

"El paseo," the classic Latin approach to mating, consists of women walking to the left and men to the right around the perimeter of the town plaza on Sunday afternoon. The clumps of men and women chatter and giggle among themselves, eyes often darting to the opposite sex. When glances begin to linger, a man may break loose from his compadres and cajole the woman into joining him. Then they can retire to a bench in the middle of the plaza. Contact has been made.

Say what you will about such a system (it persists mainly in rural areas), the "paseo" works with an elegant, simple efficiency. It accomplishes its purpose by putting singles in touch with each other.

We have no comparable system in this country, and never have. "Dating" is America's contribution to the world's mating customs, an approach uniquely suited to high mobility and Rugged Individualism. Singles are free, for better or worse, to seek each other as best they can.

This task can require planning like that for "D-Day," particularly among the urban unattached. What few matchmakers we've allowed any sway—clergymen, neighborhood druggists, and the like—are declining along with their strongholds: the churches and soda fountains where people used to meet. As the sheer number of singles grows—to today's 36 million—as we approach a 70% urbanization rate, and as one in five of us changes address every year, the simple act of making contact with other unwed people can require elaborate strategy.

In his book, *The City is the Frontier*, the late urbanist Charles Abrams called three elements vital to the successful mating and reproduction of any species: convergence (the coming to the same point from different directions), selection, and courtship. "None of these," wrote Abrams "has been given even honorable mention in the planning texts. The urban mechanisms for convergence have become defective and the opportunities for boy meeting girl fewer."

So a convergence infrastructure has grown up despite the planners. With help from commerce, the crush of singles in city and suburb are developing their own means to take the most elementary step of the mating process: finding each other. Some of

Singled Out

by Ralph Keyes

Photographs by Peter Karnig



All photographs in this article were taken at "Friday U.S.A.," a singles apartment complex in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles.

the flashier means—the resort weekends, computer dating, and “body swap” bars—have already hit the headlines, often inaccurately. Other ways of making contact are secrets well kept by the cognizenti—little out of the way laundromats, sensual political clubs, and friendly courtrooms—where mating runs a strong second to the stated reason for being present.

I have broken down these approaches broadly into direct and indirect styles of convergence, the “Step Right Up and Meet Your Mate,” approach balanced by “But I’m Here for a Reason.”

Step Right Up and Meet Your Mate

“We recognized loneliness as a market,” explains the director of the Concord Hotel, in the Catskill Mountains of New York State. The Concord is the largest Catskill resort now sponsoring occasions for the unattached. The hotel’s *maitre d’* says that during singles weekends the place is transformed into “a healthy nursing home.”

Singles weekends have become such a resort fixture that it’s hard to recall they only took root during the past ten years. In the Catskills especially, tens if not hundreds of thousands flock annually to resort weekends for the unmarried. There they participate in a frenzy of social activity, “round-robin dining” (a different table/group for every meal), savage competition, and humiliation.

A veteran of one such weekend later wrote of her first meal:

Arthur, on my left, pale, forty-ish, asked in a cured stutter whether anyone would mind if he took off his jacket. Eight people glowered at him. He took it off anyway. Then he asked me, since I was from New York, if I knew the girl who had been shot in Central Park.

“No.”

“There are a lot of murders in your city,” he said.

“Aren’t there any in yours?” asked Lucy. . . .

The meal went on with conversation about how much better the food and company were at the other hotels. How’s your beef (I

ate it, didn’t I?). How’s the duck? Pass the salt. The two Morts hardily spoke. Jack and Alice got entangled in the topic of domineering women:

“You look like a domineering woman.”

“But I’m not. Why do you say that? I want to be domineered. Most women want to be domineered.”

“But why . . .”

Too early to be polite, the two Morts excused themselves and left the table.

“I guess they told us,” said Joan.

“Nuts,” said Sal, laughing.

“Yeah,” said Lucy. “We don’t care, do we?”

Arthur was later elected Creep of the Week.

“I had expected it to be incredibly festive,” wrote the bewildered veteran later, “but instead it was the scene of an accident where everyone was hurt.”

Disparaged, ridiculed—the resort singles weekend not only survives but flourishes. Where else is there to go?

