

## Swipe with Caution: Assessing the Dangers of Online Dating

Mikayla Howard

Tinder. Bumble. Hinge. If you are a millennial or an older gen-z, chances are you or someone you know has tried these or similar dating apps in the hopes of swiping right into love. You or your friend are not the only ones who are trusting the black box algorithm to find your better half. As of 2023, 349 million people worldwide use a dating app to find a romantic partner.<sup>1</sup> Based on a survey done by Forbes, 45% of respondents found their significant others on dating apps, only about 20% of respondents found love at a bar.<sup>2</sup> The prevalence of the use of dating apps does not prevent, however, the dangers associated with meeting a stranger from the internet in person. People, especially women, have come up with creative ways to keep themselves safe while navigating the dating scene. This blog will quickly highlight some of the dangers of online dating, the creation of the Facebook community Are We Dating The Same Guy, and the subsequent lawsuit.

Dating apps inherently come with risks, especially for women, who have been found to face more risks when using dating apps than men.<sup>3</sup> Dating apps have little to no vetting or background checks, meaning that anyone can make an account.<sup>4</sup> This opens users up to falling victim to potential scams or catfishing, which is when someone takes photos or information about another person and uses them to create a new identity for themselves.<sup>5</sup> Dating apps have been described as an “open hunting ground,” because dating apps allow for immediate interactions with a greater number of people than most people would normally come in contact with during a night out, which makes the chances of meeting someone with ill intentions much more likely.<sup>6</sup> Violent sexual predators have realized that dating apps are the perfect hunting ground to find vulnerable women. A study found that dating app facilitated sexual assault cases had more frequent instances of physical injuries and higher rates of assault against those with self-reported mental illness, in comparison to sexual assaults committed by an acquaintance (known as date rape).<sup>7</sup> Even more alarming, when looking at women who reported being raped between 2017-2020, 14% reported being raped during a first time meet up with someone from a dating app.<sup>8</sup> Dating apps have attempted to implement various safety measures, such as making users verify themselves through selfies, making available online background checks, or

---

<sup>1</sup> David Curry, *Dating App Revenue and Usage Statistics (2024)*, BUS. OF APPS, <https://www.businessofapps.com/data/dating-app-market/> (last updated Mar. 12, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> Carley Prendergast, *The State Of Dating in America in 2024: Emotional Cheating Ranks Higher than Physical Cheating*, FORBES, <https://www.forbes.com/health/dating/state-of-dating/> (last updated Jan. 25, 2024, 11:00 AM).

<sup>3</sup> Sofia Andrade, *Mixing Dating Apps and Travel can Be Dangerous. Be Careful.*, WASH. POST. (Feb. 6, 2024, 1:59 PM), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/travel/tips/dating-apps-safety-advice/>.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*; *What Is Catfishing Online? Signs and How to Tell*, FORTINET, <https://www.fortinet.com/resources/cyberglossary/catfishing> (last visited Mar. 29, 2024).

<sup>6</sup> Andrade, *supra* note 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> Angie Moreschi & Alex Brauer, *Dating App Danger: Research Shows Violent Sexual Predators Hunt For Victims on Apps*, TND, <https://thenationaldesk.com/news/spotlight-on-america/violent-sexual-predators-use-dating-apps-as-hunting-grounds-for-potential-victims-study-finds-tinder-bumble-match-grindr-dating-violence-assault-byu-brigham-young-university-provo-utah-links-date-dates-meeting-in-public> (last updated Apr. 11, 2023, 2:53 PM).

“including anti-harassment prompts that proactively intervene if harmful language is detected”.<sup>9</sup> These safety features have done little to fully protect women from the dangers of online dating.

This gap in the safety provided by dating apps is the reason why Are We Dating the Same Guy (also known as AWDTSG) was created. The private Facebook group was initially created in 2022 by Paola Sanchez as a safe space for women in New York City to share stories and dating experiences about local men in order to protect other women from potentially dangerous or toxic men.<sup>10</sup> The group quickly spread like wildfire and now encompasses approximately 3.5 million women throughout the 200 location specific private Facebook groups.<sup>11</sup> There are even international based groups for London, Brisbane, and Dublin.<sup>12</sup> The Facebook group even spawned an AWDTSG website full of resources, including links to states by state sex offender search engines and court record searches.<sup>13</sup> Despite the implications of its name, the group is more about protecting women before they go on a date with a man than trying to figure out if the man they are seeing is cheating on them (although some women do ask if anyone has seen their partner on dating apps).

A typical post is a screenshot of a dating profile or a selfie of the man that a woman is currently talking to and intending to meet in person and asking the group for any red flags. Another similar post would be the same information but, instead of red flags, a rundown of an experience they had that serves as a warning to other women in the groups. Women are not allowed to post any identifying information about the men such as their address, phone number, or last name because the goal is to get information to ensure they are in a safe situation and not dox the men that they speak to.<sup>14</sup> Other women will then reply with their experience with the man in question, either negative or positive. In essence, it is somewhat of a Yelp for online dating apps. AWDTSG acts as a way for women to crowdsource their own safety and adds another layer of protection when it comes to using dating apps.

