

How far will a New

There are twice as many women as men in Manhattan, which makes it hard for everyone. Right. Karen Moline on the lengths, depths and pick-up joints to which the desperate city

Truman Capote once compared New York to a diamond iceberg floating in river water. A lovely hunk of ice. Preferably from Tiffany. Dating in New York is just like Truman's conceit: what's above the surface might be dazzling, but it's the treacherous stuff under the water you have to worry about. Meeting people is tough enough: everyone's either too battle-shy, insecure or drained by work to aspire to romance. If you actually meet someone with the Richard Tyler suit, the Frederic Fekkai haircut, the brand new Land-Rover, the entire collection of Trollope and the house in the Hamptons, it's a matter of moments before you wake up to the fact that he's a monster.

Male New Yorkers tend to fall into categories: self-obsessed, unable to commit, married, divorced but screwed-up, gay, too old, too young. Sometimes – if you're really unlucky – some of these categories overlap, and you end up with someone who is a Venn diagram of your worst nightmares. Because it seems that there are twice as many women as men in the city, throngs of smart, civilised and otherwise well-balanced women are waiting for Mr Wrong to return their calls while he's out with a trophy bimbo younger than his daughters from his first marriage. (Take Lee, a 32-year-old entrepreneur who's short and fat and looks just like one of Diane Fossey's mountain gorillas. He just loves New York. 'You can look like me and live like Warren Beatty,' he says, beaming.)

'I'm not into dating children, so I don't get why men want to be with a woman who's 20 years younger,' says Lucy, 36, a broker. 'Sure, she'll flatter his ego and stroke his pathetic mid-life crisis but,

really, what grown-up woman would want to be with a man like that? And doesn't he know we're on to him? I mean, if some young stud-muffin hits on me, I'm flattered, but I don't want to date him; I want to ask if there are any more like him at home. Like his dad.'

Single men, on the other hand, wonder where all the nice girls looking for nice guys have gone. 'We'd been going out for a couple of months, but it wasn't working, so I told her and she got very upset,' says Daniel, 31, a doctor. 'Then the nightmare begins: she's stalking me. She'd show up in restaurants when I'd be with other dates, and sit down; I'd turn a corner and she'd be there. And then one day I come home and she's standing in my bathtub with her mother, trying to remove the shower-head she'd bought me. These two little Park Avenue ladies, in their mink coats, with a wrench. Let me tell you, it was not a pretty picture.'

New York has always attracted the most ambitious Americans who can't imagine, despite all their grumbling, living anywhere less chock-full of stimulation. But perhaps it is this very over-stimulation of the senses – the exhilarating feeling that, yes, there are so many glorious opportunities out there and a better one is lurking just around the corner – that makes romance such an ordeal. Especially when the biological clock starts ticking louder than a police siren and the word *impotent* is suddenly part of your vocabulary.

Nowhere else can you lose yourself in a world of killing glamour and back-stabbing and noise and excitement. Take Charles, 37, famous, adorable, a self-confessed hopeless romantic. Here's his



Barnes & Noble bookstore

83rd Street and Broadway

Talent: arty advertising types (strictly creatives not account handlers).

Dress: Comme Des Garçons, Calvin Klein and Thierry Mugler.

Positive equity: Upper West Side duplex

on the park; large, male golden retriever (not fixed); brand-new, white Toyota Landcruiser stocked with Barbra Streisand CDs; high levels of disposable income.

Negative equity: sexual persuasion (undecided); highly strung; Prozac and

Häagen-Dazs addictions; long, blond dog-hairs; Streisand shrine in spare bedroom, mother fixation.

Looking for: serious friendship/commitment from fellow creative who can contribute to advertising portfolio. No Iron Maiden fans need apply.

Yorker go for sex?

She's twice as likely to end up with Mr Wrong; he only has half the chance of finding Mrs dwellers go in search of the perfect partner... any partner. Photographed by Mark Seelen

dating history: 'First I decided it was OK to date women at work, as long as they weren't in the same elevator bank. Then it was waitresses. Because they like to serve you. Then actresses, but they'll leave you for a producer. Models were next: I realised I don't need to date a genius.'

'Now,' he confesses, 'I've sort of slid into normal women.' Lucky gals, one and all.

Nowhere else are there so many professional cynics, full of anger and devoid of courtesy. 'We were on our second date, at a restaurant with another couple, when he excused himself,' says Amanda, a 28-year-old illustrator. 'He seemed to be gone for the longest time, so I thought he was a junkie. Just my luck, right? So my friend's husband went to see what had happened, and the window was open. He'd crawled out.'

