harm them.

Other negative encounters are more sexualized: 35% of users say someone on a dating site or app has sent them a sexually explicit message or image they did not ask for.

Younger women who use online dating sites or apps are especially likely to report that they encountered certain negative behaviors while using these platforms

% of online dating users in each group who say someone ___ on a dating site or app



Note: Online dating users refers to respondents who say they have ever used an online dating site or app. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019.

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These unpleasant interactions are more prevalent among women than men – with the largest gender gaps present among those who say they have received unwanted contact or explicit messages. Some 48% of female users say someone has continued to contact them after they said they were not interested, while a similar share – 46% – report that they have been sent a sexually explicit message or image they didn’t ask for. These shares are considerably lower among male users (27% and 26%, respectively). Similar gender gaps are present when online dating users are asked about being called an offensive name or having someone threaten to physically harm them.

Younger women, in particular, stand out for how likely they are to encounter these behaviors on a dating platform. Six-in-ten female users ages 18 to 34 say someone through a dating site or app continued to contact them after they said they were not interested, while 57% say they have been sent a sexually explicit message or image that they did not ask for. At the same time, 44% of these younger female users say that someone has called them an offensive name via these platforms, while 19% report being physically threatened by another user. Each of these figures is substantially higher when compared with the experience of male online daters across age ranges, as well as that of female users ages 50 and up.

Women ages 35 to 49 who have online dated also are more likely than male users of the same age group – as well as men younger or older than them – to say someone has continued to contact them after they said they were not interested or sent them sexually explicit content on a dating platform.

Whether someone reports that they have been the target of these behaviors also differs by sexual orientation. LGB users are more likely than straight users to say someone on a dating site or app has sent them a sexually explicit message or image they didn’t ask for (56% vs. 32%). LGB online daters also are more likely than straight users to say they’ve faced unwanted contact from someone after they said they were not interested, been called an offensive name or been physical threatened by someone on a dating site or app.

LGB online daters more likely than those who are straight to say they have been harassed on a dating platform

% of online dating users, by sexual orientation, who say someone ___ on a dating site or app

	Among online dating users		LGB-Straight DIFF.
	LGB	Straight	
Sent them a sexually explicit message or image they didn’t ask for	56	32	+24
Called them an offensive name	41	25	+16
Continued to contact them after say they were not interested	48	35	+13
Threatened to physically harm them	17	7	+10

Note: Online dating users refers to respondents who say they have ever used an online dating site or app. LGB indicates those who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Statistically significant differences between LGB and straight online dating users are highlighted in **bold**. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019.

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3. Americans' opinions about the online dating environment

Online dating platforms have been scrutinized at times for the way they have contributed to [dating culture](#) and its [safety](#), as well as how successful they are at [finding people a suitable match](#). There are a slew of both [troubling](#) and [love stories](#) involving online dating.

This chapter explores how all Americans – not just those who have online dated – feel about the broader landscape and impact of online dating. To begin, Americans are more likely to describe online dating as having a neutral impact on dating and relationships, rather than a mostly positive or negative one. And when asked to share their views about the success of relationships that begin through online dating, just over half of U.S. adults agree that these relationships are just as successful as those that began offline.

Still, views about online dating do vary across demographic groups, as well as by people's own personal experience with using these sites or apps. At the same time, there are some lingering concerns about the danger of meeting someone through a dating site or app. Americans are somewhat divided on whether these platforms are a safe way to meet people.

Half of Americans believe that online dating has had neither a positive nor negative effect on dating and relationships

