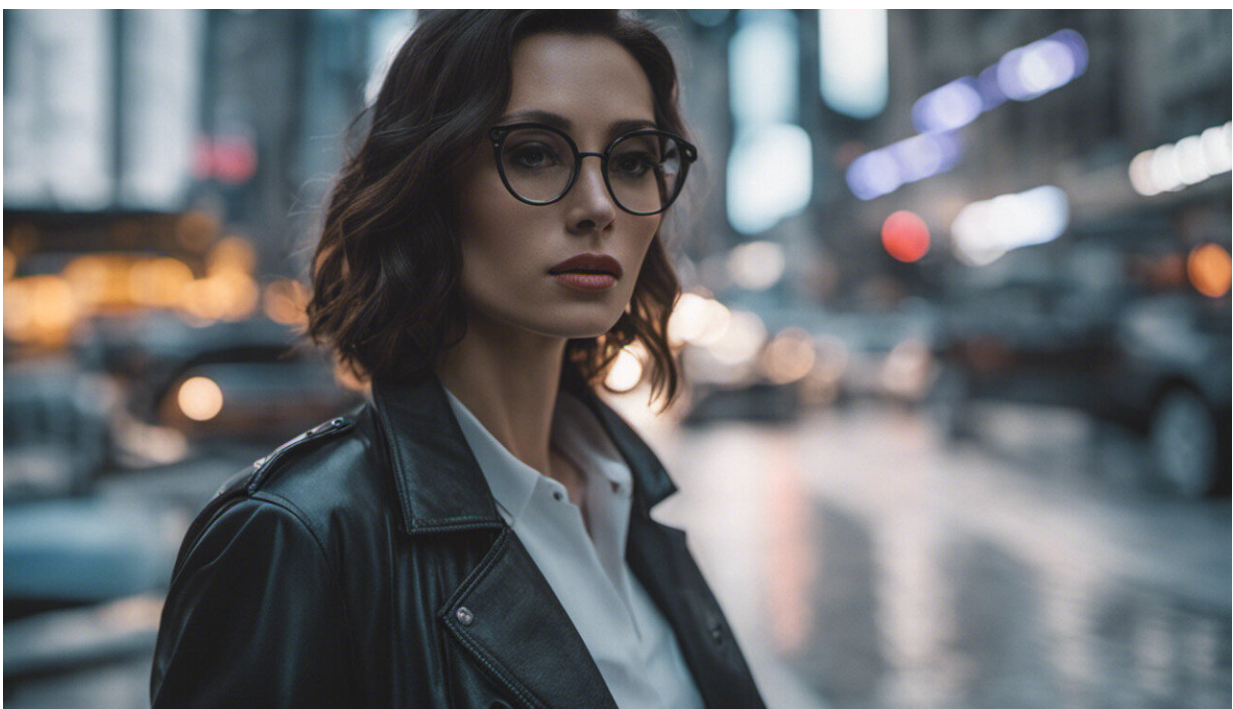


Are we dating the same guy? Online groups toe the line between protecting women and defaming men

October 5 2023, by Treena Orchard and Erika Chamberlain



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

Infidelity and deception have always been part of dating and relationships. Traditionally managed privately between the parties or through legal processes, these issues have recently been co-opted by online vigilante communities that [shame daters](#)—men in

particular—who behave badly.

But are these [online communities](#) about more than shaming? Do they also safeguard women from getting exploited or hurt?

These questions are being debated in London, Ont., where a man featured on the Facebook group "Are We Dating the Same Guy? London, Ontario" [launched a defamation lawsuit](#) against one of its administrators alleging he was called names, accused of sending lewd photos and labeled a bad parent.

As scholars who specialize in dating culture and defamation, this case is intriguing to us for the legal precedent it may set. It could also have far-reaching implications for people in the online dating world and anyone using social networking platforms.

