

At this very moment over 1.2 million women in their thirties are single in the UK. But stop right there if you're picturing Bridget Jones, moping around and obsessing about meeting Mr Right. In many cases, single women have chosen to be alone, preferring freedom over family, a fact that has led them to be dubbed 'freemales'. Celebrities such as Cameron Diaz and Kylie Minogue, who have not settled down and thrive on successful careers, are said to define this group. As Diaz recently put it: "I love being by myself and I'm really good at it."

However, says Trudy Hill, psychologist and head of matchmaking for exclusive dating site Seventy-thirty.com, it would be wrong to think this means women don't want partners. She says women are as romantic as ever, with most of us dreaming of weddings and families. What *has* changed is society's expectations, and our own willingness to settle. We still want the dream, but not with just anyone.

"The rising number of single women can be explained by two shifts in society," says Hill. "First, there is the general empowerment of women. Women have their own incomes, ambitions, careers. There is less pressure to be married or a mother by a certain age. Settling down is *one* thing we want to do with our lives, not the only thing. Second, because it's no longer taboo to be single, women aren't prepared to settle with anyone who happens to be interested. They have precise ideas of what they're looking for and don't like compromising."

So what *is* it like to be single in 2009? Here, six women share their stories with GLAMOUR...