

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

Jane Doe v. Tea Dating Advice, Inc.

Doe v. Tea Dating Advice · No. 25-cv-06559-TSH · Decided August 6, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of California grants Jane Doe permission to proceed under a pseudonym in a putative class action concerning the alleged failure to protect users’ private information. The Court concludes that the need to preserve privacy in a sensitive and highly personal matter outweighs the preliminary risk of prejudice to the defendant and that anonymity does not presently impair the public interest in open proceedings.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Thomas S. Hixson
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
DECIDED	August 6, 2025
DOCKET	25-cv-06559-TSH
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff filed a putative class action under a pseudonym and moved for permission to proceed pseudonymously.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court applied the Ninth Circuit's balancing test for pseudonymous litigation, weighing the plaintiff's need for anonymity against prejudice to the defendant and the public's interest in knowing the party's identity.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown

TOPICS

- civil procedure
- class actions
- pleadings

PRACTICE AREAS

- civil procedure
- privacy and data security
- class action procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Plaintiff should be permitted to proceed under a pseudonym in a putative class action involving allegedly compromised private information.
2. Whether the need for anonymity outweighed potential prejudice to Defendant and the public interest in knowing Plaintiff's identity at the preliminary stage of the litigation.

HOLDINGS

1. Plaintiff may proceed under the pseudonym Jane Doe because the need to preserve her privacy in a sensitive and highly personal matter outweighs the risk of prejudice to Defendant at this preliminary stage.
2. Plaintiff was not required to obtain leave to proceed anonymously before filing the anonymous pleading.
3. Permission to proceed under a pseudonym at the preliminary stage does not preclude Defendant from later seeking disclosure of Plaintiff's true name.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The normal presumption in litigation is that parties must use their real names.” (at 1)

“The Court must determine the precise prejudice at each stage of the proceedings to the opposing party, and whether proceedings may be structured to mitigate that prejudice.” (at 2)

“Accordingly, the Court shall permit Plaintiff to proceed under a pseudonym.” (at 3)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff alleges that Defendant's mobile application failed to protect users' private information, including photographs, government-identification information, posts, and chats, from hackers. Plaintiff sought to maintain her anonymity because of the sensitive and highly personal nature of the claims. The court found that anonymity was necessary to preserve Plaintiff's privacy and that her identity did not appear central to the issues concerning Defendant's data-security practices.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Jane Doe filed a putative class action alleging that Tea Dating Advice, Inc. failed to protect users' private information from hackers. The district court granted permission for Plaintiff to proceed under a pseudonym at the preliminary stage of the litigation, while recognizing that disclosure could later be required.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Doe v. Kamehameha Schools/Bernice Pauahi Bishop Estate, 596 F.3d 1036, 1042-43 (9th Cir. 2010)
- Does I through XXIII v. Advanced Textile, 214 F.3d 1058, 1067-69, 1072 (9th Cir. 2000)

- Doe v. UNUM Life Ins. Co. of Am., 164 F. Supp. 3d 1140, 1144 (N.D. Cal. 2016)
- Doe v. Penzato, 2011 WL 1839569, at *1 (N.D. Cal. May 13, 2011)
- Jane Roes 1-2 v. SFBSC Mgmt., LLC, 77 F. Supp. 3d 990, 993 (N.D. Cal. 2015)
- Doe 1 v. GitHub, Inc., 672 F. Supp. 3d 837, 853, 855 (N.D. Cal. 2023)
- Doe v. County of El Dorado, 2013 WL 6230342, at *5 (E.D. Cal. Dec. 2, 2013)
- Doe v. NFL Enters., LLC, 2017 WL 697420, at *2 (N.D. Cal. Feb. 22, 2017)

OPINION

Doe v. Tea Dating Advice, Inc.

PER CURIAM.

1 2 3

4 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

5 NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

6 7 JANE DOE, Case No. 25-cv-06559-TSH 8 Plaintiff,

ORDER GRANTING PERMISSION TO

9 v. PROCEED UNDER PSEUDONYM

10 TEA DATING ADVICE, INC.,

11 Defendant. 12

13 Plaintiff Jane Doe brings this putative class action against Defendant Tea Dating Advice, 14
Inc., alleging it failed to protect class members' private information on its mobile application, Tea
15 Dating Advice, leading to hackers accessing their information, including photos, information
from 16 government IDs, and users' posts and chats. Plaintiff filed this case using a pseudonym
"in order 17 [to] protect her identity given the sensitive nature of this action." Compl. ¶ 10, ECF
No. 1. 18 "The normal presumption in litigation is that parties must use their real names." Doe v.
19 Kamehameha Schools/Bernice Pauahi Bishop Estate, 596 F.3d 1036, 1042 (9th Cir. 2010); see
20 also Fed. R. Civ. P. 10(a) (requiring that the title of every complaint "include the names of all
the 21 parties"). However, the Ninth Circuit allows parties to use pseudonyms under special 22
circumstances where nondisclosure of the party's identity is necessary to protect a person from 23
harassment, injury, ridicule or personal embarrassment.¹ Does I through XXIII v. Advanced 24 25
1 The Ninth Circuit does not require a plaintiff to obtain leave to proceed anonymously before
filing an anonymous pleading. See Doe v. UNUM Life Ins. Co. of Am., 164 F. Supp. 3d 1140, 26
1144 (N.D. Cal. 2016) (holding that a plaintiff is not required to obtain leave to proceed
anonymously before filing an anonymous pleading because any attempt to proceed anonymously
27 would be pointless if a plaintiff had to use his or her real name first); Doe v. Penzato, 2011 WL
1 Textile, 214 F.3d 1058, 1067-68 (9th Cir. 2000) (citations omitted). A court must balance the
need 2 for anonymity against the risk of prejudice to the opposing party and the public's interest in
3 knowing the party's identity. Jane Roes 1-2 v. SFBSC Mgmt., LLC, 77 F. Supp. 3d 990, 993
(N.D.