Tens of thousands of women around the world have said that the private groups have made them feel safer, escape a bad situation, avoid danger, or have simply just prepared them when meeting someone for the first time, according to Sanchez.<sup>15</sup> Despite this high praise and the efforts by the numerous volunteers who moderate the groups, many people, specifically men, do not see the groups as a tool for safety but rather as a platform for gossiping and slandering men within the area. Social media simultaneously can be a tool for safety as well as an arena for public persecution.<sup>16</sup> Since its inception, AWDTSG has been met with criticism. Groups focused on men’s rights have launched Reddit pages attacking the groups, mass reporting the Facebook pages, and creating their own similar groups such as Are We Dating the Same Girl? in retaliation.<sup>17</sup> Some men have even gone as far as infiltrating the groups by creating fake profiles pretending to be a woman or using the Facebook page of a female friend or family member.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Andrade, *supra* note 3; Moreschi & Brauer, *supra* note 8.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Walrath-Holdridge, ‘Are We Dating the Same Guy?’ *What to Know About Controversial Facebook Groups at Center of Lawsuit*, USA TODAY, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/health-wellness/2024/01/18/are-we-dating-the-same-guy-facebook-groups/72268061007/> (last updated Jan. 18, 2024, 10:19 PM).

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> Emilie Lavinia, ‘Are We Dating the Same Guy:’ *The Dark Side of These Online Groups*, VICE (May 26, 2023, 3:45 AM), <https://www.vice.com/en/article/dy375q/are-we-dating-the-same-guy-facebook-groups>.

<sup>13</sup> Walrath-Holdridge, *supra* note 10.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> Lavinia, *supra* note 12.

<sup>17</sup> Walrath-Holdridge, *supra* note 10.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

The biggest criticism is that, since men are forbidden from joining the private groups, they cannot defend themselves against any lies or misrepresentations.<sup>19</sup> Claims made in the groups have led to men “being questioned by employers, losing relationships, and spiraling emotionally over accusations they insist are untrue.”<sup>20</sup> Many men find out about themselves being posted in the groups from a female friend or acquaintance, which is strictly against the rules of the group.<sup>21</sup> Women who are found to be “moles” or “snitches” are removed from the group, blacklisted, and held out to not be “a girl’s girl.”<sup>22</sup> Women have reported being confronted by the very men that they warned others about, which is the reasoning behind removing women who have been found to have told.<sup>23</sup> Telling men about the fact that they have been posted in the groups have disastrous, even fatal, consequences. A woman in Columbus, Ohio warned other women about her ex-boyfriend in the Columbus AWDTSG group. A few days later her ex-boyfriend stabbed her and cited her posting “dispiriting comments on social media about him” as his motivation when he confessed.<sup>24</sup>

Nikko D’Ambrosio took his dislike for the group a step further. In January, the Chicago man filed a lawsuit in the district court for the Northern District of Illinois against 27 women, including Sanchez, one man, and Meta.<sup>25</sup> He alleges that the post about him in the Chicago area group defamed him, violated anti-doxing law, and impeded on his right to privacy. Aside from a jury trial, the complaint is also asking for damages in excess of \$75,000 for emotional distress, humiliation, and reputational damage that has resulted in lost wages.<sup>26</sup> In addition, he is seeking injunctive relief to forbid future posts from being made about him.<sup>27</sup> In response to the lawsuit, Sanchez created a GoFundMe that has raised \$80,000 from supporters as of February 2024 and plans to aggressively fight the lawsuit.<sup>28</sup>

Overall AWDTSG, when used properly, can be an empowering and safe space for women to protect themselves when attempting to navigate the rocky and sometimes dangerous terrain of online dating. The purpose of this blog is not to discourage any women from partaking in crowdsourcing information about dating app matches but emphasize the importance in doing so in a way that does not open you to more danger. The biggest takeaway from this is that even though these are private groups with the option to post anonymously, information may leave the group by way of other women showing male friends or by court order in which Meta would be required to hand over identifying user information.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, when posting about an encounter with a man, it is important to stick to verifiable facts and be mindful of potential claims that come with any online publication such as defamation, online harassment/cyberbullying, invasion of privacy, tortious interference with a prospective

---

<sup>19</sup> Lavinia, *supra* note 12.

<sup>20</sup> Brittany Shammass & Marisa Iati, *Are We Dating the Same Guy? Facebook Groups Offer Intel but Upend Lives.*, WASH. POST (Mar. 2, 2024, 6:00 AM), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2024/03/02/dating-same-guy-facebook-groups/>.

<sup>21</sup> Lavinia, *supra* note 12.

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> Shammass & Iati, *supra* note 20.

<sup>24</sup> *Id.*

<sup>25</sup> Walrath-Holdridge, *supra* note 10.

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> Shammass & Iati, *supra* note 20.

<sup>29</sup> Kohrman Jackson & Krantz LLP & Alexandra Arko, *Are We Dating the Same Guy? The Legal Implications of Posting Your Dates on Facebook*, JD SUPRA (Jan. 24, 2024), <https://www.jdsupra.com/legalnews/are-we-dating-the-same-guy-the-legal-7934962/>.

advantage/contract, and intentional infliction of emotional distress.<sup>30</sup> Also know that deleting a post does not negate a legal claim.<sup>31</sup> With all this in mind, continue to protect yourself and prioritize safety when it comes to online dating.

---

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*