

MEN'S SPECIAL

# WHO IS IN SILICON VALLEY'S LONELY HEARTS CLUB?

What's it like to be a single woman in the Silicon Valley dating game? Marisa Meltzer investigates



JENNIFER LIVINGSTON/TRUNK ARCHIVE

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**M**oney can buy many things. For the men of Silicon Valley — be they tech founders or lawyers or engineers or venture capitalists — who are often young, devoted to their careers and insanely smart, money is plentiful, even normal. But millions (or billions) of dollars and a place on the Forbes 30 Under 30 can't buy you love, let alone a little swagger.

Consider the Collison brothers: Patrick, 28, and John, 26, who went from awkward teens in County Limerick in Ireland to billionaire owners of Stripe, an online payment company worth \$9.2bn (£7.5bn). When asked about his love life in a recent article, ginger-haired Patrick, “shifts in his seat and gazes at the ground, his freckled face turning a vibrant shade of red”. “We are both single,” he said. “Our dating lives are about as interesting as our downtime. There’s not a whole lot happening. We’re pretty boring.”

And for single women dating in the tech world, the combination of lack of time and lack of confidence can pose something of a challenge. One friend of mine, who we’ll call Sarah, owns a boutique in San Francisco and has gone on at least 25 dates since she moved there in 2014. Only two of them were any good, she told me. One ended because the guy told her he was too busy with his start-up — “in the weeds,” were his words — to date anyone. Another guy checked his email to see if his \$4.4m commercial real-estate bid had been accepted, and paid for their drinks by ostentatiously waving a \$100 bill.

The offering on dating apps isn’t much better. Expect typical profiles to be populated pictures of guys wearing their Google Glass, standing beside their Tesla cars, dressed as Steve Jobs for Halloween — or trying to show how much fun they’re having. “Everybody is hiking, kitesurfing, or skiing, and it’s just not me,” Sarah complains. “If there is a mention of Burning Man, I don’t engage. I had one date in a mezcal bar with a man who told me he was eating a lot of salad to work on his ‘Burning Man body’. I knew then this was not going to work.”



**WHAT MAKES SO MANY MEN SUCCESSFUL IN THE TECH WORLD IS AT ODDS WITH MAKING REAL HUMAN CONNECTIONS**

Activity-based dates seem to be a go-to for techie bachelors. Doree Shafir, a California-based writer at BuzzFeed and author of *Startup: A Novel*, which is about the tech scene in Manhattan (out next month), says: “Start-up guys, particularly founders, just don’t have a lot of time. They’re always working and they feel like if they’re going to spend time and money on a date, it needs to be something impressive, so for a first date they take you to a secret club or to an animal-shelter fundraiser. Meanwhile, I think most women would rather just have a drink or two.”

Amy Andersen, founder of the Silicon Valley matchmaking service Linx Dating, agrees. “Some of the extremely affluent tech guys feel the need to peacock. Instead of having a more subtle, quiet confidence about what he has achieved, he leads with his material possessions, or, quite figuratively, the size of his net worth and all the companies he has sold.” She mentions one client, a repeat offender who couldn’t resist talking about how much money he had made and all his investments, and, to make matters worse, was a chronic name-dropper: “Zuck”, “Elon”, and “Sergey”. To translate: the founders of Facebook, PayPal and Google respectively.

So if men in tech work around the clock, tethered to their smartphones at all times (rumours of phones being whipped out right after or even during sex are not uncommon), the woman who dates them “needs to have her own life outside of their relationship and be independent, and not be needy, otherwise he will run for the hills”, says Andersen. She adds that finding independent women with a lot going on has been a good way to screen out “people who are in it for the wrong reason”.

The problem at the heart of Silicon Valley dating is that what makes so many men successful in the tech world is at odds with making real human connections. Silicon Valley is fast-paced and relentlessly focused on what’s new and next. “Some guys are too cerebral, too analytical, and trapped in their minds,” Andersen says. “They don’t connect enough on a personal level. They churn and burn through interactions and are not only quick to be judgmental, but can also be highly critical of their dates.”

Karen, who works in public relations, moved to San Francisco during the first tech boom of the early 2000s — an aeon ago in Silicon Valley terms — but still remembers it as a mixed bag. “Every date felt like I was going on a pity date, even if the guy made loads of money.” She was then set up by friends with a guy who doesn’t work in tech; she married him and seems to have no regrets. Well, almost none. “I do always wonder whether maybe that boring guy I went out with a few times, who was one of the founding members of PayPal, could have got less boring.” Of course, some girls give the start-up guys the benefit of the doubt: Miranda Kerr is set to marry Snapchat CEO Evan Spiegel later this year. Here’s to a life of Burning Man chat.

## Men most eligible



Top row, from left: Joe Gebbia, Drew Houston, Evan Sharp. Bottom row, from left: Jack Dorsey, Patrick and John Collison

BRAD WENNER, GABRIELA HASBUN/EYEVINE, GETTY, REX

Joe Gebbia 35, co-founder and chief product officer of Airbnb.  
Net worth: \$3.8bn.

Drew Houston 34, CEO and founder of Dropbox.  
Net worth: \$1bn.

Evan Sharp 35, co-founder and chief creative officer, Pinterest.  
Net worth: \$1.1bn.

Jack Dorsey 40, co-founder and CEO of Twitter.  
Net worth: \$1.4bn.

Patrick and John Collison 28 and 26, co-founders of Stripe online payment processing service.  
Net worth: \$1.1bn each.