

Research on the Ideological and Political Education of College Women's Online Narratives after Breakups

-- A Case Study of a University in Northwest China

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Abstract

In the new media era, while college students expand their social spaces through online platforms, they also amplify the dissemination of information. Against this backdrop, "relationship records" and other gossip-related content among college students have repeatedly triggered online public opinion. The accusers and audiences of such information are primarily college students, which may influence the value judgments of the student community. As the main arena for the fermentation and spread of such information, universities should enhance both preliminary guidance and subsequent management. This study takes cases collected over the past three years from a university in Northwest China as examples to examine the characteristics of online narratives in which female college students denounce "scumbags" after experiencing breakups. Furthermore, it analyzes the underlying motivations and proposes guidance and response measures. The study aims to enhance young students' individual cognition, suggests that universities strengthen ideological and political education to manage online risks, and calls on relevant authorities to standardize regulations and purify the online environment.

Keywords

Denouncing "Scumbags"; Young Female College Students; Breakup; Online Narrative.

1. Problem Statement: Types and Modes of Breakup Narratives among Young Female College Students

"Romantic relationships" constitute a significant component of emotional support for contemporary young students. Against this backdrop, this study examines nearly twenty cases of undergraduate female students denouncing "scumbags" at a university in Northwest China between 2021 and 2024 (see the appendix for details). By categorizing these cases, three primary narrative types emerge: (1) purely textual accusations, (2) image-text hybrid accusations with blurred details, and (3) image-text hybrid accusations with explicit exposure of ex-boyfriends' personal information. The first type typically does not attract public attention, whereas the latter two may involve third-party interference or other motives. The third type, in particular, risks violating privacy rights, triggering public backlash, and even leading to the accused facing "social death." Indeed, some cases in this study have sparked spillover effects, such as gossip spreading to neighboring universities.

Generally, the breakup narrative methods of young female college students can be classified into three categories: (1) Peer Confiding: Based on Granovetter's strong-tie theory, they tend to seek emotional and informational support from close friends after a breakup. This traditional approach helps alleviate emotional distress. (2) Breakup Diaries: As a form of self-therapy, writing allows young female students to process painful experiences through reflection, reducing anxiety and fostering emotional resilience. Compared to peer confiding, this is a more private healing process. (3) Online Narratives: These primarily include two subtypes-post-90s generations prefer closed social media platforms for private support, while post-00s generations are more inclined toward public platforms to seek social validation through weak-tie networks.

These narrative types and methods reflect generational differences in emotional expression and support-seeking behaviors among young female college students. At the same time, they highlight the potential risks of privacy violations and legal consequences associated with online narratives. The study finds that the subjects often rationalize their denunciations without fully recognizing the severity of their actions. As a generation with strong awareness of rights protection but emotional vulnerability, they require guidance in knowledge systems, values, and emotional maturity to prevent impulsive actions from crossing legal boundaries. Grounded in sociological theory, this research investigates the phenomenon of online breakup narratives among young female college students.

2. Feature Analysis: Common Characteristics and Hidden Concerns in Young Female College Students' Online Breakup Narratives

The act of denouncing "scumbags" leverages public opinion to expose and condemn misconduct in romantic relationships, safeguarding the legitimate rights and dignity of aggrieved young female college students while raising public awareness. From this perspective, such behavior is imbued with a sense of justice. However, at its core, it represents a form of "vicarious satisfaction" rooted in the simplistic notion of "fighting violence with violence," which risks crossing legal boundaries.

2.1. The Simplistic Notion of "Fighting Violence with Violence"

The online recounting of breakup experiences by young female students at a university in Northwest China reflects a deep-seated belief in "fighting violence with violence"-a manifestation of the just-world hypothesis ingrained in collective social consciousness. The just-world hypothesis reflects individuals' strong expectation of fairness and order in their environment, where people inherently desire a world governed by justice and rules [1]. Influenced by this belief, the aggrieved party seeks public exposure of the other's wrongdoing, hoping to elicit social condemnation and moral scrutiny.

While this "fight violence with violence" approach may appear effective in the short term, a deeper analysis from the perspective of social psychology and behavioral dynamics reveals its potential to spiral out of control. These negative breakup narratives, laden with heightened emotions and cathartic venting, can gradually foster self-blame, anger, and anxiety among young female students, ultimately harming their mental well-being. Moreover, given the volatile nature of online discourse, they may also face risks such as cyberbullying and backlash, further exacerbating psychological distress.