In the city, singles bars are the most visible congregation points—on New York’s Upper East Side, Boston’s Back Bay, San Francisco’s Union Street and financial district. The owner of “Harpoon Louie’s” in San Francisco explains how his layout encourages mingling: barstools are screwed to the floor, far enough apart for a guy to stand in between and talk with a seated girl. Lighting is kept low, to favor the non-beautiful. His bartenders get to know regulars by name, are protective of the women, and sometimes will make introductions.

The success of singles bars is based on a particular change in American mores: that it’s increasingly okay for women alone to frequent bars. (They’ve always been welcome in British pubs.) But the singles bar scene is not numerically significant, being limited largely to a young, white-collar, and basically attractive minority group. Journalist John Godwin, after touring the country doing research for his book, *The Mating Trade*, writes, “The bars have acquired a high and glittering profile that makes them appear much more significant than they actually are on the singles scene.”

Godwin was more impressed by media for the unmarried, tabloids like *Singles Register* and *Singles Critique*, which combine a smattering of text (“How to Tell if He’s Single”—look for little finger smudges on his car windows) with page after page of contact ads. “Sensitive, attractive teacher of handicapped children,” reads an ad in the latest *Register*. “Slim, 43, a humanist, out-going, wide interests, music, art, politics. Include phone number please. Y32.” The *Register*, like all such papers, includes a forwarding service.

Advertising for mates, long a custom in Europe, has just become respectable in America. John Godwin estimates that the total annual volume of contact ads in this country has now hit 120,000. In addition to papers built around singles, a sober journal like *The New York Review of Books* now resembles a dating bureau in its classifieds, as does the “Personals” section of my local newspaper. Marie Edwards, a Los Angeles psychologist who teaches courses on how to be single, says, “Many people in my classes have reported that some of the nicest people they have met have been through ads.”

A big advantage of making contact this way is the opportunity to pick and choose among respondents. Veteran advertisers work out elaborate pre-screening systems, then a meeting in some highly public place for coffee, more coffee dates, followed by supper together. Eventually: trust.

Computer matches, by contrast, usually start at a higher trust level, with actual dates, because the computer presumably has done pre-screening. But that presumption isn’t necessarily safe. Many of today’s “computer dating” services use no electronic assistance. A computer just isn’t necessary for the rudimentary matching most do, with limited variables and a small sample. But the appeal to a higher, electronic authority does remain a powerful advertising ploy.

This field is now dominated by high-pressure outfits which use some variation of the theme, “How much is it worth to you not to be lonely any more?” A recently deceased San Francisco service used to advertise, “If you are alone tonight, maybe it’s because you want to be.” They charged \$475 for testing and matching,

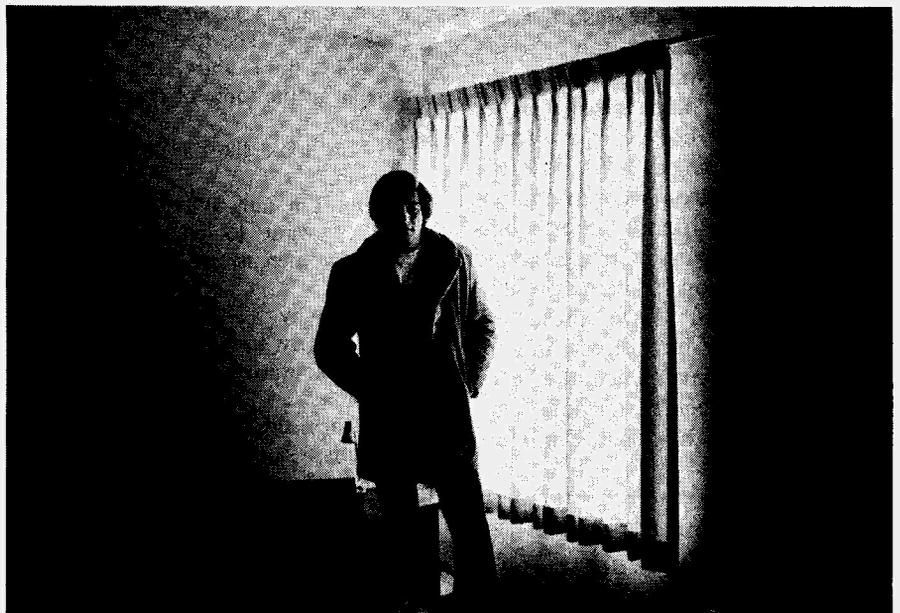
promising marriage counseling if that becomes necessary, and a refund for any matched marriage which ended in divorce.

