

WEEKEND EXTRA | FROM F1

Wherefore art thou, romance?

“I don’t know what the problem is here,” says Jody Radu. At 46, Radu is tall and graceful with a sweet smile and a sexy rock-chic style. Radu has been married once, has no kids, and a career in the entertainment industry that brings her into daily contact with some of music’s biggest artists. She’s happy with her life. Not jaded, no hard edges, no obvious baggage. But when it comes to a real, satisfying relationship — lover, boyfriend, partner — there’s a gap.

It’s mystifying. “I’ll talk to anyone, I’ve been online, tried all the websites, I make allowances, too. I’ve been attracted to people that didn’t fit my ‘type’: maybe someone’s not good on the phone, maybe they’re not good on email, maybe it just wasn’t a good photo. Maybe the chemistry will be there in person.”

For all her efforts online, there has been a zero compatibility outcome. For a lark one night, she posted a personal ad on Craigslist. The next morning she had dozens of replies. She followed up with email contact. Most of the guys wanted her photo before going further. Once they saw it, their pictures started coming in. Radu shakes her head. “The guys were delusional. An out-of-shape 60-year-old? No thanks.”

For the last few months, since *Vancouver* magazine ran the first-names-only article “Do Vancouver Men Suck?” (“Yes” was the only answer that could be read between the lines), the question has hung over Vancouver’s dating scene like a pall.

Even before the article ran, women were, well, bitching. “My friends and I talk about this all the time,” says Radu. For the record, she says, “I don’t think Vancouver men suck. They could dress a little better, though.”

So, why is it so hard to meet someone in Vancouver? Is it geography? Is it part of the city’s identity that the dating scene is as tricky to negotiate as its landscape, divided by waterways and forbidding mountains?

Is it the way the city is spread out and shuts down early, its denizens more likely to rise at dawn to pound up the North Shore mountains on their bikes before work than lie in and roll over for a little good morning sex?

Is it our ethnic enclaves that divide us?

Is it seasonal affective disorder, a collective low libido?

“There is a lack of sexuality in Vancouver,” says Derkson, bluntly. Derkson is petite, tanned, toned, with a bright smile: her nails are done, her hair is thick and full. She looks like she’s got a personal groomer on call.

At 47, Derkson has no kids, and has never been married — nor is she desperate to get hitched. She’d be happy with just a little more warmth and sensuality. A little response. “No one smiles at you on the street here! People are cold.”

While living in Florida a few years ago, she was turning men away.

“I think the Latin culture in Florida really helps; people are warm, men smile at you on the street. They look at you. Men here, they don’t even turn their head to look at you.”

‘People here are inhibited’

Back in Vancouver, she just wishes that when she smiles at someone on the street, they would smile back.

Rachel Fox, a 34-year-old writer, says her experiences of meeting men in other cities, like New York, where she used to live, are incredibly different than in Vancouver: “The pool is a lot bigger there. I was dating every night.”



LES BAZZO/PNG

Shauna Miller, 37, with her dog Blue, says she dates a lot but she hasn’t made that special connection during those dates. The registered nurse says blaming the city is just an easier way to take rejection.



JASON PAYNE/PNG

Sebastien Lessard, 37, is single guy. He says some Vancouver women have ‘a really unrealistic vision of what a man is supposed to be.’

Fox has an endearing, girl-next-door vibe: Zooey Deschanel with a healthy scoop of irreverent wench.

“People here are inhibited,” she says. “We are ghettoized, we don’t intermingle and the landscape isn’t conducive to community.”

Sara Stocksand, 38 years old and single for a few years, isn’t afraid to say she wants the whole package, including marriage and children.

She also finds it easier to connect outside of Vancouver: she met her most recent love interest at a wedding in France.

Although she works at the Bottle-neck and comes in contact with a great number of men, she finds most her age are married.

With a history of committed monogamous relationships, she finds Vancouver’s dating culture challenging compared to other cities, like New York, where she has had more success.

Ron Lee, 36, a marketer who ran a

dating coaching service for many years in Vancouver, agrees that it’s tough to make a connection in this city.

Guys have a hard time, too

“Vancouver is the hardest city to date in in North America. We have no dating culture here. In Edmonton, Toronto, Calgary there is a much higher chance that people will come out just to meet you for a coffee, just for the social aspect. Because Vancouver doesn’t have that dating mechanism, it’s awkward for people to ask each other out.”

Many of the men he’s worked with find Vancouver women to be intimidating.