2.2. Providing Vicarious Satisfaction

The phenomenon of online "scumbag" sanctions resonates with many netizens primarily because it fulfills the psychological needs of emotionally wounded women-offering a form of vicarious satisfaction. Vicarious satisfaction occurs when individuals, unable to achieve their goals directly, adopt alternative means to attain similar psychological relief, as if their pain has

been alleviated and their anger and resentment have found an outlet, thereby experiencing a sense of retributive justice[2].

Within the female student community, sharing breakup narratives publicly serves as a medium for emotional exchange, triggering collective memories and empathetic resonance among those with similar experiences. This process allows other female students to experience indirect emotional release and psychological compensation, a phenomenon often humorously referred to online as "feel-good revenge stories." Such narratives, which provide vicarious satisfaction, can help repair the emotional wounds of victimized female students.

2.3. Crossing Legal Boundaries

The act of denouncing "scumbags" online, which involves unauthorized disclosure of personal information, clearly violates legal principles of privacy protection. The accused may suffer reputational damage due to negative public judgment. As noted, "post-breakup evaluations of an ex-partner and past relationships are a form of emotional expression, but they must not devolve into defamatory rants that breach legal limits" [3]. In the intertwined realms of cyberspace and real society, whether addressing formal rights claims or personal emotional venting, individuals-be they former intimate partners or strangers-must exercise legal awareness and ethical restraint, handling post-breakup matters through lawful, rational, and measured means.

Furthermore, "scumbag" denunciations exhibit a unilateralist tendency, violating principles of procedural justice and evidentiary rigor by directly imposing moral judgment and condemnation, thereby undermining fairness. Online breakup narratives, often presented as "personal essays," are heavily influenced by subjective emotions, with descriptions of "scumbag" behavior based on the narrator's personal interpretation rather than comprehensive, objective observation. Consequently, such narratives fall short as credible evidence of the accused's wrongdoing. "All justice must be pursued through due process; otherwise, the pursuit of justice may yield unjust outcomes" [4]. "Extreme privacy violations accompanied by verbal abuse" constitute a blatant defiance and violation of procedural justice.

3. The Fog of Confusion: Underlying Causes of Online Breakup Narratives among Female College Students

3.1. Emotional Catharsis

The mood maintenance hypothesis suggests that individuals in positive emotional states tend to avoid risks to preserve their current mood, whereas those in negative emotional states are more inclined to take risks to improve their emotional condition [5].

"In the immediate aftermath of a breakup, individuals are in a state of emotional stress, and their judgment and decision-making are heavily influenced by transient emotions" [6], leading to heightened emotion-driven decision-making. Specifically, post-breakup emotions drive the female students in these cases to adopt risky behaviors as a means of emotional release, seeking temporary relief from inner pain and discomfort through stimulation, challenges, or potential positive outcomes. At this stage, online denunciations of "scumbags" become a form of psychological solace-a risky yet immediate way to restore self-identity and emotional equilibrium. Despite potential consequences such as privacy breaches and social judgment, the short-term cathartic effect often dominates their decision-making.

3.2. Seeking Social Support

Social support theory posits that individuals seek support-both material and emotional-from their social networks when facing life stressors.

By posting in online communities, young female college students aim to gain understanding, sympathy, and support from netizens. Many who share similar experiences gather to form communities built on collective emotional resonance. Within these spaces, they not only confide their struggles but also exchange advice and encouragement. Their narratives contribute to broader social discourse, breaking the long-standing silence surrounding emotional harm and prompting deeper societal reflection. When their stories receive validation, they perceive their post-breakup emotions as legitimate and justified. This recognition reinforces their self-worth and fosters a sense of societal respect.

3.3. Gaining Group Identity

Group identity refers to an individual's sense of belonging to a collective, including alignment with its values, goals, and behavioral norms, and a willingness to adhere to them [7]. The "scumbag" denunciation narrative not only solidifies female students' self-perception as victims of romantic harm but also strengthens their identification with shared group values.

This group identity first encompasses self-identity—a process of introspection through which individuals define "who I am" [8]. Some female students frame themselves as "victims" or "brave truth-tellers," using this identity to defend their rights and dignity. A clear self-identity helps them recognize the significance of individual and collective efforts in overcoming adversity, empowering them to take charge of their life trajectories.

Second, it includes cultural identity, defined as an individual's emotional attachment to their cultural group [9]. The online spaces frequented by female students are highly attuned to women's rights, where feminist discourse and influencer rhetoric converge to create an environment encouraging female expression. In this context, those who identify with these values feel more compelled to voice their authentic thoughts and experiences.