New York, California and three other states have taken some of the over-priced and under-performing services to court for fraud. Hearings with their victims generated pathetic tales of high pressure salesmen. "You can't cuddle money (or TV) (or your stereo)" was a standard pitch in peddling contracts on time payments to lonely singles, who then got few dates or grossly mis-matched ones.

One study of 240 patrons of a computer dating service found them normal in most respects, beyond youth (38.8 on the average), and with relatively high educational credentials (38% had completed college). Most said marriage was their ultimate goal in using a computer service, and most claimed inadequate opportunities to meet the opposite sex elsewhere. But only 21% found computer dating more satisfying than other methods. Still, computer dating endures. There's a market.

A newer approach to that market promises behavioral conditioning. "Announcing: A revolutionary new program for SINGLE PEOPLE," advertises Learning Dynamics, Inc. "A totally new approach to living—based on modern Human Behavior research which at last brings you the means to live a full, confident, more successful single life." For \$99.80, Learning Dynamics offers ten 30-minute cassettes on "The Dynamics of Living Single," which are supplemented by a programmed Response Book and Reinforcement Exercises. The package includes a bonus subscription to *Living Single*.

So called "swinging single" residence compounds were born in Southern California around the mid-1960s, and now appear to be dying there. The best known of the lot, the South Bay Club, last year sold off most of its apartment buildings to another real estate company, which renamed them the Oakwood Garden Apartments and stopped trying to attract a young, single crowd. South Bay had overestimated the permanence of the singles compound's attractiveness and built more units than they could fill. But overbuilding wasn't the whole story. There was also a tremendously high (and costly)



turnover rate, the most important factor of which was the sheer exhaustion of the partied-out. Life in a singles compound can be like a continuous fraternity party, with those who remain in their rooms branded as sticks-in-the-mud. "It was great at first," reports a 29-year-old male refugee from South Bay, "but after a while you got tired of chasing the girls around the pool, and they began to discover they had been given the same line by your roommate the night before. You got tired of it. It was always the same people at the parties. It was like high school."

Clubs for singles are a more enduring mating approach, one which boomed in the mid-'60s and contin-

ues strong, although seeming to have crested. The club scene varies from one part of the country to another. In Tucson, singles clubs began only last summer. Los Angeles' city-sponsored activities for the unmarried have kept down the private trade in that city. San Diego has had private singles' clubs for 30 years, and today supports groups like the Single Set Club, the Mixer Club, and Single Again. On almost every day of the year there is at least one function for unmarrieds—a dance, party, or discussion group.

Emily Trapp, who has organized San Diego singles clubs for nearly a decade, says there are less of them now than 15 years ago. Ms. Trapp says her biggest problem is persuad-



ing the unmarried that it's socially acceptable to join a singles club, when the very act of walking in the door announces your loneliness. "Singles clubs are just too non-specific," she explains. "We have no face-saving excuse to offer people about their membership."

Many of the unattached can't or won't accept such an onus and go to elaborate ends to look like they're doing something else while actually looking for each other.

But I'm Here for a Reason.

The National Encyclopedia of Associations lists over 16,000 groups in

this nation of joiners. Singles in search of each other could be their backbone. Isabella Taves, author of *Women Alone*, advises her readers that "dancing clubs, sailing, sports of all kinds, bird-watching, even walking clubs, give you a chance to meet men." Ms. Taves claims to know several women who attend meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous, feigning alcoholism in their search for a husband. They're careful to stick to chapters in better neighborhoods.

Along with a variety of ski clubs, museum guilds, Porsche clubs, Sierra Club, junior chambers of commerce, drama groups, and Santa Claus Anonymous, *Mademoiselle* highly recommends the Young Democrats and/or Republicans in seven

out of eight cities they surveyed for a feature on "The Single Life, U.S.A." Young Republicans are the largest and most active group in Portland, advises *Mademoiselle*. In Boston both Young Democrats and Republicans are active socially, and "some girls join both."

