

# Local "Are We Dating the Same Guy?" Facebook Page Aims to Keep Women Safe, Creator Says

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter  
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ALTON - Loryn Harbers knows two women who were killed by men.

The first was a friend of Harbers's; it took a week to find her body. The second was a distant relative, who disappeared on a first date. These tragedies led to Harbers creating a Facebook group that has garnered both controversy and gratitude throughout the Riverbend region: "Are We Dating the Same Guy? -Alton, IL."

This private Facebook group, open to women only, allows members to post pictures of men they have dated or want to date. Posters encourage each other to share stories about the men, specifically if they have any history of violence or abuse. The goal, Harbers explained, is to keep women safe.

"We get the restraining orders, we get the orders of protection, but a piece of paper doesn't protect us from dangerous men," she said. "And so the group was really just meant to get women together so that we can protect ourselves, because at this point, it doesn't seem like the government is doing anything for us anymore. Women are dying every day. A woman goes on a run, she dies. A woman neglects a man, she dies. A woman turns down a man, she dies. We have to, at this point, protect ourselves. And that's really what the group is for."

Many major cities have a Facebook group that follows the "Are We Dating the Same Guy?" format, but Alton's is a hyperlocal way to talk about men in the area. The group has grown exponentially since its creation one year ago, with almost 3,000 members from around the Riverbend and St. Louis area.

Harbers is not surprised by the group's growth. One in three women and one in four men will experience physical violence, rape or stalking from an intimate partner in their lifetime. She pointed out that the Facebook group allows women to talk about these experiences while offering help to others in the area who are going through it.

"This is an alternative, to open doors to where people do feel safe, where if you've encountered this, another woman has, too. And we have clues and tips on how to help or next steps," she explained. "It's been really spectacular to see it grow and on top of that, just to see the sisterhood come together...This was just a platform for women to talk to other women, because we've all experienced it."

But not everyone agrees with these intentions. The Facebook group's description reads, "This is a FRIENDLY place to catch the scandalous men in our lives but also if you just need some clarity before settling down with a special someone." Sometimes the posts are less about safety and more about hurt feelings. Harbers has also received many messages from men threatening litigation against her, most of whom say the Facebook posts constitute slander and defamation of character.

Harbers said that the group doesn't aim to slander anyone. She works with moderators to remove posts that violate the guidelines, including those that aren't relevant to the group's mission.

"I don't have any ill intentions with trying to ruin a man's reputation or anything like that," she said. "The group is only a year old so we still have to fish out the women who are posting for ill intention, because that's not what the group is for. We're not here to let you post about, oh, you know, this man was terrible to you because he wasn't giving you what you want. This is about protecting women."

And, she said, a lot of the women have the evidence to back them up. Some people have police reports. Others post screenshots of text conversations or snippets of recordings from Ring doorbells where abuse is audible. Harbers pointed out that it can be difficult to file a police report or get an order of protection, and some women find that word-of-mouth is the best way to warn one another.

"A lot of the women that came forward, these men already had charges on them. All you have to do is look it up," Harbers said. "The thing is, a lot of the women that post, they come with receipts. So it's not really defamation if she's showing the evidence...The only thing I can say is that a majority of the time these women post receipts. They're not really posting for slander or defamation because the intent of the group isn't for any ill will towards men. We're just doing what we can to protect ourselves."

But it can be taxing for Harbers, who sometimes worries if she did the right thing by creating this platform. One member was attacked by an ex after posting about him in the group. It's not new for women to warn each other about abusive partners or talk behind closed doors about violence they've experienced, but there are risks that come with posting about it online.

"That's a daily conscious thought that I battle. Am I really keeping women safe, or am I making it worse?" Harbers said. "The benefit for social media is that we are able to reach so many people and we're able to have these types of conversations not only behind closed doors but on platforms as well. Women's rights are constantly evolving or being taken away, and it keeps us more on task with what our goal is, and that's to keep women safe."

To that end, the group will stay active and continue to grow. Harbers has lost two people to violence, but she'll do what she can to stop others from going through the same thing.

“We just want to do our part to look out for someone else’s daughter, someone’s sister, someone’s aunt, someone’s niece,” she added. “Our ultimate goal is really to protect one another, and this is a way that we can...At least we’re doing our part to help another sister.”