Social media sites enable users to potentially reach millions of people instantly. With that reach, the risks and impacts of defamation can be far greater.

As university educators working in environments where online dating is widespread and incidents of gender-based and [sexual violence occur often](#), we're also interested in what this case could mean for [university students](#).

Are we dating the same guy?

The first group was launched on Facebook in New York in 2022 by women who wanted to protect one another from men who cheat, are violent or exploit them financially.

Since then, groups have sprouted up in hundreds of cities across [North America](#), [Europe](#), the [United Kingdom](#) and [Australia](#). Men in Toronto

have retaliated by also creating their own Facebook page: [Are We Dating the Same Girl?](#)

Members of the women's groups post information about "red flag" men using screenshots of dating app profiles, text exchanges and sometimes memes. [Many posts](#) are anonymous, contain trigger warnings and are difficult to read because they detail awful instances of coercion, assault, racism, extortion and abuse.

However, the degree to which these groups actually protect women is up for debate and so is the purpose they serve. In some instances, these groups may be used to make [false claims](#) about men.

Online dating groups

Online posts stating that someone has behaved poorly in the dating context could be considered defamatory. Men whose reputations suffer from the information featured in the groups [could sue](#) the people posting and the group administrators for defamation, especially if they are of high social or professional standing and have a lot to lose.

Post-writers might [defend themselves](#) against accusations of defamation through the defense of "truth." The rationale for this defense is that a person cannot sue for reputational harm if the statement made about them is in fact true.



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

However, this defense would require posters to prove their allegations are true. We know from [decades of experience](#) that this can be especially difficult in stereotypical "[he said/she said](#)" situations.

Post-writers might also raise a "qualified privilege" defense. This protects someone against civil liability for defamatory statements made to [protect the interests](#) of another party, a common interest or the public interest.

Although these groups were established to protect women from toxic or dangerous men, it's unclear whether [group members](#) have a legal or [moral duty](#) to share and receive this information, which is the hallmark of qualified privilege.

If any information is shared with malice or includes statements that exceed what is necessary to protect someone's interests, the post-writers cannot rely on this defense. This means that vitriolic statements or gratuitous complaints about someone's dating behavior aren't protected by qualified privilege.

Gender-based violence on campus

Online dating, social media posting and defamation have unique implications for university campuses where additional dynamics are at play.

Students who experience distressing dating experiences, including gender-based and sexual violence, may post the names and photos of the perpetrators online to call out violence and protect fellow students. However, in doing so they could be vulnerable to defamation suits if they cannot legally prove that the statements are true.

Individuals labeled offenders could [bring defamation claims](#) or complaints against their accusers under student codes of conduct.

This happened at Yale University when a former [student was sued for defamation](#) after she reported that a fellow [student](#) had raped her. In 2018, a fired Yukon College instructor also [sued a student](#) who accused him of sexual assault and posted about it online.

Such cases could escalate campus tensions regarding safety issues and make it harder for people to [come forward about sexual assault](#), which are already infrequent due to fears of being disbelieved, shamed by peers or reliving the traumas related to the events.

More safeguards needed

The romantic escapades of celebrities once dominated news headlines, but in our digital society, anyone's dating life can be thrust into the spotlight. Are We Dating the Same Guy? groups highlight the thorny social and legal implications of posting what could be considered defamatory content.

The proliferation of these groups across the globe means we must reflect on the complicated world of online dating, where there is little protection for daters and few ramifications for people who behave badly.

The potential for students to be pulled into similarly complex legal battles is equally important to consider. To safeguard students, universities should ensure they are able to come forward about abuse, whether to file formal complaints or to obtain other supports.

Universities should also consider distributing information about [online dating](#) and social media issues so students better understand their rights and risks when it comes to gender-based and sexual violence, dating and [campus safety](#).

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Are we dating the same guy? Online groups toe the line between protecting women and defaming men (2023, October 5) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-10-dating-guy-online-groups-toe.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.