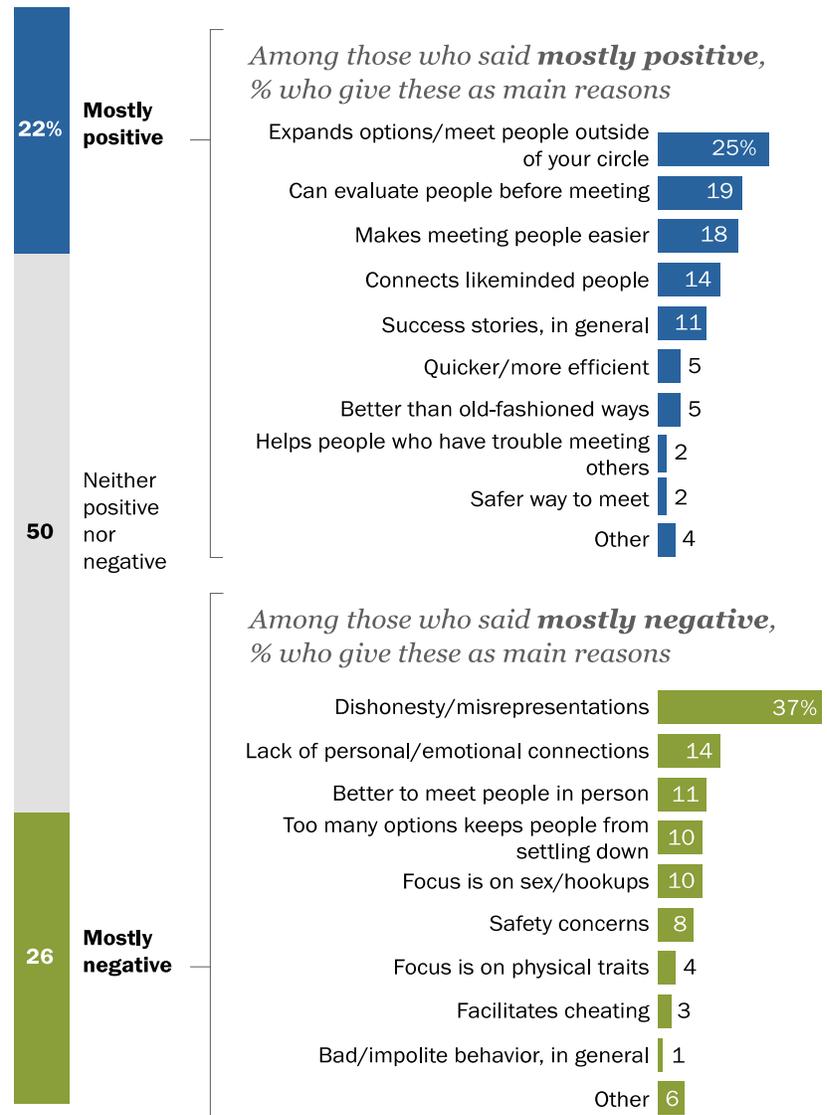
When asked to share their views on the type of effect dating sites and apps have had on dating and relationships, 50% of Americans believe their effect has been neither positive nor negative. Meanwhile, 26% say online dating has had a mostly negative effect on dating and relationships, while 22% describe its effect as mostly positive.

Across demographic groups, larger shares of Americans feel as if online dating has had neither a positive nor negative effect on dating and relationships, but personal experience with online dating also is associated with more positive views of its impact. Some 29% of online dating users view its effect on dating and relationships as mostly positive, compared with 21% of those who never used a dating site or app.

At the same time, 30% of adults with at least a bachelor's degree say that dating sites and

Americans who think online dating has had a positive effect say it expands people's options, is easier; those with a negative opinion think it facilitates lying

% of adults who say online dating sites and dating apps have had a ___ effect on dating and relationships



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown. Verbatim responses have been coded into categories, and figures may add up to more than 100% because multiple responses were allowed.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019. "The Virtues and Downsides of Online Dating"

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apps have a mostly positive effect on dating relationships, compared with 18% of those with a high school education or less. These educational differences are present regardless of online dating use.

Americans cite a number of reasons – ranging from expanding options to success stories – as reasons these platforms have been a good thing for dating and relationships

The survey also asked an open-ended question to give respondents a chance to explain, in their own words, why they feel as if dating sites and apps have had a mostly positive or mostly negative effect on dating and relationships.

Among respondents who say dating sites and apps have had a mostly positive effect, 25% say it is because they have helped expand people’s dating pool. Many of these responses emphasize how online dating has made it easier to meet people outside of one’s normal social circle, thereby expanding their options:

“They allow people who wouldn’t have ever really crossed paths in person easier access to that possible ‘one’ that they otherwise wouldn’t have ever met.” (Woman, age 36)

“It widens the pool of available persons.” (Woman, age 64)

Others in this group cite the ability to evaluate people before meeting them in person (19%) or that it is generally an easier way to meet people who also are interested in dating (18%).

“You read people’s profiles and know what they are all about before reaching out to them. Cheaper than going on a date to find out the hard way.” (Man, age 43)

“Easy to meet people. Easy to break the ice. Easy to size up people to see if you would like to really date them.” (Woman, age 28)

Some 14% of these respondents also express that these platforms can connect people who are likeminded or have mutual interests, while 11% offer up success stories as a reason online dating has had a mostly positive impact on dating.

“It’s easier to find someone who shares your interest and values. Easier to identify what you have in common before you decide to pursue spending time together.” (Man, age 54)

“We have known untold numbers of now-married couples who met online. ... It does shrink the world to help you meet wonderful people.” (Woman, age 75)

Relatively small shares argue that online dating has had a mostly positive effect because it is a more efficient way of meeting people, is a better alternative to more traditional ways of meeting, helps people who have trouble meeting others or is a safer way of meeting people.

Americans who believe online dating has had a mostly negative effect on dating and relationships are especially likely to stress issues related to dishonesty

There is a stronger consensus among respondents who believe dating sites and apps have had a mostly negative effect. By far the most common response (given by 37% of these respondents) mentions that these platforms are a venue for various forms of dishonesty – ranging from people embellishing the truth to outright scams.