Political movements have long been known as a prime mating ground. In the mid-'60s, Charles Abrams said the quest for tryst may have led to Carmine de Sapio's downfall, because it was "the buttress of the political reform movement in New York City." Later, while researching new love-life styles in 1969, Gloria Steinem found reform clubs still a favorite mating ground for affluent singles. "There's a deep suspicion," wrote Steinem, "that in New York, the candidate with the largest number of sexually viable volunteers is the one who wins." She observed that one's political positions often carried a lot of social impact. As one older club member complained, "A single male who believes in a one-year timetable for withdrawal from Vietnam can get four single girls to believe the same. It's like uncovering a fondness for A. A. Milne."

In Los Angeles, too, a member of one political club confesses: "I'm not really interested in politics, but belonging here is better than belonging to some lonely hearts outfit. At least the men are young and have an active interest in the world. And I have an excuse for being with them other than my loneliness."

Politics needn't be so organized for making contact. To the contrary, says Eric Weber, author of *How to Pick Up Girls*. His advice: "March in a peace demonstration, even if you're secretly for war. I've heard countless stories of guys who've picked up fantastic broads at peace demonstrations.

The upsurge of campus protest in the late 1960s was concurrent with the decline of fraternities, sororities, and mixers. This may not have been accidental. "In such moments of collective enthusiasm," recalls Daniel Cohn-Bendit of the Paris barricades in 1968, "nothing could be more natural and simple than a warm relationship between boys and girls. Everything was easy and un-



complicated.”

A college co-ed recently told sociologist Jessie Bernard that she had never been more open with men than inside the building she helped liberate while a sophomore in college. “Here,” she explained, “all together, the games I had always felt I had to play with boys fell away.”

One would think that a college campus is mating ground enough. This isn’t the case, especially at larger schools. Nothing said it better than the note penciled on yellow lined paper which was once taped to the stairs leading to San Diego State University: “WILL THE GIRL WHO SAID ‘HI’ TO ME AT 10:45 ON MONDAY WHEN SHE WAS COMING DOWN THE STEPS BE HERE FRIDAY, SAME TIME.”

“It’s brutal, just brutal,” a State student once explained to me. “You meet someone and you’ve got just a couple of minutes to make a good impression, or blow the opportunity forever.” Weren’t there better, arranged opportunities, I asked the student? He thought for a second. “Oh, there’s some encounter groups. But

they’re 90% men and 10% ugly women.”

Be that as it may, campuses remain a primary lure for singles through their extension programs. In the chapter on “A Continuing Education . . . and date bait, too,” of her *Single Girl’s Book*, Stanlee Miller Coy writes: “Taking a course at night school is a standard prescription for a sickly love life.” Coy advises against overlooking any possibilities in the field of education, including the local free universities. “The young, swinging, fun crowd,” she writes, “will congregate in general at the most stimulating, avant-garde, ‘relevant’ courses . . . If you want to choose your curriculum by the company you’ll keep, and you don’t know what’s ‘in,’ ask the jazziest looking girls and men at your office to recommend schools and courses.”

Some of the best enrolled courses in today’s extension programs focus specifically on the problems of single living, divorce, and re-marriage. Marie Edwards first taught her course on “The Challenge of Being Single”

at the University of Southern California on February 9, 1970—the day of the earthquake. Since that time she’s repeated the weekend workshop on University of California campuses at Irvine, San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Riverside, as well as Foothills Community College — often more than once. The course is usually over-subscribed, especially by women. (A \$5.00 discount is offered to the first 30 men to enroll.)

During the weekend, Ms. Edwards—who has been divorced longer than the eleven years of her marriage—lectures briefly on being single, then has the class break into small groups to discuss their feelings. “One of the most striking things,” she says, “is how many feel alone, as if they were the only single person in the country. When I point out that there are 36 million of us, they’re always astounded.”

Ms. Edwards encourages her students to find their own best style of life without making the quest for a mate paramount. “Take to the Yellow Pages,” is her advice. “Find an activity you’re *really* interested in, and get involved. If you don’t find someone there, at least you’ll be doing something you enjoy.” For those who want to directly seek each other, Edwards advises imaginative approaches, such as going often to the laundromat, where liaisons can take place naturally.

Laundromats are becoming a significant mating ground. “There’s something about clothes spinning around in a washing machine that seems to loosen people’s tongues,” writes Rebecca Greer in *Why Isn’t a Nice Girl Like You Married?* Margo, the *Chicago Daily News’* “now” columnist wrote her inaugural column on “laundro-mating,” which she called much preferable to singles bars.