Nowhere else is there such a surfeit of entertainment that it's actually less stressful to stay in with a pint of Häagen-Dazs (there's so much to do you often don't feel like you're missing anything - like marriage). 'He was older and very famous, and for a while our first date was magic: a limo, romantic meal, drinks and dancing,' explains Julianna, 26, a real-estate broker, 'until I realised he was a lot drunker and stronger than me. When we walked through my lobby, where everyone greeted him, and got in the elevator, I was panicking. I pretended not to have my key. He was pawing me all over, and I didn't know what to do, so I punched him. Down he went. Out cold. I *really* panicked, dashed into my apartment and called my father, who was skiing in Aspen. "Daddy," I said, completely

hysterical, "I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is that I got rid of Mr X. The bad news is, I think I killed him." Well, Daddy took care of everything. The worst thing was seeing Mr X with a huge lump on his head the next night at a charity ball.'

Nowhere else has a population with such a finely honed sense of self-preservation. 'I was fed up with the inevitable scenes that came with breaking up, so I told all the women I met that I'd only go out with them for a month, and that was it,' says George, 34, a Wall Street trader. 'Except I liked the first one so much, I renewed her for a month. She really thought she'd got me, so it was still a mess when we split.'

Nowhere else is Woody Allen a psychological role-model. Sherie, a 35-year-old lawyer, tells of a date who told her: 'I've been going to therapy five times a week now, and I realise I just don't like sex with women. The truth is, I should be gay.'

Nowhere else are there so many attractive, accomplished and intelligent singles wondering why, in a city of millions, it is so hard to meet someone normal. He says she only wants me for my trust fund. She says he only wants me for my body. It's easier to retreat and lick your wounds. The rules have changed, except we don't know what the new ones are. We're too busy pretending to be chic to admit we're lonely. We're terrified by diseases and recessions. We're numbed by gender-bashing and threats of sexual harrasment. So forget love. Anything goes, as long as I don't get hurt.

'I don't date. I just have sex,' declares Christian, 29, a model.

New York is also a city of extremes, where you are either in



Equinox Fitness Club

Amsterdam Avenue and 76th Street

Talent: type-A personality bankers, lawyers and magazine editors (from the glossy four: *Vogue*, *Harpers Bazaar*, *Elle* or *Mirabella*).

Dress: women: non-logo-ed baseball caps,

body-hugging Nike or Norma Kamali

OMO gym-wear. Men: loose-fitting

sweat pants, cut-off Ivy-league

T-shirts, bandanas.

Positive equity: money, money

(bankers and lawyers). Superb body, face

and wardrobe (magazine editors).

Negative equity: *ego*. Badly

furnished apartments with wall-to-wall mirrors.

Looking for: superb body, face and

wardrobe (bankers). Superb

body, face and wardrobe (lawyers).

Money (magazine editors).



AT THE BAR...

Belelman's Bar at The Carlyle
Madison Avenue and 76th Street

Talent: socialites, celebs, aristocratic ex-pats.

Dress: eccentric mix of Brooks Brothers

(for men and women), Gucci (original loafers only) and ancient Ralph Lauren.

Positive equity: family crest, dilapidated Cape Cod beach house, waning trust fund, connections.

Negative equity: overbearing parents, depleted trust fund, their very own dress sense.

Looking for: male/female of similar background for social and breeding purposes.



JOGGING...

The running track

Central Park Reservoir at 8am or 7pm

Talent: strictly type-A personalities (even Jackie O used to jog or walk here daily). All ages, all body types, all intent on making it round the loop at least once (one-and-a-half miles).

Positive equity: countless pairs of

Reeboks, two waterproof Sony Walkmans, healthy bank accounts (owing to the fact that they never go out to dinner – they're always running).

Negative equity: poorly dressed – always in sweat pants. Low tolerance factor (due to exhaustion). Idea of entertainment: watching *The Loneliness of the Long*

Distance Runner – on video.

Looking for: fellow jogger obsessed with the idea of running the New York Marathon and/or losing half a stone. Only dedicated followers of Bob Glover need apply (Glover gives over-subscribed running classes in Central Park on weekday evenings).

Alcoholics Anonymous or sozzled, an unrepentant chain-smoker or a step-class fanatic, a flesh-guzzling eco-destroyer or a pass-the-beans vegetarian. This would make the planning of dinner parties (the preferred London howdy-do) a bit of a headache, except that no one in New York entertains at home, because most kitchens are either the size of a closet or have been converted into one. Real estate is so expensive and apartments so small that a choice between a beau and an expanded bathroom becomes an existential dilemma.

