

Post-Bridget, it's looking even worse for the girls

Singletons have a new problem, a dearth of educated males, says Vanessa Jolly

It is a truth universally acknowledged that an alpha female requires an even more alpha male as a mate. But a recent report suggests today's successful woman with her high standards and picky notions will have nobody to marry: women now make up 57% of university graduates and outnumber men in every subject in higher education (though not engineering or maths, yet).

For the post-Bridget Jones and Sex and the City generation, it's bad news. The sobering truth is that demographics being what they are, more and more educated, eligible women are facing a choice: downgrade your notions of Mr Right, or face up to life alone.

Women are getting better degrees — more 2:1s and firsts in every subject — and two-thirds of medical students are now women, compared with 29% in the 1960s. So not much point in hoping that a handsome consultant will come along, whose Harley Street earnings will pay for the school fees and the 4x4.

And you can forget finding a latter-day Mr Darcy, too. As many trainee barristers these days — you've guessed it — are women as men. Bridget Jones's saviour is a dying breed.

Imogen Lloyd Webber — being the daughter of Andrew, the super-rich theatre impresario — does not need someone to pick up the rent, but even she, blonde and beautiful, has found it a struggle to find a man. Just turned 30, she admits to having spent most of her twenties as a singleton and has no beau in

prospect. Instead, she has decided that if one is going to be single — even permanently — one might as well enjoy it. Her book *The Single Girl's Guide*, published this week by Summersdale, is a wry, witty look at the predicament of the modern woman and a useful aide to surviving the single state.

"We love Bridget Jones and Carrie Bradshaw, but for them it was all focused on finding a man. What happens if he's not there?" she asks. "No one's ruling [marriage] out, but no one seems to be dealing with what happens to the women who don't have a man."

In *The Single Girl's Guide*, men are always referred to as "distractions" in the happy life of the singleton. In fact, two thirds of the book doesn't mention "distractions" at all but focuses on the solo girl's navigation of everything from the office Christmas party to the family reunion.

Having "accidental sex", perversely cold-shouldering the man you fancy, calling your ex in a weak 3am moment even though he comes up under "git" in your mobile are all part and parcel of modern single life, and we should be able to laugh at ourselves and our lapses, she says.

Instead, make the most of the pleasures a single life brings: enjoying your friends, buying shoes without guilt, and getting an unbroken night's sleep in your (blissfully) empty bed.

When a man comes along, don't expect miracles. Until now

it has been the social norm for women to marry up the socio-economic pecking order. Times are changing and our expectations will have to change too: when it comes to whom we choose as a mate, "there's going to have to be flexibility", says Lloyd Webber.

One of the happiest couples she knows is a successful investment banker friend who tried endless unsuccessful dates with other City high-flyers, but eventually fell in love and is blissfully happy with a waiter.

"She's still going out with her waiter/actor. They are completely compatible in the sense that their working hours are crazy and he's very confident in himself. The world has a funny way of working these things out," she says. "Women's expectations about the men they are with will probably change, and men's expectations of a relationship will change too."

It is certainly true that these kinds of couples are on the increase: a recent study found that 1.8m women in full-time work in Britain earn more than their partners. Among the younger generation this is even more marked: half of women aged between 22 and 29 earned more than £9.55 an hour but fewer than half of men in the same age bracket earned as much.

High-powered professional women need to learn that it is much more useful to have a husband who can pick up some of the domestic slack (stay home, say, when the kids are ill) do the shopping, or be there to take that delivery, than it is to have a similarly high-powered spouse who has no time to keep the home fires burning. Perhaps, as Lloyd Webber points out, if modern women are going to find husbands they need to change their criteria for what makes their ideal man.

Francesco Guidicini



Imogen Lloyd Webber is the author of a new guide to single life