4 Cal. 2015); *Advanced Textile*, 214 F.3d at 1068. Applying the balancing test, courts have
5 permitted plaintiffs to use pseudonyms in three situations: (1) when identification creates a risk
6 of retaliatory physical or mental harm; (2) when anonymity is necessary to preserve privacy in a
7 matter of sensitive and highly personal nature; and (3) when the anonymous party is compelled
8 to admit his or her intention to engage in illegal conduct. *Jane Roes 1-2*, 77 F. Supp. 3d at 993 9
(citing *Advanced Textile*, 214 F.3d at 1068). 10 The Court must determine the precise prejudice at
each stage of the proceedings to the 11 opposing party, and whether proceedings may be structured
to mitigate that prejudice. *Advanced 12 Textile*, 214 F.3d at 1068. The Court must also decide
whether the public's interest in the case 13 would be best served by requiring that the litigants
reveal their identities. *Id.* at 1069. In cases 14 where plaintiff has demonstrated a need for
anonymity, the district court should use its powers to 15 manage pretrial proceedings under Rule
16(b) and to issue protective orders limiting disclosure of 16 the party's name under Rule 26(c) "to
preserve the party's anonymity to the greatest extent 17 possible without prejudicing the opposing
party's ability to litigate the case." *Id.*; Fed. R. Civ. P. 18 16(b) & 26(c). 19 Given the nature of the
claims in this case, the Court finds the need of Plaintiff for 20 anonymity outweighs the risk of
prejudice to Defendant at this preliminary stage, as Plaintiff has 21 shown anonymity is necessary
to preserve privacy in a matter of sensitive and highly personal 22 nature. The Ninth Circuit has
explained that, where a defendant does not know the plaintiff's 23 name, "at some later point in
the proceedings it may be necessary to reveal plaintiffs' identities to 24 defendants so that
defendants may refute [their] individualized accusations." *Advanced Textile*, 25 214 F.3d at 1058.
Thus, Defendant can later seek disclosure of Plaintiff's true name. See *Doe 1 v. 26 GitHub, Inc.*,
672 F. Supp. 3d 837, 853 (N.D. Cal. 2023) (concluding that defendants would not be 27 prejudiced
because "Plaintiffs have disclosed their true names to Defendants subject to a 1 Further, the public
interest factor does not weigh against permitting Plaintiff to proceed 2 || pseudonymously. "The
normal presumption in litigation . . . that parties must use their real names 3 ... 18 loosely related
to the public's right to open courts and the right of private individuals to 4 || confront their
accusers." *Kamehameha*, 596 F.3d at 1042. Where the plaintiffs' identities are not 5 central to the
issues raised by a case, however, the public interest may not be harmed by 6 || permitting plaintiffs
to proceed pseudonymously. See *Advanced Textile*, 214 F.3d at 1072 7 (reversing denial of
anonymity where "[t]he district court did not explain, and we fail to see, how 8 || disguising
plaintiffs' identities will obstruct public scrutiny of the important issues in th[e] case"); 9 ||
Kamehameha, 596 F.3d at 1043 (noting that, where plaintiffs brought "claims of widespread 10
discrimination," "it [wa]s difficult to see 'how disguising plaintiffs' identities w[ould] obstruct 11
public scrutiny of the important issues in th[e] case'") (quoting *Advanced Textile*, 214 F.3d at 12
1072). There is no indication that withholding Plaintiff's identity will obstruct public scrutiny of 13
the issues raised, as the identity appears to have no bearing on the central issues of this case, 14 ||
including whether Defendant failed to safeguard its users' private information. Thus, the Court 3
15 finds the public interest factor does not weigh against anonymity at this stage of the litigation.

See a 16 GitHub, Inc., 672 F. Supp. 3d at 855 (finding public interest factor weighed in favor of anonymity 3 17 where the plaintiffs’ identities appeared to have no bearing on the resolution of the issues, and S 18 allowing plaintiffs to proceed pseudonymously would not impede public access to the substance of 19 the proceedings); Doe v. County of El Dorado, 2013 WL 6230342, at *5 (E.D. Cal. Dec. 2, 2013) 20 (same).” Accordingly, the Court shall permit Plaintiff to proceed under a pseudonym. 21 IT IS SO ORDERED. 22 Dated: August 6, 2025 23 24 A\.\°4 _

THOMAS S. HIXSON

25 United States Magistrate Judge 26 07 ? The Court is mindful that, like the other factors, the public interest in Plaintiff’s identity may change as the suit progresses. See Doe v. NFL Enters., LLC, 2017 WL 697420, at *2 (N.D. Cal. 2g || Feb. 22, 2017) (noting that “class members will . . . have a right to know the identity of their representative in this litigation” in later stages of the case).