

Front Page
News
Sports
Opinion
Red Letter Daze
Photos
Weather
Covers
Sunspctives
Browse Archive
Digital Archive
Subscription
Advertising
About Us
Contact Us
Alumni Website



digital partners
network

News Updates
Get headlines and capsule summaries every weekday morning during the Cornell academic year. All you need is to sign up right here!

E-mail:



[More Info](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

Wanna Be My Wing ... Woman?

No Holds Barred

Meghan Barr

"You can be my wingman anytime." Admit it: you've heard the phrase before. If you number among college-aged guys, you probably even know the source by heart. The 1986 flick *Top Gun* attracts a cult-like following of worshippers who were still in diapers when it first arrived in movie theaters nearly two decades ago.

The term "wingman" owes its birth to the popular movie. Immortalized by "Iceman" Val Kilmer, the word was instantly recorded in the lexicon of American culture. The expression literally refers to a pilot in a flying formation who flies on the wing of his leader. He plays the role of a guardian: if anyone tries to shoot the leader, the wingman will take the hit for him instead.

The very idea smacks of honorable heroics. But in the mundane existence of ordinary people, the word refers to an entirely different battlefield. Imagine the following scenario: It's Friday night. Two guys enter a bar (for the sake of clarity, we'll call them Jerk #1 and Jerk #2). Leaning across the bar, they spot two girls. One of them is stunningly beautiful. Naturally, Jerk #1 wants to hook up with her. So Jerk #2 assumes the dreaded, yet necessary, role of the wingman. He chats up the less attractive girl so that his buddy can take the beautiful one home.

It happens all the time. Yet some people claim that this strategy has grown outdated. Women are no longer fooled by obvious attempts at double-teaming. And with the dawn of a new service called www.wingwomen.com, the previously all-male practice is now calling for female recruits. According to its website, the company provides a selection of Wing Women who, for a mere \$50- per-hour, will assist the hapless male in meeting some pretty ladies at a bar. The formula is fairly straightforward: the client indicates a woman whom he finds attractive, Wing Woman strikes up a conversation with her, Wing Woman introduces her to said client, then Wing Woman bows out while he charms his new lady friend with his sparkling personality.

Bizarre? Perhaps. But with over 200 customers and a "conversion rate" (number of clients who walk away with a woman's digits) of 65 percent, the service has proved its skeptics wrong. A *New York Times* reporter even went undercover with a Wing Woman, only to reveal in an October article that the concept actually works. The bargain even includes a money-back guarantee: if a client is unsatisfied with his Wing Woman after the first 25 minutes of their session, he may request a full refund.

The Wing Woman theory is the brainchild of a man named Shane Forbes. The former computer programmer came up with the idea one night when he tagged along with two female friends as they toured the New York City bar scene. To his amazement, he met more women than ever before simply due to the presence of his female companions.

Why does the concept work so well? Are the majority of men cursed with the disease of social awkwardness? Forbes boasts that his Wing Women counteract the natural obstacles that prevent men from meeting members of the opposite sex. His website includes a laundry list of alleged female behaviors that contribute to the Wing Woman's success. Take, for example, what he has dubbed the "icebreaker" effect: Women tend to lower their defenses and view men as "less hostile" when they are surrounded by other women. Forbes does not, however, provide any scientific basis for this assertion. Other explanations include the "let the games begin" phenomenon, which states that women "are very jealous and love to compete with one another." Again, no legitimate proof accompanies this statement. Apparently we are supposed to take his word for it.

Despite the offensive chauvinism latent in his claims, Forbes does have a point. Otherwise he'd be out of a job. The real question remains: Should women feel duped by Wing Women's clandestine actions? Allison Frenkel, a Wing Woman interviewed by the *Times*, denies any feelings of guilt. "I'm purely an introduction tool," she insists. It is impossible to know whether the women that she has fooled would feel the same way.

The company is currently looking to expand its scope beyond the crowded streets of New York. Women from all parts of the country could soon be eligible to join the ranks of the "attractive, personable, outgoing" females employed by Mr. Forbes.

As the fall semester draws to a close, fewer and fewer jobs remain open to the masses of unemployed seniors. Next year, a *Wingwomen.com* franchise could open at a city near you.

Meghan Barr is a senior in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Wanna Be My Wing ... Woman?