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# It's the Economy, Girlfriend

By RAVI SOMAIYA

The economic crisis came home to 27-year-old Megan Petrus early last year when her boyfriend of eight months, a derivatives trader for a major bank, proved to be more concerned about helping a laid-off colleague than comforting Ms. Petrus after her father had a heart attack.

For Christine Cameron, the recession became real when the financial analyst she had been dating for about a year would get drunk and disappear while they were out together, then accuse her the next day of being the one who had absconded.

Dawn Spinner Davis, 26, a beauty writer, said the downward-trending graphs began to make sense when the man she married on Nov. 1, a 28-year-old private wealth manager, stopped playing golf, once his passion. "One of his best friends told me that my job is now to keep him calm and keep him from dying at the age of 35," Ms. Davis said. "It's not what I signed up for."

They shared their sad stories the other night at an informal gathering of Dating a Banker Anonymous, a support group founded in November to help women cope with the inevitable relationship fallout from, say, the collapse of [Lehman Brothers](#) or the Dow's shedding 777 points in a single day, as it did on Sept. 29.

In addition to meeting once or twice weekly for brunch or drinks at a bar or restaurant, the group has a [blog](#), billed as "free from the scrutiny of feminists," that invites women to join "if your monthly Bergdorf's allowance has been halved and bottle service has all but disappeared from your life."

Theirs is not the typical 12-step program.

Step 1: Slip into a dress and heels. Step 2: Sip a cocktail and wait your turn to talk. Step 3: Pour your heart out. Repeat as needed.

About 30 women, generally in their mid- to late-20s, regularly post to the Web site or attend meetings.

"We do make light of everything on the blog and it's very tongue in cheek," said Laney Crowell, 27, who parted ways with a corporate real estate investor last month after a tumultuous relationship. "But it all stems out of really serious and heartfelt situations."

When she introduces other Wall Street widows to the group, Ms. Crowell added, "They call their friends and say, 'You're not going to believe what I just read. It's going to make you feel so much better.'"

Once it was seen as a blessing in certain circles to have a wealthy, powerful partner who would leave you alone with the credit card while he was busy brokering deals. Now, many Wall Street wives, girlfriends and, increasingly, exes, are living the curse of cutbacks in nanny hours and reservations at Masa or Megu. And that credit card? Canceled.

Raoul Felder, the Manhattan divorce lawyer, said that cases involving financiers always stack up as the economy starts to slip, because layoffs and shrinking bonuses place stress on relationships — and, he said, because "there aren't funds or time for mistresses any more."

(One such mistress wrote on the blog that when she pouted about not having been taken on a trip lately, her married man explained that with money so tight, his wife had taken to checking up on his accounts.)

Harriet Pappenheim, a psychotherapist at Park Avenue Relationship Consultants who wrote "For Richer or Poorer," a 2006 book on money in marriage, said that the repercussions could be acute for Wall Street wunderkinds who define their identities through their job titles and the size of their bonuses.

"It's a big blow to their egos and to their self-esteem," she said of the endless stream of economic bad news, "and they may take it out on their partners and children."

Ms. Petrus, a lawyer, and Ms. Crowell, who works for a fashion Web site, started the support group when they realized that they were facing similar problems in their relationships with bankers last fall.

"We put two and two together and figured out that it was the economy, not us," Ms. Petrus recalled at a recent meeting in the lobby bar of the Bowery Hotel. "When guys in banking are going through this, they can't handle a relationship." (She and her boyfriend split up last year; he declined to discuss it.)

Many of the women said that as the economic crisis struck last fall, they began tracking the markets during the day to predict the moods that the men they loved might be in later. On big news days, like when the first proposed government bailout failed in Congress, or when Lehman went belly-up, they knew that plans to see their partners would be put off.

"I was like, 'O.K. I signed up for that, it's fine,'" said Ms. Cameron. "But all of a sudden," she said, her boyfriend "couldn't focus. If he stayed over he'd be up at some random hour checking his BlackBerry, Bloomberg and CNBC."

Ms. Cameron said that she and her boyfriend broke up at the end of November but that they still saw each other occasionally.

One frequent topic among the group is the link between the boardroom and the bedroom. "There's actually the type of person who has a bad day on the trading floor and they want to have sex more," Ms. Spinner Davis offered as she sipped a vodka gimlet, declining to say how she knew.

Ms. Petrus chimed in.

"If you're lucky you'll get that guy," she said, not revealing whether she considered herself lucky. "Middle-case scenario: It gets relegated to the weekends.

"Worst-case scenario," she began, and then took another sip of her drink.

Brandon Davis, Ms. Spinner Davis's husband of almost three months, acknowledged in a recent telephone interview that his new job was "certainly more stressful and there's certainly more pressure" because of the economy, but disagreed that such stresses had affected his home life. He did not want to talk about golf.

Some women in the group said the men in their lives had gone from being aloof and unattainable to unattractively needy and clinging. Others complained of being ignored — one, who called herself A.P., wrote on the blog that three weeks had passed without her boyfriend "asking a single question" about her life. Another wrote, fearfully, that her beau had told her to make a list of their favorite New York restaurants before the bad market forced a move to the Midwest.

"Next time you are stressing over some finance guy, remember that he is just a math-club nerd," one woman wrote after recounting a breakup. "This recession just bought everyone an extra two years of the single life."

Another, though, seemed chagrined, after her boyfriend told her to "grow up" and stop "complaining about vacations and dinner" since he had to "fire 20 people by the end of the week."

On the blog, the objects of their affections — and disdain — are referred to as F.B.F.'s, for Financial-Guy Boyfriends. Financial news is conveyed via a color-coded daily warning system: red, when the Dow fell 300 points on Oct. 6 ("Good night to have dinner with your girlfriends and do laundry"); yellow, when Warren Buffet invested \$3 billion in [General Electric](#) ("Good night to hang out with your F.B.F."); green on Jan. 21, in honor of [President Obama's](#) hope.

Despite the seemingly endless stream of disparaging remarks and shaking heads, some of the appeal of dating a banker remains.

“It’s not even about a \$200 dinner,” Ms. Petrus said. “It’s that he’s an alpha male, he’s aggressive, he’s a go-getter, he doesn’t take no for an answer, he’s confident, people respect him and that creates the whole mystique of who he is.”

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