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# Neighbor a cheat? It's easy to tattle

**True or not, Web sites name lying spouses, drunks, even bad tippers**

**By Rhonda Bodfield Bloom**

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Somewhere around Tucson, according to drivehonest.com, there's a driver of a black Dodge pickup whose aggressive language is matched only by aggressive driving.

The Web site I Saw Your Nanny reports that an attractive, petite nanny was spotted at the turtle playground at Reid Park in August secretly drinking a beer hidden in her handbag.

And sites such as womansavers.com and cheaternews.com detail accusations of infidelity against Tucsonans, with full names and sometimes places of work and even snarky anatomical descriptions.

Want to know who? Dying for all the gritty details? Web sites are increasingly naming names, or at least posting descriptions, pictures and license plate numbers, of people supposedly caught in the act of violating social norms.

This kind of turbo-charged tattling, driven by citizen snooping, is creating a host of privacy and ethical issues.

How would you like to be the Arizona woman who is accused of having sex in her purple Ford on a daily basis in a Safeway parking lot?

Or the Tucson man, whose full name is used on one Web site, who is accused by an anonymous poster of using cocaine and abusing alcohol?

Even less-serious allegations can be upsetting.

Take the case of Paradise Valley resident Martin Nason, a 62-year-old CPA who retired in July. Nason was surprised to find he got a mention on bitterwaitress.com, where food servers complain about customers who leave lousy tips. In this case, the server noted that Nason left \$2 on a \$16.82 bill at a pizza and salad place.

"I am dumbfounded. It's incredible that people can say bad things about people that may or may not be true, and here it is, online for everyone to see," Nason said. Nason added he consistently tips at least 20 percent at restaurants he frequents, but left a smaller tip in this case because it was a to-go order — a nuance not made clear on the Web site.

"I think the Internet is a fantastic thing," said Nason, who uses it to trade on eBay and to do research, such as obtaining information on his wife's upcoming knee replacement surgery. "But for something like this, there's no way of stopping it, and there's no way to refute it. Where does it end?"

In this case, it will end with Nason calling the manager to advise him that the restaurant lost a faithful customer.

**Litterbugs reported on Web site**

## Shame site links:

[drivehonest.com](http://drivehonest.com)

[I Saw Your Nanny](http://I_Saw_Your_Nanny.com)  
[womansavers.com](http://womansavers.com)

[cheaternews.com](http://cheaternews.com)

[bitterwaitress.com](http://bitterwaitress.com)

[litterbutt.com](http://litterbutt.com)

[Holla back NYC](http://Holla_back_NYC.com)

[ratemyprofessor.com](http://ratemyprofessor.com)

[ratemyteacher.com](http://ratemyteacher.com)

[YouTube newspaper snatcher](http://YouTube_newspaper_snatcher.com)

Residents of Pennsylvania, Texas and North Carolina can report litterbugs to [litterbutt.com](http://litterbutt.com), and the offenders will get a letter from the state notifying them they were caught littering and letting them know there are fines for such behavior.

Subway riders in New York City who are fed up with harassers can fight back at [hollabacknyc.blogspot.com](http://hollabacknyc.blogspot.com), where women can post photos of transgressors. The motto? "If you can't slap 'em, snap 'em."

Got a bad neighbor? Emulate California resident Tim Halberg, who was fed up with someone stealing his newspaper, and busted his neighbor by putting a film of the alleged paper-snatcher on YouTube. **(Watch the video)**

Daniel Solove, a law professor at George Washington University, explores the boom in shame sites in his new book, "The Future of Reputation: Gossip, Rumor and Privacy on the Internet."

The book is full of cautionary tales about how gossip, once restricted to whisper campaigns within limited circles, is fast creating indelible stains, driven by the Web. The piling-on by gleeful cyber-vigilantes often punishes people out of proportion to the infraction, he notes.

He opens the book with the story of so-called "dog-poop girl," a South Korean who was caught on camera in 2005 refusing to pick up after her pooch did its business on the subway. Bloggers later identified the woman, whose story raced over the Internet, attracting mainstream attention and ultimately leading to her withdrawal from her university.

"It's similar to being forced to wear a digital scarlet letter or being branded or tattooed," Solove writes. "People acquire permanent digital baggage. They are unable to escape their past, which is forever etched into Google's memory."

For all practical purposes, anyway.

In an e-mail, Google spokesperson Eitan Bencuya said the company does not publicly release the number of requests it receives from people hoping to remove Web content.

Generally, however, customers are advised that search engines, such as Google or Yahoo, cannot remove content directly from the Internet. Instead, individual Webmasters or hosting companies should be contacted. Once it has been removed and Google has verified the content has been changed, the information will no longer appear in Google's search results, Bencuya said.

### **Lawsuits costly, time-consuming**

What are the remedies?

Defamation law still protects people from smears, but lawsuits tend to be expensive and time-consuming. And what if the information is true, but you didn't expect to find it published online for all to see? You might get some relief by citing privacy concerns, but again, it's a long and dicey slog.

And some would argue there is little expectation anymore that privacy will be respected, in an age when even performance reviews are increasingly public.

Many students log onto sites such as [ratemyprofessor.com](http://ratemyprofessor.com) or [ratemyteacher.com](http://ratemyteacher.com), for example, to review a professor's clarity, ease and helpfulness — and even note if the professor is "hot" enough to rate a chile pepper as well.

Charlie Bertsch, an English professor at the University of Arizona, rated a respectable 3.5 out of 5 on the site. While, alas, he did not get a chile pepper, he did warrant a smiley face overall. Still, he said, he finds the site ridiculous, given that the statistical sample is so small, with only 10 students weighing in.

"There's no screening or anything like that, and it's completely anonymous," he noted, adding he knows colleagues who have posted funny comments about other professors on the site as a joke. "It doesn't worry me so much, but at the same time, if a student has a vendetta and posts something that's unfair, it's pretty alarming that people will use that information to gauge the relative teaching ability of different people."

A blogger himself, Bertsch is fascinated by how society is navigating new media, now that anyone with a blog can be a political pundit and anyone can get his or her 15 minutes of fame on YouTube.

"The lines between public and private lives have blurred, leaving this in-between space. And the line between public figures and private figures has also substantially blurred," Bertsch said. "If you're Brad Pitt, you're used to this. If you're Hillary Clinton, it comes with the territory. But that territory is increasingly our territory as private citizens. And you can't go back. We'll never be private the way we were 10 years ago."

Keep that in mind next time you tip your server.

On StarNet: Find links to the shame sites and watch a YouTube video of the alleged paper snatcher at [azstarnet.com/dailystar](http://azstarnet.com/dailystar).

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YouTube newspaper snatcher

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