There are rules for laundro-mating. For example, weekends are prime time, but only during the day. (Doing your wash on a Saturday evening would be humiliating.) People inside have far more permission to speak than if they were on the street. “This set-up is more subtle than the bars,” says one laundro-freak. “The conversation’s better, you don’t get the typical bull, and nobody’s three sheets to the wind.”

Margo found some singles freely admitting that they went to laundro-

mats hoping to meet people, others stoutly denying any such intent. One young lady, asked if she ever dated other patrons, replied "DATES? I'm here to do my laundry."

"And so she was," wrote Margo, ". . . in two pairs of eyelashes, silver-blue eyeshadow, a little brush-on, and a cashmere slack outfit."

In a subsequent column, Margo suggested jury duty might be a good way to swing—particularly after the Manson jurors revealed how much fun they had with each other.

In their "Urban Strategist" section, *New York* magazine ran an article a few months later on courtrooms as a good place to meet people. "It's a paradise for single girls down here," one juror was quoted as saying. "If you don't meet someone in the jury room, there's all those lawyers who hardly ever see a woman unless she's on the stand." The article gave advice on what to wear in case you get called.

The list of places and occasions where mating rivals the primary purpose is endless—hitchhiking, dog walking, garage sailing, museum going. One San Francisco State co-ed says she'd had it with singles' dances because the guys get sloppy drunk and want to tell you their life story. Her solution is to hang around San Francisco International Airport on weekends. "When a guy has to wait an hour between planes," she explains, "he might as well sit around and talk."

Eric Weber says, "If you're really serious about picking up women, you should be working at it 24 hours a day . . . on the prowl, ever alert for even the slightest hint of a possible pickup." Weber, who deserves some kind of award for ingenuity, says he overcame his own shyness about meeting women by carrying around a tape recorder, feigning "research" for his book on mating. "It made my objective professional," he explains, "not personal." *How to Pick Up Girls'* author says that getting picked up is no longer a cause for stigma. He quotes one city single from his tape recorder who said, "Of course I get picked up. How else am I going to meet guys?" Another girl commented, "As far as I'm concerned, it's the only really decent way to meet people."



The convergence pattern sketched above includes other elements—parties and dances, encounter groups, escort services—as well as the "Ann & Abby-approved" ways to meet people, such as Y's, Red Cross, and religious groups. Churches in particular are beginning to pay more attention to their single members, through clubs like the Singletarians (Unitarian), the Catholic Alumna for unmarried college graduates, and local groups like Single People Over Thirty at a Washington Jewish Community Center. Parents Without Partners is the largest national organization of singles, involving an estimated 100,000 participants in their self-help group for divorced and widowed parents.

The mating methods I have covered appeal mainly to white, middle-class heterosexuals. There are also great status differences within the group categorized as "singles"—especially between the never- and the formerly-married. The scene varies considerably in different parts of the country, between the East, for example, where organized socials, singles bars, and

resort weekends are the norm, and the West, where resort weekends have never caught on, where bars become for singles but don't necessarily start out that way, and parties seem more to "just happen."

John Godwin reports that in his mating trade study "the atmosphere . . . grew more relaxed, less overtly predatory the further West I went. The undercurrents remained, but the veneer of jollity didn't crack so fast." Godwin said singles affairs seemed most relaxed in high-tension Los Angeles, which he attributes to the fact that women arrive in their own cars and know they can leave in them.

The problem of making contact is primarily an out-of-school one, since high schools still serve as interim mating bureaus, as do colleges. Still, higher education can be as lonely as a city, even at a small college. One coed at 350-student Prescott College in Arizona told me of sitting in her dorm room night after night, wanting to be with people, but not knowing where to find them or how to get that across without saying so. "So I'd just storm out of my room," she said,

"booming around campus, hoping to run into someone. But I always walked fast and looked straight ahead, as if I had some place to go, the library or something. You wouldn't want to look like you were just wandering around hoping to meet someone."

I asked her if that method was very often successful. "No," she replied, "But I don't know what else to do."

What is common to singles is the unnatural and changing state of that status, or status of that state, in a culture geared to marriage. Singleness in this society has always been assumed to be a state of pre-marriage—something to be gotten over, like the flu. The worst part is that so many singles accept this stigma, and are forced—force themselves—to live in a demeaning and unnatural state.