Sebastien Lessard, 37, who came to Vancouver from Quebec City seven years ago, can attest to the intimidation factor. “This is typical of a woman’s online profile: here’s a picture of me on top of a mountain, here’s one

of me winning an award, here’s me in Vegas. It’s like, wow, don’t you ever sit on a patio and have a beer or hang out and cook a meal? I’m not even going to contact you because I’m too ordinary.”

Lessard may see himself as ordinary, but he’s got a great dating resumé: A stable career that allows him to work from home, a funky casual style, is open to having kids and if you have kids, that’s okay too. He’s dated five years younger than his age, and up to 15 years older. Throw in the French accent and the wry sense of humour, and Lessard just might be the total package. But he gets frustrated sometimes.

“Some women here have a really unrealistic vision of what a man is supposed to be. They don’t accept that men are what they are; the women have been burned a couple of times, they’ve read all the articles, they have a checklist: Uh oh, he didn’t shave for three days. That means something. They believe their own conclusions about what a good guy is and what non-relationship material is; some weird criteria.”

Kevin Quinlan, whose job as director of policy and communication for Mayor Gregor Robertson keeps him on call, even when he’s on a date, says he doesn’t buy into the idea that Vancouver is the problem.

“Vancouver is an incredibly diverse place,” Quinlan says.

“Generalizations obscure the fact that there are so many people with different interests. I don’t think it’s fair or accurate to blame the city. If someone turns you down, just don’t take it personally. It’s not realistic to expect instant gratification leading to lifelong fulfilment from everybody you meet.”

He is also totally comfortable dating across all ethnicities.

Quinlan, who has recently found a girlfriend, has a few quirks, like reciting the lyrics to ‘90s gangsta rap

Vancouver is the hardest city to date in in North America. We have no dating culture here.

RON LEE
MARKETER, FORMER DATING COACH

songs, but he doesn’t put it all out there on a first date.

He has a dapper geek-chic style: suits and chunky glasses, but it wasn’t always that way. “I had years of the sloppy unkempt look. I’m living proof that people can change.”

Shauna Miller, 37, a registered nurse, is taking a break from dating to do some soul searching about what she wants. She doesn’t blame the city for not making a connection. “I’d really like to be in a relationship,” she says. Miller is a little shy, and doesn’t like to approach people, but she’s fully confident in the online universe, and it’s not unusual for her to have several dates a week, when she’s in the mood.

“I think meeting and dating is just a hard thing. Blaming the city is an easy way of putting the onus on something else. It’s an easier way to take rejection.”

What are we doing wrong?

Sue Seminev, a professional high-end matchmaker in Vancouver, believes there are certain variables here that do add to the challenge.

“Our market is complex. Almost every major dating market has more women than men, and our city is visibly ethnic with a high representation among Asian and South Asian. Race is huge. Compared to Montreal and Toronto, our downtown is small. We also tend to discount the outlying areas. We were recently ranked the worst-looking city in terms of dress. Both men and women can look like crap, with both parties guilty of judging and misinterpreting.”

Seminev counsels singles to “think outside of the box.”

“Women are voting the Asian men off the island. Women that are open about race are going to be more successful here.”

Turning away from blue collar is another mistake. Vancouver is not a head-office power centre. “We can’t invent a white-collar population. Women may have to date men that aren’t at financial parity with them. Men have been doing that for years.”

Stepping outside the small boundaries of Vancouver’s downtown scene is also important. “Men in Whistler look rough and tumble, but all they need is a little fairy dust. I suggest people look in Burnaby, Whistler, Squamish. All the boys need some work, but we can impart that.”

Seminev cites demographics as part of the problem. “In a lot of major markets there are two-, three-, four-, five-per-cent more women. That’s not just Vancouver, but the discrepancy is higher here than in some other cities.”

If we can’t change the city, and don’t want to leave the city, what do we do? Start talking to strangers, says Seminev. Get past the “frosty factor.” Talk to someone in the elevator. And if they shut you down? “Be nice.”

Lee, who still hasn’t met the right woman, in spite of making a career out of helping others find partners, says, “Relax and start questioning what it is that you are looking for, and what will make you happy.”

dryan@vancouversun.com



B.C. 2035- Forestry
Saturday, July 14



London Olympics 2012
Wednesday, July 25



100 Years of Business in
Weekend Review
Saturday, July 28



West Vancouver Centennial
Thursday, August 2

*Content subject to change.

Coming soon in The Vancouver Sun
Call 604-605-READ to subscribe. vancouversun.com

THE VANCOUVER SUN
100 YEARS
STRONG