“You only know what they want you to know. They lie about themselves to make themselves look good.” (Man, age 58)

“People give a description of who they want to be and not always how they really are. You can’t depend on everyone being honest about who they are on both the positive and negative sides.” (Woman, age 40)

“I found there are a lot of scammers on dating sites trying to take advantage of others.” (Woman, age 59)

Another 14% in this group mention that online dating has made courtship more impersonal and devoid of meaningful communication.

“People don’t act like themselves online. No one is actually getting to really know each other. Communication is flawed from the beginning.” (Woman, age 33)

“There is a constant influx of ‘new inventory.’ It’s made dating more of a shopping activity (consumerism) than an interpersonal experience (emotional). The ‘swipe right’ mentality starts to affect us in everyday life.” (Man, age 56)

And additional 11% say the traditional ways of meeting were better and online dating has prevented people from connecting in the physical world. Overall, people who answer in this theme feel that online dating is generally just a bad way to meet people:

“Profiling isn’t romantic. The slower process of meeting someone, the chase, maybe the game and the face-to-face learning about each other makes for deeper and lasting feelings.” (Man, age 72)

“The old-fashioned way of meeting people in person or getting introduced through friends seems more individualized.” (Woman, age 30)

Respondents also offer other reasons they believe online dating has negatively affected dating, including that it keeps people from settling down because there are too many options (10% say this), while another 10% criticize these platforms for encouraging casual relationships and hookups. Another 8% in this group attribute their negative views of online dating to safety concerns.

“It’s hard to work on a relationship or give a partner another chance when sites/apps are constantly promoting the message that you are surrounded by wonderful singles all the time. It makes you believe that there is always a better or easier option available.” (Woman, age 27)

“Those sites and apps are used more for hookups nowadays and the people on there are not seriously looking for a committed relationship.” (Woman, age 33)

“I find the whole thing just extremely odd. I think that it is actually rather dangerous to meet complete strangers that way. It’s too easy for serial killers, psychos, thieves and people that are up to no good to find new victims that way.” (Woman, age 47)

About half of Americans think online dating is a safe way to meet people – but this varies substantially by age, gender and personal experiences with dating sites and apps

Overall, Americans are somewhat divided on whether online dating is a safe way to meet someone. Roughly half of the public says that dating sites and apps are a very (3%) or somewhat (50%) safe way to meet people. Still, perceptions that online dating is a dangerous way to meet someone are fairly common. Some 46% of Americans believe meeting someone through online dating is not safe, including one-in-ten who say it is not at all a safe way to meet people.

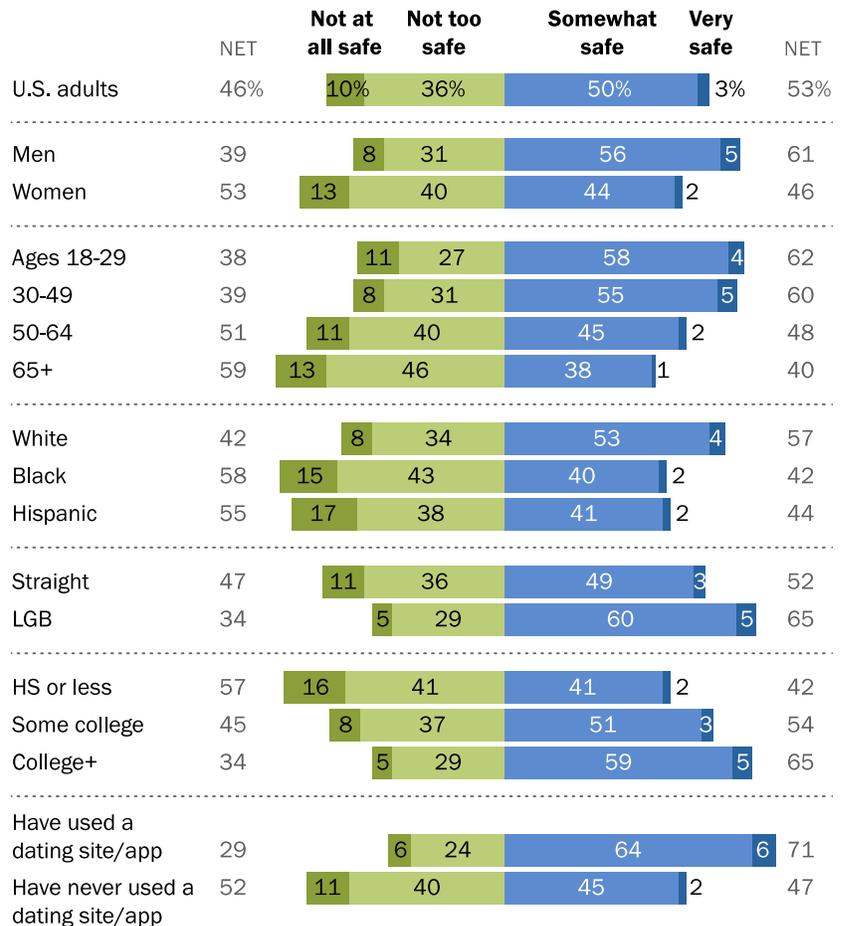
Public perceptions about the safety of online dating vary substantially by personal experience. A majority of Americans who have ever used a dating site or app (71%) see it as a very or somewhat safe way to meet someone, compared with 47% of those who have never used these platforms.