Competition, brutal competition, is the essence of that state, particularly with members of one's own sex for the attention of the opposite. This jousting can be so deadly and so serious—no matter how frantic the grinning—that to admit any doubt is to risk losing points. Loneliness, especially, can't be admitted . . . or unhappiness. Emily Trapp says that at some singles gatherings the competition is so fierce that you sit and grin—OR ELSE. "For a single to admit unhappiness," said one person in Los Angeles, "is to tell the world that he hasn't been invited to the party."

The competition inevitably breeds contempt for other searching singles, and especially for oneself. Singles gatherings in general, and at resorts in particular, can degenerate into sadomasochistic put-downs of anyone resorting to such "desperate" tactics.

Relations between the unattached, especially those just meeting, are rarely natural. The roving eyes, the gaze over the shoulders for someone better to talk with, the perpetual "sizing up," all make it impossible to have relaxed social intercourse. "There are tremendous sex stereotype problems that keep singles from really meeting each other," says John K. Wood, a divorced college counselor and Fellow of La Jolla's Center for Studies of the Person. "The way they size each other up when they meet,

pair off in fantasy."

Marie Edwards, who is mounting a little movement in favor of not having to pair, cites some blatant discrimination against singles in this society—in our tax structure, hiring and promotion standards, loan eligibility, and restaurant seating. "If you're one of the 36 million singles in the United States who has tried to get a decent table in an attractive restaurant," she writes, "you're already well aware of being ushered to the seat with a magnificent view of the swinging kitchen door, that is if you get seated at all."

The worst common problem is feeling it a "problem" being single. John Wood says the biggest hurdle he has had to overcome is other people's assumption that he is in trouble. John feels singles aren't necessarily the people with a problem, that "maybe marrieds are actually individualists who can't kick the habit of pairing."

As singles emerge more clearly as a group unto themselves, social contempt and self-contempt must be confronted and dealt with. As the courtship period extends, as ages of first marriage become later, and as the number of unmarried swells from the population explosion, from the skyrocketing divorce rate, and from the emergences of ex-priests, "singles" will inevitably emerge as a neo-separatist community of interest. "Looking into the future," says Marie Edwards, "in fifteen or twenty years I think there will be not only a couple world, but a single world . . . with equal status."

To some degree that has already begun. Unmarrieds increasingly are segregated and self-segregated into urban ghettos. Two conventions have been held for singles clubs in the West. The First Singles Church in Orange, California, is an early separatist institution, its pastor claiming to have attracted 100 parishioners in a few months' time because "traditionally, churches don't know what to do with singles and un-married people." Early pamphleteering for a singles movement consists of a 1969 *McCall's* article extolling the advantages of living alone—the freedom and spontaneity, the financial benefits, and the fact that single people can have more friends, and better ones.

Ms. Edwards likes to cite a U.S. Public Health Service report showing that singles suffer from fewer mental breakdowns, on the average, than those who are married.

"Single people need to stop being silent and letting people push them around," says Ms. Edwards—the emerging movement's focal point, if it has one. "We need to educate the public. Single people are not alone and they are not abnormal. They can help change society. I suspect that programs to educate society won't be initiated unless we (singles) can get together and have some impact."

Singles as a movement, even as a distinct social group, have definite obstacles to overcome. Scholars still regard them almost exclusively as pre-married people, who engage in "dating and courtship." Recent books like George Bach's *Pairing* or Carl Rogers' *Becoming Partners* are a cut above 1937's *Why Not Get Married?* by Harvey A. Kalish, but something has yet to be written on *Single and Proud*. The card catalog of San Diego State University's library, a reasonably complete collection, lists 21 entries for Henry George's "Single Tax" scheme of last century, no entries for "Single People," or "Single Men," and nine for "Single Women,"—three of which are by Helen Gurley Brown. "Courtship" has 13 entries, only four of which were written after 1959, and none after 1967.

As a group, singles can expect little help from a society dedicated to their eradication, except from merchants who know a market when they see one. They will have to find their own ways of making contact, of building community. And they are. There is nothing wrong with any of the ways singles have found to converge, *per se*. What's wrong is the condescension and contempt directed at the paths taken—especially by participants. The main problem with the ways single Americans seek contact is the shame and self-hatred which too often goes along. There is a desperate need to make this a society in which one can be unattached in comfort, and seek company less frantically.

One good reason, if none other, is that with divorce rates going up so fast, creating a humane environment for singles could be a matter of general self-interest—even for those who are married today. ■