3.4. Closure Through Public Farewell

Online narratives serve as a public declaration of breakup, making the separation unequivocal [10]. This phenomenon reflects the expectation of consistency in one's digital persona—a virtual "showroom" where every trace must align with real-life identity. Failure to publicly signal emotional closure may be misinterpreted as unresolved attachment, potentially hindering new relationships or even being perceived as disrespect toward future partners. The healthiest way to move on is to swiftly recalibrate one's mindset and re-engage socially as a single individual, thereby expanding social circles and creating opportunities for new connections.

Studies show that post-breakup, people often adopt strategies such as changing their appearance, making new friends, exploring unfamiliar social activities, setting fresh life goals, or reevaluating personal values to embark on a new chapter [11]. For female students, sharing breakup stories online aids in self-redefinition and emotional recovery. After a relationship ends, the once-shared intimacy dissolves, requiring them to gradually shed identities tied to their ex-partners and rediscover their independent selves.

4. Solutions: Ideological Guidance and Responses to Young Students' Online Breakup Narratives

Under the spillover effects of internet media, young students are increasingly resorting to online platforms to publicly denounce romantic partners. This phenomenon has evolved from written "scumbag exposés" to more elaborate formats like PDFs and PPTs, and is now expanding into audio and video content. Notably, accusations are no longer limited to "scumbags" (male targets) but have extended to "scumbelles" (female targets), fueling an increasingly volatile "gender war" with significant destructive potential. To address the issues reflected in this study—specifically, young female college students' online breakup narratives

and the resulting gender conflicts-the following measures are proposed to guide this demographic constructively:

4.1. Individual Level: Enhancing Personal Awareness

(1) Implementing Effective Emotional Management Strategies

Emotional perception, expression, and interpersonal relationship management are indispensable aspects of personal growth. Proficient emotional regulation is not only a hallmark of psychological maturity but also a critical skill for social integration. As societal expectations for college students intensify, mastering emotional control becomes paramount. Breakups, while challenging, serve as pivotal experiences that foster emotional maturity and personal development. By learning to manage emotions and cope with heartbreak healthily, students can mitigate harm and derive growth-bolstering resilience, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal skills.

(2) Cultivating Ethical Online Conduct

Contemporary college students must develop robust digital literacy to contribute to a wholesome online environment. The current internet landscape is marred by sensationalism, inadequate platform moderation, and heightened emotional reactivity, all of which exacerbate chaos. Students should remain discerning consumers of online content, verifying information and resisting manipulative narratives. Crucially, they must prioritize rational decision-making over emotional impulses. Additionally, young adults should recognize the non-constructive and hazardous nature of vigilante-style "justice" online, rejecting blind endorsement of such methods. Privacy protection-both for themselves and others-is equally essential.

4.2. Institutional Level: Managing Online Risks and Strengthening Values Education

(1) Mitigating Online Risks and Public Sentiment

The rapid dissemination of polarized online content profoundly influences students' perspectives and behaviors. While exposure to diverse viewpoints can hone critical thinking, extreme or toxic rhetoric risks demoralizing young audiences. Universities must prioritize guiding students to engage with online information judiciously, minimizing adverse impacts-a key focus for ideological and political education.

To address trending topics like relationships and ideology, universities should leverage big data and AI to establish platforms. Such tools can amplify institutions' online influence while fostering students' rational engagement with societal issues. Furthermore, implementing scientific early-warning mechanisms for online sentiment enables counselors and ideological educators to monitor dynamics proactively, safeguarding campus cyber environments [12]. These systems can curb cyberbullying and personal attacks, promoting constructive discourse.

(2) Deepening Education on Relationships and Life Values

Universities should intensify guidance on the essence of love, romantic ethics, and relational accountability. As a microcosm of life philosophy, one's approach to romance and life goals are deeply interconnected. Students who grasp life's broader purpose navigate relationship conflicts more adeptly and build healthier partnerships. A positive outlook on love also shapes psychological growth and informs future life choices.

To achieve this, educators must employ interdisciplinary theories (e.g., pedagogy, psychology, sociology) for holistic student development. For psychological struggles arising from romantic setbacks, universities should provide counseling and therapeutic support, helping students overcome obstacles and build emotional resilience.

4.3. Societal Level: Establishing Online Ethical Standards

Generation Z college students, having grown up in the digital era, are constantly exposed to a chaotic influx of diverse information. This exposure often leads to ideological turbulence, with some individuals exhibiting weakened moral awareness and behavioral misconduct. There is an urgent need to strengthen online ethical education and guide students toward proper digital conduct to mitigate the negative impacts of the internet.