There are other groups who also express concerns about the safety of online dating. Women are far more likely than men to

say dating sites and apps are not a safe way meet to people (53% vs. 39%). And while 39% of adults under the age of 50 view online dating as unsafe, that share is 54% among those ages 50 and older.

Americans’ views on whether dating platforms are a safe way to meet people varies by age, gender and whether they’ve used dating sites or apps

% of U.S. adults who say dating sites and apps are a ___ way to meet people



Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race. LGB indicates those who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Figures may not add to subtotals due to rounding. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019.

“The Virtues and Downsides of Online Dating”

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Additionally, 57% of adults with a high school education or less think meeting someone through a dating platform is not safe, compared with just about a third of those with a bachelor’s or advanced degree (34%). There also are differences in views about online dating safety by race and ethnicity, as well as, by sexual orientation.

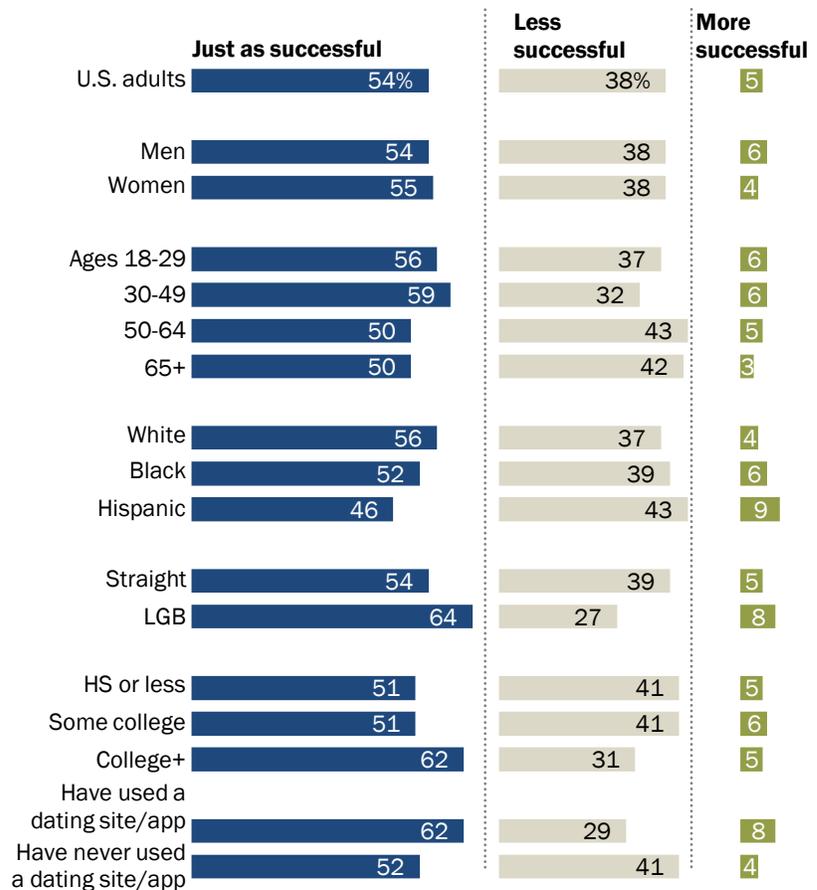
54% of the public says relationships where people first meet through a dating site or app are just as successful as those that begin in person

One of the [central debates](#) that emerged with the rise of online dating is whether courtships that begin online can be as successful and long-lasting as those forged in person.

When asked whether relationships where people first meet through an online dating site or app are generally more successful, less successful or just as successful as those that begin in person, 54% of Americans agree that these relationships are just as successful. Smaller shares – though still around four-in-ten (38%) – categorize these relationships as less successful, while relatively few Americans (5%) say relationships in which people first met through online dating are more successful than those that begin in person.

Just over half of Americans say that the success of relationships started online is comparable to relationships that begin offline

% of U.S. adults who say that relationships where people first meet through a dating site or app are ___ compared to relationships that begin in person



Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race. LGB indicates those who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019. “The Virtues and Downsides of Online Dating”

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Larger shares of most groups believe relationships that start through dating sites or apps are just as successful as those that begin in person, but there are some Americans who are more skeptical of digitally forged relationships.

Again, views about online dating differ between those who have used these platforms and those who have not. Roughly four-in-ten Americans who have never online dated (41%) believe relationships that start off through dating platforms are less successful than those that begin in person, compared with 29% of those who have used a dating site or app.

Americans ages 50 and up are more likely than those under the age of 50 to say that relationships that first began through a dating site or app are less successful than relationships that started in person (43% vs. 34%). And adults who have a high school education or less are more likely than those with a bachelor's or advanced degree to believe that these types of relationships are less successful when compared with those that begin in person (41% vs. 31%). There also are differences by sexual orientation. Some 39% of straight adults feel that relationships that began through online dating are less successful, while smaller shares of LGB adults (27%) hold this view.

