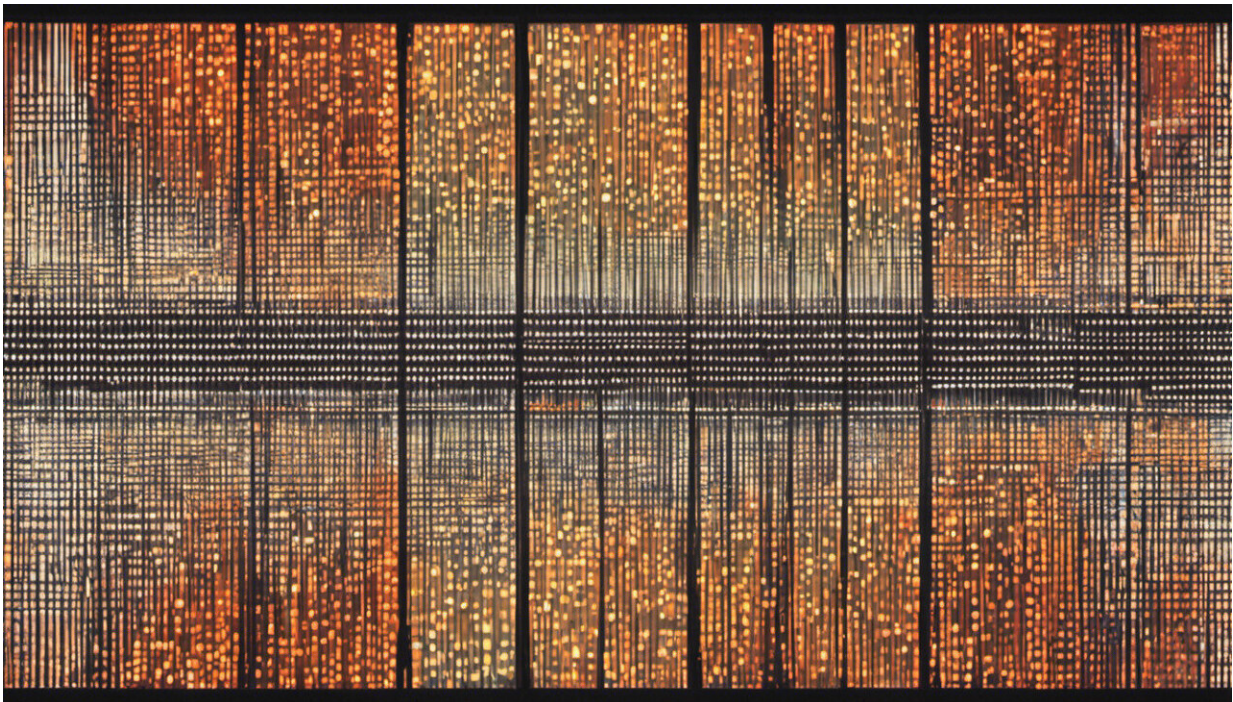


# Groping, grinding, grabbing: New research on nightclubs finds men do it often but know it's wrong

November 27 2018, by Alfred Allan, Aimee-Rose Wrightson-Hester And Maria Allan

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

We have conducted what we believe to be Australia's first [quantitative research](#) on young people's [behaviour in nightclubs](#) and the findings present a disturbing picture.

The research suggests that [behaviour](#) is taking place at these clubs that would be criminal if non-consensual, and totally unacceptable at the very least.

However, the behaviour is somehow tolerated – in some cases almost encouraged. Many [young people](#) think they are too conservative, and that the behaviours they witness must be normal and acceptable in a nightclub setting—so they just put up with it.

Men engage in this conduct – such as groping, grabbing, and pinching a person on the buttocks – far more than [women](#). Our research was confined to behaviour between heterosexual men and women. The respondents came from across Australia.

On the relatively rare occasions when women initiate such conduct, respondents of both genders regard this as somewhat more acceptable than when it's men engaging in the conduct.

## **A values and accountability-free zone?**

On any given weekend, young Australians flock to nightclubs and bars to have a good time and, in many cases, find a sexual partner. For years, nightclubs have been hot spots for [sexual behaviour](#) that would be deemed out of order in any other setting.

We hear of women who avoid nightlife settings because they dislike their "grab, grope and grind" culture. We also know these behaviours can potentially cause some people to feel [degraded, threatened or distressed](#) .

In our study, we explored the norms of sexual behaviour in nightclubs and bars as experienced by 381 young Australians.

