# In tech, some bemoan the rise of 'brogrammer' culture

**By Doug Gross, CNN**
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"The Social Network," which chronicled Facebook's rise, is attributed with bringing tech culture to the mainstream.

- At tech startups, some bemoan the rise of 'brogrammer' culture
- The term is a satirical one to describe computer pros with a fraternity party mind-set
- Critics say the emerging style shuts out women and others who don't fit in
- It can also have consequences, by alienating customers and potential hires

At one of the world's biggest gatherings of Web culture, a 28-year-old executive talks about landing a tech job by sending a CEO "bikini shots" from a "nudie calendar" he created.

On campus at Stanford University, a hot startup attracts recruits with a poster asking if they want to 'bro down and crush some code.'"

And the world's largest Internet registration company entices Web entrepreneurs with a Super Bowl ad in which two female celebrities paint its logo onto the body of an apparently naked model.

Forget what you think you know about the benignly geeky computer programmer who lives for the thrill of finding a single misplaced semicolon in thousands of lines of code.

And welcome to the world of the "brogrammer."

As tech startup culture increasingly enters the mainstream consciousness through movies like "The Social Network" or headlines about the latest 20-something to cash in a dorm-room idea for millions of dollars, the field is attracting a whole new host of personality types.

And some in the tech community complain that its anything-goes structure and sky's-the-limit earning potential has turned the environment at some companies into something akin to your worst stereotype of a booze-soaked frat party.

"There is always built into a lot of startups the mentality of the barbarians at the gate ... the disruptive nature that the startup ethos is supposed to be all about," said Tasneem Raja, the digital-interactive editor for Mother Jones magazine. "It's sort of lame that it's being expressed as kegs at the office and beer pong and, unfortunately, also sexism."

The term "brogrammer" (a mash-up of "programmer" and "bro," the stereotypical fraternity-house salute) has sprung up recently as a sarcastic take on this new breed of Silicon Valley (or New York, or Chicago, or wherever else techies assemble) computing entrepreneurs.

Witness a thread on Quora where members of the site satirically submit answers to the question, "How does a programmer become a brogrammer."

One answer:

"Lots of red meat, push-ups on one hand, while coding on the other, sunglasses at all times, a tan is important, popped collar is a must. It's important that you can squash anyone who might call you 'geek' or 'nerd' and that you can pick up girls, but also equally important that you know the "Star Wars" movies by heart, and understand programming ideas, like recursion and inheritance."

**'A sexier industry'**

The evolution of software has played a part in opening up the field to people who haven't necessarily devoted themselves to a computer science degree or spending years hunched over a keyboard.

"Ten years ago, it required somebody who was much more technical," said Steve Spurgat, the CEO of VYou, a New York-based social video site. "When you were writing [code], it was much less abstracted layers where it would take a much longer time to build something that would take a couple of days now."

Spurgat cites some positive effects of that trend, saying that creative types who maybe aren't as detail-oriented as early coders can now join in. But in the 10 years since he started working in startups, he's definitely noticed a culture shift.

"I will boldly say that tech is the new music. It's becoming a sexier industry," he said.

"Think about how much time people are spending with technology. Ten years ago, kids were going to hang out and listen to CDs in their bedrooms. Now they're going to hang out and play 'Words With Friends' and 'Draw Something' and be on Facebook."

But sometimes the growing allure of a tech career can manifest itself in ugly ways.

Raja wrote a piece for Mother Jones about her experience at South by Southwest Interactive when she attended a panel titled "Adding Value as a Non-Technical No Talent Ass-Clown."

During the talk, she wrote, Matt Van Horn, a 28-year-old executive at social-media site Path, talked about landing his first job, at web-aggregator site Digg, by sending editors "bikini shots" from a "nudie calendar" he'd created.

She continued, saying that he advised attendees to avoid what he called "gang-bang interviews" and compared the recruiting process to his college fraternity trying to "attract the hottest girls."



The South by Southwest Interactive festival in Austin, Texas, is a meeting of Web minds, but partying also plays a role.

Raja and some others in attendance -- both men and women -- got up and left. After her article ran, she said she received more than 100 messages from tech professionals who said they'd had similar experiences.

"I've gotten e-mails from women in this space who say 'I see it. I'm really disheartened by it. It makes my job harder,' " she said.

For his part, Van Horn says he regrets having played a part in that perception.

"I just feel terrible about this whole thing," Van Horn told CNN Friday, noting that, flying in the face of the "brogrammer" stereotype, he's a married man (he live-streamed his proposal online). "I'm so sorry that I offended anyone."

He called his comments at South by Southwest "a bad attempt at humor and a poor choice of words during a talk, particularly when taken out of context."

"I don't think the words represent a true reflection of my true feelings and character," he said, adding that at the sometimes free-wheeling festival, he "was trying to have a provocative discussion about non-tech contributors making an impact on tech companies."

He added that the calendar he mentioned was, in fact, a college charity project to aid tsunami victims in Southeast Asia and featured both male and female models."

**'Bro down and crush some code'**

But it's not the only instance that critics cite of the "brogrammer" mentality.

Klout, an app that seeks to judge users' effectiveness on social-media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, has recruited programmers at Stanford University with a poster reading: "Want to bro down and crush some code? Klout is hiring."

That poster, which critics say sends the message that anyone that doesn't share a party-boy mentality need not apply, was "an unfortunate judgment call by a former Klout employee" when the company only employed 10 people, said spokeswoman Lynn Fox. It now employs 70 and 20% of them are women, according to Fox.

In March, daily deals aggregator Squoot advertised a Boston hackathon that promised (along with massages, access to a gym and "kick-ass cupcakes") this tidbit: "Need another beer? Let one of our friendly (female) event staff get that for you." The site has apologized.

And then there's GoDaddy, the web registrar that some call the godfather of the "brogrammer" mind-set.

Jennifer 8. Lee, a journalist and author who, among many projects, works with Web startup Upworthy, said the aforementioned Super Bowl ad, and others like it, show that a "brogrammer" mind-set can have consequences for the company involved.

"They called me the other day and said they just wanted to check in," said Lee (whose numerical middle initial invokes Chinese numerology and was intended to set apart her otherwise common name). "I said, 'Oh yeah, that reminds me ... I thought your Super Bowl ads were sexist and I want to change my registrar. Thanks for reminding me.'"

"We do have power," she added. "There are totally consequences."

The image of beer-swilling coders is a stereotype that far from describes the majority of men in tech startups, those in the industry say.

"There are plenty of people in this industry who ... came up because they were interested in tech and computer programming and maybe some of the more traditionally geekier aspects of this work," Raja said. "Now, I'm hearing people talk about being concerned about the number of quote-unquote 'idea people' flooding the field.

"For me, this is an industry that's really wrestling with how it defines its own professionalism."