This pattern is true even among those who have online dated. Among those who have used a dating site or app, older or straight adults are more likely than those who are younger or LGB to say relationships that start through dating sites and apps are less successful than those that start in person.

Americans who have had more success with online dating tend to view it more positively

Across several measures, online daters who have found a committed partner through these dating sites or apps tend to view these platforms in a more positive light. The same is true of how they rate their overall experience, as well as whether they've experienced some form of harassment while using these platforms.

Online dating users who have married or been in a committed relationship with someone they met online are more likely than those who haven't to say that these platforms have had a mostly positive effect on dating and relationships overall (37% vs. 23%), or to view online dating as at least a somewhat safe way to meet people (79% vs. 66%). Online daters who have had success in finding committed relationships online also are more likely than those who haven't to say relationships started through dating sites or apps are just as successful as those started offline (67% vs. 58%).

Users who had at least a somewhat positive experience overall using these platforms also are more likely to view them as having had a positive effect on dating and relationships, compared with those who have had a very or somewhat negative overall experience (39% vs. 14%). Differences in perceived safety also are present. Fully 82% of online daters who had a positive experience with dating sites or apps believe these platforms are a safe way to meet people, compared with 55% among those who categorize their overall online dating experience as negative.

Additionally, opinions about online dating vary by users' own encounters with harassment on these platforms. Online daters who have experienced some form of harassment measured in this survey are more likely to say that online dating platforms have had a mostly negative effect on dating and relationships, compared with those who have not experienced harassment (30% vs. 20%). And while majorities of online daters, regardless of their experience with harassment, think of these platforms as a safe way to meet someone, those who personally have faced these negative interactions (66%) are less likely than those who haven't to describe it as at least somewhat safe (77%).

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Methodology

The American Trends Panel survey methodology

The American Trends Panel (ATP), created by Pew Research Center, is a nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults. Panelists participate via self-administered web surveys. Panelists who do not have internet access at home are provided with a tablet and wireless internet connection. The panel is being managed by Ipsos.

Data in this report is drawn from the panel wave conducted Oct. 16 to Oct. 28, 2019. A total of 4,860 panelists responded out of 5,887 who were sampled, for a response rate of 82.6%. This includes 4,458 from the ATP and an oversample of 1,429 respondents sampled from the Ipsos KnowledgePanel that previously indicated that they identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB). This does not include three panelists who were removed from the data due to extremely high rates of refusal or straight-lining. The cumulative response rate accounting for nonresponse to the recruitment surveys and attrition is 5.3%. The break-off rate among panelists who logged on to the survey and completed at least one item is 1.2%. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 4,860 respondents is plus or minus 2.1 percentage points.

American Trends Panel recruitment surveys

Recruitment dates	Mode	Invited	Joined	Active panelists remaining
Jan. 23 to March 16, 2014	Landline/ cell RDD	9,809	5,338	2,318
Aug. 27 to Oct. 4, 2015	Landline/ cell RDD	6,004	2,976	1,337
April 25 to June 4, 2017	Landline/ cell RDD	3,905	1,628	685
Aug. 8 to Oct. 31, 2018	ABS/web	9,396	8,778	6,424
	Total	29,114	18,720	10,764

Note: Approximately once per year, panelists who have not participated in multiple consecutive waves or who did not complete an annual profiling survey are removed from the panel. Panelists also become inactive if they ask to be removed from the panel.

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The subsample from the ATP was selected by grouping panelists into eight strata so demographic groups that are underrepresented in the panel had a higher probability of selection than overrepresented groups:

- Stratum A consists of panelists who identify as LGB, use online dating sites or apps, and are single and looking for a relationship. They were sampled at a rate of 100%.
- Stratum B consists of panelists who identify as LGB, do NOT use online dating sites or apps, and are single and looking for a relationship. They were sampled at a rate of 100%.

- Stratum C consists of panelists that are who do NOT identify as LGB, use online dating sites or apps, and are single and looking for a relationship. They were sampled at a rate of 41.5%.
- Stratum D consists of panelists who are non-internet users. They were sampled at a rate of 87.5%.
- Stratum E consists of panelists with a high school education or less. They were sampled at a rate of 69.9%.
- Stratum F consists of panelists that are Hispanic, not registered to vote, or non-volunteers. They were sampled at a rate of 29.2%.
- Stratum G consists of panelists that are black or 18 to 34 years old. They were sampled at a rate of 15%.
- Stratum H consists of the remaining panelists. They were sampled at a rate of 11.1%.

The ATP was created in 2014, with the first cohort of panelists invited to join the panel at the end of a large, national, landline and cellphone random-digit-dial survey that was conducted in both English and Spanish. Two additional recruitments were conducted using the same method in 2015 and 2017, respectively. Across these three surveys, a total of 19,718 adults were invited to join the ATP, of which 9,942 agreed to participate.