But New Yorkers are nothing if not resourceful and tenacious. When we've exhausted the usual ways of meeting people – drinking Chilean plonk at SoHo gallery openings, dining and dancing at deafening decibels, and sweating like a pig at the gym where every man seems interested in every other man – or when we've exhausted the goodwill of our married friends, who've already fixed us up with everyone they know, we turn to more unusual means of finding true love.

The Learning Annex has become a veritable clearing house for lonelyhearts determined to improve their lot by attending classes and lectures entitled 'How to Sweep a Man Off His Feet', 'How to

Marry the Rich', and '10 Ways to Attract the Opposite Sex... Immediately'. The only problem is that the men who should be attending such useful lectures are busy taking notes at the one-off seminar given by Elle Macpherson. Even Macy's, the world's largest store, has muscled in on the matchmaking act by sponsoring cooking classes and wine-tastings. Savvy foodies have learned that it is much easier to initiate a conversation when you're both wielding meat cleavers or debating the tinge of raspberry overlaid with a hint of caramel in a glass of California cabernet.

Then there are always the small ads: pages of *New York* magazine and *The Village Voice* are filled with tall, handsome chief-executive officers searching for brainy, broody broads. Of course, if it sounds too good to be true, you can bet it is. 'Sophisticated New Yorkers are very embarrassed about needing to place an ad, because they think that they should somehow meet people naturally,' explains psychologist Dr Bonnie Eaker Weil. 'I told myself I wanted to get married, so I treated it like a job – and I went out on 75 dates before I met my husband. There were a few psychos along the way. At dinner, one date said, "I know this won't upset you because you're a



AT LUNCH...

E.A.T. coffee bar

Madison Avenue and 83rd Street

Talent: White Anglo-Saxon Protestant lawyers, bankers and socialites.

Dress: Anne Taylor florals, Belgians and



Still, beggars can't be choosers...

TSE cashmere for women; Ralph Lauren Polo, J. P. Todd boots and Lands' End khakis for men.

Positive equity: money, breeding.

Negative equity: family history of low

sperm-count due to excessive sexual experimentation during high-school years.

Looking for: dining and sailing partner, with view to commitment and producing a male heir.



IN THE PARK...

The dog-run by the American Museum of Natural History

Central Park West at West 79th Street

Talent: caring, sharing male and female Upper West Side yuppies (yes, yuppies still exist on the UWS) with a mild literary bent.



Two lonely individuals brought together by Kibbles and Bits...

Dress: Banana

Republic, Emporio, Timberland and Prada.

Positive equity: chocolate Labradors, German shepherds or Hungarian Vizslas.

Negative equity: dog-eared, hair-covered, paw-muddied apartment. Their lives are ruled by expensive

dog-walkers, pet stores and feeding times.

Looking for: Thirtysomething dog owner (preferably with similar breed) with up-and-coming media career (probably in public relations or television) and up-and-coming therapist who encourages joint sessions. □

TINA GAUDOIN

therapist, but I just wanted you to know that my father killed my mother and is incarcerated for life."

No matter what your hobby or area of interest, thanks to New York's social-club scene you never have to be alone. The Tall Club, Short People, Classical Music Lovers' Exchange, Single Book Lovers and Vegetarian Singles are waiting for you to enroll and find your soulmate. The truly needy, of course, can always be seen checking out the competition at Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings.

Bars are also happy hunting grounds: the politically incorrect are flocking to the Cigar Bar or Le Cigar in the old VIP room of the club Tatou, where you can light up far from censure of the nicotine police. Even non-smoking asthmatics are pretending to love stogies just for the chance to light a suitable mate's fire. Practically every block now has a casual coffee bar next to the ubiquitous deli and Korean nail salon where New Yorkers can get wired on a jolt of Java. Spilling a bit of lukewarm *latte* on that attractive person's *Post* as she scans Patric Walker is certainly a socially acceptable opening gambit.

One may wish to jazz up the romance stakes with less conventional methods. Enchantments is a shop in the East Village, run by a local coven of very friendly witches who are used to dealing with the lovelorn. They sell a wide variety of potions, talismans, spells and incense. For a small fee, they will make you a special love or sex candle with the names of you and your intended etched in the wax, covered with aromatic oil and sprinkled with glitter. Light up and expect the best.

As a last resort, Myreah Moore is an urban dating coach and TV producer who believes in 'a pair and a spare': scant consolation for those who can't even find one poor sod to go out with. 'And if you can't find anyone here, get up and travel. NY men are not the only ones on the planet.'

To which many women would say: 'When can I leave?'

'You simply don't hear happy dating stories', says Adriana, 30, an interior decorator, 'because if you have a bunch of good dates, then it's easier just to give in and get married. Just don't forget to register your list at Tiffany.'

Who says New Yorkers are cynics? □