(1) Accelerate the Development of Legal Frameworks for Cyber Ethics to Establish Regulatory Mechanisms

In the face of the vast and uneven quality of online information, creating a clear and orderly cyberspace has become a necessity of our times. This requires a multidimensional approach incorporating legal, administrative, and technological measures to ensure the rule of law, standardization, and order in the online society. Such efforts will safeguard the internet as a space for healthy information exchange, intellectual discourse, and cultural prosperity.

Relevant authorities should optimize existing cyber laws and regulations, taking into account the unique cultural background, psychological development characteristics, and information discernment capabilities of Chinese college students. The goal is to establish a legal framework that aligns with China's national conditions while effectively protecting the rights of student netizens and online organizations. This framework must balance the promotion of healthy ideological exchange with robust legal safeguards, encouraging students to engage rationally and constructively in the digital world.

Additionally, internet regulatory bodies must strengthen oversight of online communities, improve institutional mechanisms, standardize online operations, and enhance content ecosystem governance to maintain a clean and positive cyberspace.

(2) Strengthen the Development of Cyber Culture on Online Media Platforms

Online platforms must intensify video content review processes to promptly identify and remove disruptive material, thereby curbing cyber violence at its source. This responsibility not only fulfills platforms' obligations but also protects users' legitimate rights, fostering a healthier online environment.

Platforms should also encourage rational discussion and cultivate an objective, fair commenting culture to prevent emotionally charged rhetoric from escalating into cyberbullying. As primary channels of information dissemination, platforms are obligated to establish comprehensive codes of conduct that firmly oppose insults, personal attacks, and other harmful behaviors, ensuring the protection of users' rights and dignity.

5. Conclusion

While the twenty "scumbag" denunciation cases from a university in Northwest China represent only a fraction of breakup narratives among young students, their impact is magnified by today's online environment. Similar accusations against "scumbags" or "scumbelles" frequently trigger public opinion storms on campuses and beyond. Such phenomena have become commonplace across universities, where exaggerated attention from peers often distorts perceptions of social norms, significantly influencing young people's views on love and marriage. The resulting gender opposition and "gender wars" can also be exploited by certain groups to manipulate public discourse.

Therefore, proactive measures are essential-whether through enhancing individual awareness among youth, strengthening ideological education in universities, or establishing societal and national-level regulations to purify online culture. Vigilance and coordinated action are imperative to address these challenges effectively.

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Appendix

Table 1. Summary of "Scumbag Denunciation" Cases at a Northwest China University (2021-2024)

Case No.	Narrative Summary	Boyfriend's Info Exposed?	Third Party Involved?	Post Format	Primary Purpose
1	Relationship account +accusations	Yes	Yes	Text+Images	Exposure+Accusation
2	Relationship account +accusations	Yes	Yes	Text+Images	Exposure+Accusation
3	Relationship account +accusations	Yes	Yes	Text+Images	Exposure+Accusation
4	Relationship account +accusations	Yes	Yes	Text+Images	Exposure+Accusation
5	Relationship account +accusations	Yes	Yes	Text+Images	Exposure+Accusation
6	Relationship account +accusations	Yes	Yes	Text+Images	Exposure+Accusation
7	Relationship account +accusations	Yes	Yes	Text+Images	Exposure+Accusation
8	Relationship account +accusations	Yes	Yes	Text+Images	Exposure+Accusation
9	Relationship account +accusations	Yes	Yes	Text+Images	Accusation
10	Relationship account +accusations	No	Yes	Text+Images	Accusation
11	Relationship account +accusations	No	Yes	Text+Images	Accusation
12	Relationship account +accusations	No	Yes	Text+Images	Accusation
13	Relationship account +accusations	No	Yes	Text Only	Accusation
14	Relationship account +accusations	No	No	Text Only	Accusation
15	Relationship account +accusations	No	No	Text Only	Accusation
16	Relationship account +accusations	No	No	Text Only	Accusation

Key Features:

1. 87.5% of cases (14/16) involved detailed relationship accounts combined with accusations
2. 56.3% (9/16) exposed the boyfriend's personal information
3. 75% (12/16) mentioned third-party involvement
4. 68.8% (11/16) used multimedia formats (text + images)
5. 100% contained accusatory content, with 50% (8/16) having explicit exposure purposes

Note: All cases were collected from public posts on Chinese social media platforms (WeChat, QQ, and campus social networks). All identifiable personal information has been anonymized for research purposes.