

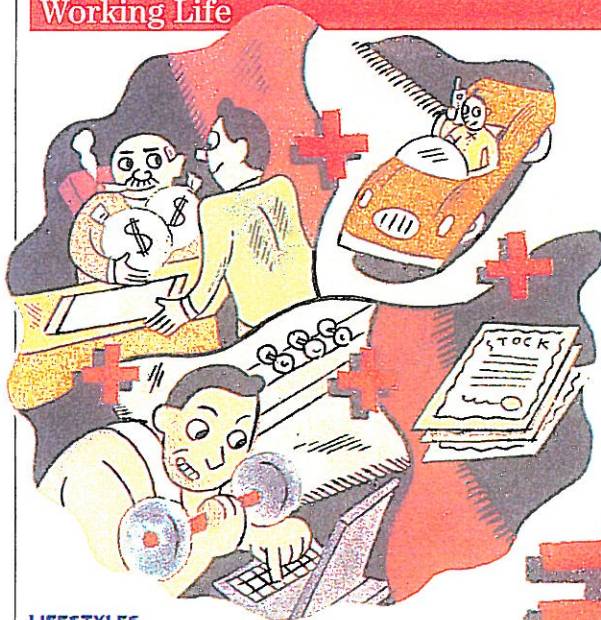


SEX AND THE SINGLE NERD

The high-paid men in the Valley can't find dates

page 126

Working Life



LIFESTYLES

ern Hemisphere with a scarcity of single women. There are 68,000 more single men than women in Santa Clara County, according to market-research firm Claritas. San Jose, for instance, has the biggest single-man surplus of anyplace in America. As one jaded British writer put it, the area resembles "some Muslim country where the women are all in purdah," the tradition of female seclusion. Compare that with the national statistics—43 million single women vs. 36 million single men—and you can see why the date dearth among Valley heterosexuals can be a much more compelling issue than friends-and-family stock.

"WOMEN RULE." In the epicenter of the New Economy, where the labor shortage grips the tightest, this has some recruiters starting to worry about what a turnoff this could be to men mulling a move to the Valley. The women, on the other hand, like it just fine. "This is the best time in history to be a woman in Northern California," says 26-year-old Nicole Lorenzo, a first-year student at Stanford Graduate School of Business. (Note to male readers: She's taken.) "It used to be all these gay men

VALLEY OF NO DOLLS

Silicon Valley has 10 zillion nerds to every one woman

There aren't many things that are hard for a guy to get in Silicon Valley. Here, in the land of a-millionaire-per-minute, the job offers come daily and the venture capital flows freely. The cars are fast, the theme houses ubiquitous. Wireheads beam their contact information to one another via dueling Palm Pilots, rendering business cards obsolete. And who needs to be bothered with picking up the dry cleaning or meeting the cable guy anymore? Even middle managers at Web startups are starting to hire the Valley's new version of a butler: the personal assistant.

But when it comes to a date, the story suddenly gets sad. "I've been searching for a partner for four years, and

it's just—damn—it's hard," sighs 43-year-old Gary Wagner, an accounting manager with the Silicon Valley branch of DreamWorks SKG.

Wagner is no schlumpy bore. This dashing bachelor with a substantial net worth has a great house and a sweet personality. He's in marathon-runner shape and knows how to romance like the songs on AM radio. But, alas, men in the valley are in oversupply—as any stroll past the breakfasts at Il Fornaio in Palo Alto or the electronics swap meets at Foothill College will reveal. Even at the muffin-filled cafés, it feels like a frat house.

The land with the highest-educated, highest-paid workers in the country is also one of the few places in the West-



here, and now it's different." Says 39-year-old engineer Mary Beth McDonald: "I'm just having a blast."

This has led to some entertaining role reversals, with Wagner and his friends sometimes acting like the women on 1970s sitcoms. Instead of talking about golf at cocktail parties, they strategize over the "tough cases"—the women they want to date who are a harder sell than many of their chintziest customers. Wagner says his friends sup-

MARC ROSENTHAL

Working Life

Last year, the annual national singles convention was moved from Alaska to Palo Alto

port one another by giving out reminders on how to stoke a woman's interest, such as "don't elaborate," "keep your answers as short as possible," and "never, ever admit you want a family." Instead, say: "That's a decision two people have to make." Says Wagner: "It's a new paradigm. Women rule."

RELATIONSHIP COACHES. To help men cope, a new cottage industry of relationship coaches and dating services is popping up among the strip malls and clogged highways. Lonely-heart males can now attend seminars that offer such

on the same weekend that many of the men had to jet out to Las Vegas for the Comdex convention. And, in true Silicon Valley fashion, when duty calls, the men go.

That's exactly part of the problem, says Carole Shattil, owner of the Bay Area dating service How About Lunch. The 24-7 nature of the typical high-tech guy's career often means dating takes a back seat to pulling all-nighters so they can get their first three commas by the time they're 30. Plus, many of these engineering types are more absorbed

find themselves clumped in fours on the dance floor, swaying to house music and surrounding one woman.

And she's got a boyfriend.

The drought extends into San Francisco. At the Balboa Café, women sometimes leave the restaurant on weekend nights with four dates slotted for the following week. And these are good ones, as in yacht trips on the bay and jaunts to St. Tropez. So hot are the frequent bashes held by three Bay Area women—who are known as Ladies on the Sauce—that the e-mail

invites spread through the Valley like wildfire. And forget having to persuade a guy to dust off his tux. Charity events are mobbed with single men willing to pay whatever it costs to meet single women. In Palo Alto, it's not uncommon to see bunches of men at hot spots like Zibibbo and Evvia sitting together on Friday nights without a woman in sight.

SHAMELESS. No surprise, then, that the old stigma attached to dating services has vanished. It's now 100% socially acceptable to sign up for Match.com or Matchmaker.com, the online love connectors that allow cyberites to check each other out via the Net.

Other Silicon Valley dating services have gone a step further. At Table for Six Total Adventures & Entertainment, "dating counselors" will arrange for weekly dinners for six strangers—three women and three men. The relationship coaches will also sketch outfits for the men and equip them with a list of exactly what to buy from a Nordstrom shopper. Sometimes, the coaches even recommend teeth bleachers, hairstylists, and glycolic-acid treatments. Some men will even ante up as much as \$10,000 for a matchmaker to help find them a potential bride.

Still, some of the less hopeful are giving up all together, leaving this arid climate for other high-tech hubs such as Boston or Boulder, where the odds are better. Anywhere, so long as there are more women.

By Michelle Conlin in Silicon Valley



TOUGH ODDS: In Santa Clara County, there are 68,000 more single men than women

tidbits as: "The first gatekeeper to sexual attraction is the way you look."

Call it the Alaska of the 21st century. That's what Richard Gosse, founder of American Singles dating service, was thinking last year when he moved his annual national singles convention from Anchorage to the ballroom at the Hyatt Rieckes Hotel in Palo Alto. He even promised to refund the \$35 ticket if the women who poured in by the plane load didn't find at least one good man. Thousands of hopefuls showed up from cities across the country where the odds are less good. Turns out Gosse had the unfortunate luck of scheduling the bash

by motherboards than in hooking up with a would-be mother. Potential romantic partners frequently brandish NDAs—nondisclosure agreements—which are waivers that forbid them to reveal trade secrets of their respective firms. How's that for a romantic moment?

Sometimes, the lack of ladies takes comic turns, especially at Stanford University business school, where the men-to-women ratio is 70-30. In the Class of 2001, the ranks of unattached single women have dropped from 30 to just 20 after a fierce courting war in the fall. Lorenzo says there are now about 200 single men in the class. They often