In August 2018, the ATP switched from telephone to address-based recruitment. Invitations were sent to a random, address-based sample (ABS) of households selected from the U.S. Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File. In each household, the adult with the next birthday was asked to go online to complete a survey, at the end of which they were invited to join the panel. For a random half-sample of invitations, households without internet access were instructed to return a postcard. These households were contacted by telephone and sent a tablet if they agreed to participate. A total of 9,396 were invited to join the panel, and 8,778 agreed to join the panel and completed an initial profile survey. Of the 18,720 individuals who have ever joined the ATP, 10,764 remained active panelists and continued to receive survey invitations at the time this survey was conducted.

The U.S. Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File has been estimated to cover as much as 98% of the population, although some studies suggest that the coverage could be in the low 90% range.⁶

⁶ AAPOR Task Force on Address-based Sampling. 2016. "[AAPOR Report: Address-based Sampling](#)."

Weighting

The ATP data was weighted in a multistep process that begins with a base weight incorporating the respondents' original survey selection probability and the fact that in 2014 and 2017 some respondents were subsampled for invitation to the panel. The next step in the weighting uses an iterative technique that aligns the sample to population benchmarks on the dimensions listed in the accompanying table. For this wave, an additional weighting parameter was added to adjust for oversampling LGB-identifying respondents.

Sampling errors and tests of statistical significance take into account the effect of weighting. Interviews are conducted in both English and Spanish, but the American Trends Panel's Hispanic sample is predominantly U.S. born and English speaking.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	4,860	2.1 percentage points
Total online dating users	2,094	3.6 percentage points
Online dated in the past year	871	5.9 percentage points
Online dated in the past 5 years, Form 1	697	6.4 percentage points
Online dated in the past 5 years, Form 2	701	6.4 percentage points
Non-online dating users	2,639	2.6 percentage points

Weighting dimensions

Variable	Benchmark source
Gender	2017 American Community Survey
Age	
Education	
Race/Hispanic origin	
Hispanic nativity	
Home internet access	
Region x Metropolitan status	2018 CPS March Supplement
Volunteerism	2017 CPS Volunteering & Civic Life Supplement
Voter registration	2016 CPS Voting and Registration Supplement
Party affiliation	Average of the three most recent Pew Research Center telephone surveys.
LGB Orientation	ATP Wave 50

Note: Estimates from the ACS are based on non-institutionalized adults. Voter registration is calculated using procedures from Hur, Achen (2013) and rescaled to include the total US adult population.

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Men	2,351	3.1 percentage points
Women	2,504	2.8 percentage points
White, non-Hispanic	3,321	2.5 percentage points
Black, non-Hispanic	519	6.2 percentage points
Hispanic	633	6.3 percentage points
Ages 18-29	802	5.4 percentage points
30-49	1,630	3.6 percentage points
50-64	1,460	3.8 percentage points
65+	964	4.3 percentage points
HS or less	1,167	3.8 percentage points
Some college	1,452	3.8 percentage points
College+	2,237	3.1 percentage points
Less than \$30,000	1,199	4.2 percentage points
\$30,000-\$74,999	1,701	3.5 percentage points
\$75,000 or more	1,814	3.4 percentage points
Urban	1,587	4.1 percentage points
Suburban	2,300	3.0 percentage points
Rural	954	4.3 percentage points
Straight	3,306	2.3 percentage points
Lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB)	1,410	4.3 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

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Topline questionnaire

**2019 PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL
WAVE 56 OCTOBER
TOPLINE
OCT. 16-28, 2019
TOTAL N=4,860**

THE QUESTIONS PRESENTED BELOW ARE PART OF A LARGER SURVEY CONDUCTED ON THE AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL. OTHER QUESTIONS ON THIS SURVEY HAVE BEEN HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE.

NOTE: ALL NUMBERS ARE PERCENTAGES UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED. THE PERCENTAGES LESS THAN 0.5% ARE REPLACED BY AN ASTERISK (*). ROWS/COLUMNS MAY NOT TOTAL 100% DUE TO ROUNDING.

	Sample size	Margin of error at 95% confidence level
U.S. adults	4,860	+/- 2.1 percentage points

ASK IF INTERNET USER (F_TABLETHH=0) [n=4,741]:

ONLINEDATE Have you ever used an online dating site or dating app?

Oct 16-28, 2019

31	Yes, have done this
68	No, have not done this
*	No answer

ASK IF EVER USED AN ONLINE DATING SITE OR APP (ONLINEDATE=1) [n=2,094]:

ONLINEDATE2 Are you currently using an online dating site or dating app?