They comprised 342 women and 39 men, all of whom identified as

heterosexual. They were aged 18 to 30 and had been to nightclubs in the past six months. We recruited them using [social media](#), given the high level of adoption of these platforms by nightclub-goers. We were able to find only 39 male respondents because it's very hard to get men to open up on this subject. Statistically, this is less than ideal.

We posed the various scenarios listed below, then reversed the role of male and female for each scenario. The third scenario—grinding—is clearly non-consensual, and so would amount to criminal assault. The other scenarios might well amount to criminal assault if non-consensual.

Both genders are more accepting of these behaviours if the perpetrator is a woman.

This finding is difficult to explain. The explanation is likely to be complex, but several factors probably play a role.

It could be that the rise of feminism and the associated sexual liberation of women might have influenced participants from both genders to be more accepting of these behaviours [by women](#).

## Types of nightclub behaviour surveyed

We found our 381 survey participants - 342 women and 39 men - using social media, widely used by nightclub-goers. Men engaged in this behaviour far more than women.

Behaviour	Scenario	Questions
Kissing	John tries to kiss Sarah after she accepts a drink from him.	How acceptable is John's behaviour? How often does this behaviour occur?
Dancing	Daniel is dancing in a crowd and Patricia grabs his bum.	How acceptable is Patricia's behaviour? How often does this behaviour occur?
Grinding	John starts grinding on Sarah and touching her body, Sarah tries to move away, John doesn't stop.	How acceptable is John's behaviour? How often does this behaviour occur?
Grabbing	Patricia grabs Daniel's bum as he walks past.	How acceptable is Patricia's behaviour? How often does this behaviour occur?

All participants were presented all four sexual behaviors twice, once with male/female and again with a female/male recipient/actor construction. Credit: Chart: The Conversation

### Men's behaviour more likely to cause harm

Or could it be that participants believed this type of behaviour by men could [cause more harm](#) to recipients than women would cause. This belief is also echoed in the media and society, where the voices of male survivors of sexual assault by women are dismissed or belittled as the harm caused to them is often perceived to be less than that of a [female victim](#). Women are sexually assaulted by men in far greater numbers than the number of men sexually assaulted by women.

In follow-up questions we posed after the study, several men indicated that the more attractive the woman engaging in the unacceptable

behaviour was—attractive as perceived by the respondent making the judgement—the more acceptable the behaviour would be. No woman said anything similar of such behaviour by men.

Other research has previously found that men are welcoming of most sexual behaviour in [nightlife settings](#). In relation to the rare instances of women groping men at [nightclubs](#), men have said women cannot help themselves around a young attractive man and that they, the men, do not see the behaviour as a threat – more as a [self-esteem boost].

## **People think they must be more prudish than their peers**

Participants in our study reported they often observe these four behaviours in nightlife settings. Why do they suppress their personal values in this setting and not in others?

Many young people wrongly think that most other people find the behaviours acceptable. Research shows it's a common phenomenon for people to wrongly think they are [more conservative](#) than their peers. They therefore subjugate their personal values in nightlife settings because they think most other people find the behaviour acceptable.

Another reason is patrons find it difficult to identify whether the behaviour is consensual or not. The continuum of consensual sexual behaviour in nightlife settings extends much further than in most other public settings, such as workplaces or the street—that is, an act that would clearly be assault on the street might conceivably be mutually consented to by two people in a nightclub.

Some people go to nightlife settings to find sexual partners, and flirting and [hook-up behaviours](#) often occur. There can also be significant

pressure on people, [especially men](#), to find a [sexual partner](#), which can lead to riskier and more [aggressive sexual advances](#).

## So what's the solution?

Nightlife settings serve an important social function as a place where young people relax, socialise, develop their social identities and find [sexual partners](#). Society should allow them that opportunity, but at the same time the nightclub should not necessarily be a place where personal values and integrity are left at the door.

The lock-out laws in some states are an overreaction by authorities to engineer change in these environments. But how can young people bring the right balance to what happens in [nightlife settings](#)?

One possible way forward is to use what we academics call "normative interventions." Such interventions involve first letting young people know what the majority of them actually think, and that is that "grabbing, groping and grinding" in nightlife settings is wrong. Just because it seems like everyone is doing it, doesn't make it OK.

The next step is to encourage patrons to speak up when such behaviours occur, whether they are the victim or a bystander. Research in other settings shows it's possible to develop programs that encourage people who observe [such behaviour](#) to intervene, such as confronting the perpetrator or reporting the incident to authorities. In further [research](#) currently underway, we are looking more closely at the role of consent in nightclub conduct.

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