Oct 16-28, 2019

18	Yes, I am currently using an online dating site or dating app
17	No, but I have used one within the past year
26	No, but I used one 1 to 5 years ago
38	No, but I used one more than 5 years ago
*	No answer

ASK ALL ONLINE DATING STATUS: COMBO OF ONLINEDATE & ONLINEDATE2

Oct 16-28, 2019

30	Ever online dated
11	Have online dated within the last year
19	Have online dated more than a year ago
*	No answer for ONLINEDATE2
65	Never online dated
*	No answer
4	Does not use internet

ASK ALL:

ONIMPACT Overall, what type of effect would you say online dating sites and dating apps have had on dating and relationships? **[RANDOMIZE RESPONSE OPTIONS 1 AND 2, WITH OPTION 3 ALWAYS LAST]**

Oct 16-28, 2019

22	Mostly positive effect
26	Mostly negative effect
50	Neither positive or negative effect
2	No answer

ASK IF SAYS ONLINE DATING SITES AND APPS HAS A MOSTLY POSITIVE EFFECT (ONIMPACT=1) [n=1,277]:

ONIMPACT_POS What is the main reason you think online dating sites and dating apps have a mostly positive effect on dating and relationships? [OPEN-END RESPONSE, CODED ANSWERS SHOWN BELOW]

Oct 16-28, 2019

25	Helps you meet people outside your regular network/Larger pool
19	Opportunity to evaluate someone before getting to know them
18	Makes the process of meeting people easier in general
14	Helps you meet like-minded people
11	Gives example of success stories
5	Quicker/More efficient
5	Better alternative than meeting people in person
2	Better alternative for people who have trouble meeting people
2	Safety concerns
4	Other
14	No answer

ASK IF SAYS ONLINE DATING SITES AND APPS HAS A MOSTLY NEGATIVE EFFECT (ONIMPACT=2) [n=1,181]:

ONIMPACT_NEG What is the main reason you think online dating sites and dating apps have a mostly negative effect on dating and relationships? [OPEN-END RESPONSE, CODED ANSWERS SHOWN BELOW]

Oct 16-28, 2019

37	People are scammers/misrepresent themselves
14	Lack of personal or emotional interaction
11	Just not a good way to meet people
10	Focus is on sex/hookups, not meaningful relationships
10	People have too many options of people to date
8	Safety concerns
4	Emphasizes physical traits
3	Facilitates cheating
1	People are impolite/Ghosting/Sexual harassment
6	Other
16	No answer

ASK ALL:

ONSUCCESS

Compared to relationships that begin in person, in general, do you think relationships where people first meet through an online dating site or dating app are... **[RANDOMIZE RESPONSE OPTIONS 1 AND 2, WITH OPTION 3 ALWAYS LAST]**

Oct 16-28, 2019

5	More successful
38	Less successful
54	Just as successful
2	No answer

ASK ALL:

ONSAFE

In general, how safe do you think online dating sites and dating apps are as a way to meet people?

Oct 16-28, 2019

3	Very safe
50	Somewhat safe
36	Not too safe
10	Not at all safe
1	No answer

ASK IF EVER USED AN ONLINE DATING SITE OR APP (ONLINEDATE=1) [n=2,094]:

ONPROBLEM

Thinking of some things that may happen on online dating sites and dating apps, as far as you know, how common are each of the following? **[RANDOMIZE ITEMS]**

		<u>Very common</u>	<u>Somewhat common</u>	<u>Not too common</u>	<u>Not at all common</u>	<u>No answer</u>
a.	People being harassed or bullied Oct 16-28, 2019	25	37	33	3	2
b.	People receiving sexually explicit messages or images they did not ask for Oct 16-28, 2019	48	33	15	2	1
c.	People lying about themselves to appear more desirable Oct 16-28, 2019	71	25	2	1	*
d.	Privacy violations, such as data breaches or identity theft Oct 16-28, 2019	18	41	37	3	2
e.	People setting up fake accounts in order to scam others Oct 16-28, 2019	50	34	13	2	1

ASK IF EVER USED AN ONLINE DATING SITE OR APP (ONLINEDATE=1) [n=2,094]:

ONEXPGEN Overall, would you say your OWN personal experiences with online dating sites or dating apps have been...

Oct 16-28, 2019

14	Very positive
43	Somewhat positive
33	Somewhat negative
9	Very negative
1	No answer

RANDOMIZE ONFEELa-c**ASK IF USED AN ONLINE DATING SITE OR APP IN THE PAST YEAR (ONLINEDATE2=1,2)****[n=871]:**

ONFEELa In general in the past year, has using online dating sites or dating apps made you feel more... **[RANDOMIZE RESPONSE OPTIONS 1 AND 2, WITH OPTION 3 ALWAYS LAST]**

Oct 16-28, 2019

32	Confident
25	Insecure
43	Neither
*	No answer

ASK IF USED AN ONLINE DATING SITE OR APP IN THE PAST YEAR (ONLINEDATE2=1,2)**[n=871]:**

ONFEELb In general in the past year, has using online dating sites or dating apps made you feel more... **[RANDOMIZE RESPONSE OPTIONS 1 AND 2, WITH OPTION 3 ALWAYS LAST]**

Oct 16-28, 2019

29	Optimistic
35	Pessimistic
36	Neither
*	No answer

ASK IF USED AN ONLINE DATING SITE OR APP IN THE PAST YEAR (ONLINEDATE2=1,2)**[n=871]:**

ONFEELc In general in the past year, has using online dating sites or dating apps made you feel more... **[RANDOMIZE RESPONSE OPTIONS 1 AND 2, WITH OPTION 3 ALWAYS LAST]**

Oct 16-28, 2019

28	Hopeful
45	Frustrated
27	Neither
*	No answer

ASK IF EVER USED AN ONLINE DATING SITE OR APP (ONLINEDATE=1) [n=2,094]:
 ONEXP Have you ever... **[RANDOMIZE ITEMS]**

		Yes, have <u>done this</u>	No, have not <u>done this</u>	No <u>answer</u>
a.	Gone on a date with someone you first met through an online dating site or dating app Oct 16-28, 2019	77	23	*
b.	Been in a committed relationship or married someone you first met through an online dating site or dating app Oct 16-28, 2019	39	61	*
c.	Come across the online dating profile of someone you already know offline Oct 16-28, 2019	63	37	*

ASK IF EVER USED AN ONLINE DATING SITE OR APP (ONLINEDATE=1) [n=2,094]:

ONPROFILES When you have used online dating sites or dating apps, how important was it to you, if at all, that the profiles you looked at included the following?
[RANDOMIZE ITEMS; SPLIT OVER 2 SCREENS]

		Very <u>important</u>	Somewhat <u>important</u>	Not too <u>important</u>	Not at all <u>important</u>	No <u>answer</u>
a.	Hobbies and interests Oct 16-28, 2019	36	49	11	3	1
b.	Political affiliation Oct 16-28, 2019	14	31	31	23	1
c.	Religious beliefs Oct 16-28, 2019	25	32	29	14	*
d.	Occupation Oct 16-28, 2019	17	43	29	11	*
e.	Racial or ethnic background Oct 16-28, 2019	19	27	32	22	1
f.	Height Oct 16-28, 2019	15	32	34	18	1
g.	If they have children Oct 16-28, 2019	45	29	17	8	1
h.	Type of relationship they're looking for Oct 16-28, 2019	63	29	6	2	1
i.	Photos of themselves Oct 16-28, 2019	71	24	5	*	*

ASK IF EVER USED AN ONLINE DATING SITE OR APP (ONLINEDATE=1) [n=2,094]:

ONFIND

When you used online dating sites or dating apps, how easy or difficult was it for you to find people on online dating sites or dating apps who... **[RANDOMIZE ITEMS]**

		<u>Very easy</u>	Somewhat <u>easy</u>	Somewhat <u>difficult</u>	Very <u>difficult</u>	No <u>answer</u>
a.	You were physically attracted to Oct 16-28, 2019	28	43	24	5	1
b.	Shared your hobbies and interests Oct 16-28, 2019	15	49	30	6	1
c.	Were looking for the same kind of relationship as you Oct 16-28, 2019	20	41	31	8	1
d.	Seemed like someone you would want to meet in person Oct 16-28, 2019	18	46	29	6	1

ASK FORM 1 IF USED AN ONLINE DATING SITE OR APP IN THE PAST 5 YEARS (FORM=1 AND ONLINEDATE2=1-3) [n=697]:

ONMSGF1

Thinking about the messages you have received on online dating sites or dating apps, would you say you have received... **[RANDOMIZE RESPONSE OPTIONS 1 AND 2, WITH OPTION 3 ALWAYS LAST]**

Oct 16-28, 2019

17	Too many messages
43	Not enough messages
40	Just about the right amount
*	No answer

ASK FORM 2 IF USED AN ONLINE DATING SITE OR APP IN THE PAST 5 YEARS (FORM=2 AND ONLINEDATE2=1-3) [n=701]:

ONMSGF2

Thinking about the messages you have received on online dating sites or dating apps, would you say you have received... **[RANDOMIZE RESPONSE OPTIONS 1 AND 2, WITH OPTION 3 ALWAYS LAST]**

Oct 16-28, 2019

13	Too many messages from people you were interested in
54	Not enough messages from people you were interested in
32	Just about the right amount
1	No answer

ASK IF EVER USED AN ONLINE DATING SITE OR APP (ONLINEDATE=1) [n=2,094]:

ONHARASS

Thinking about your own personal experiences, has someone ever done any of the following to you ON AN ONLINE DATING SITE OR DATING APP?

[RANDOMIZE ITEMS]

	Yes, this has <u>happened to me</u>	No, this has not <u>happened to me</u>	No <u>answer</u>
a. Called you an offensive name Oct 16-28, 2019	28	71	1
b. Threatened to physically harm you Oct 16-28, 2019	9	91	*
c. Sent you a sexually explicit message or image you didn't ask for Oct 16-28, 2019	35	64	*
d. Continued to contact you after you said you were not interested Oct 16-28, 2019	37	62	*