

All the single ladies

JENNIFER Aniston, Kate Winslet, Renee Zellweger ... rich, beautiful, successful, at the prime of their lives and peak of their talents. Yet all are resolutely single and still engaged in the search for Mr Right despite the fact that if you put their profiles on a dating website they'd be taken before you could say GSOH.

With the number of people living alone increasing from seven to seven and a half million between 2000 and 2010, according to the Office for National Statistics, it seems as a nation we're increasingly failing to find love and, in dire need of matchmaking magic.

Step in Karen Barr who, back in 1999, was a successful IT consultant, delivery manager for a top software company and careerwise couldn't be happier. But for all the workplace plaudits and financial rewards, something was missing from her life. Looking around at her friends, Barr realised they were all in relationships and starting families while she was the odd one out.

Applying her business brain to the problem, she began to use the techniques that had seen her become so successful in the world of work to sort out her personal life. Already armed with a psychology degree, she embarked on a series of courses including neuro-linguistic programming, which seeks to change patterns of behaviour and behavioural psychology, and then started putting what she had learned into practice.

As well as leading to a new career as a life coach and corporate trainer - Barr set up www.beswitchedon.com in 2004 - this approach was also to see her find a partner. Not content with sorting out her own life, and having identified a need among women who wanted to be in a loving relationship too, she is now keen to share her techniques in a series of Finding Love workshops, the first of their kind in Scotland.

"If you're looking for a new job or to change career you don't sit around and wait for it to happen. You plan, get your CV prepped, start to look around. So I used business principles to find love," says the Dundonian.

"It's about developing self-awareness, doing the opposite of what you usually do. For example if your usual behaviour is to be shy and avoid attractive men, go and talk to them, in the supermarket, say. Or start by smiling- take small steps and build up."

"It's my own story. I am a fortysome-

Dating workshops might sound a bit *Sex And The City* for straight-talking singletons, but Karen Barr believes she has what it takes to help us find love

WORDS JANET CHRISTIE

thing, never-married woman. I'm in a relationship now but if I had a penny for every time I was asked, 'You're attractive, intelligent, why are you not with someone?' I'd be rich. I wanted to be with someone but never was. Now I realise my head was open to it but my heart wasn't and I was sabotaging it unconsciously, always finding a reason why men were unsuitable," says Barr.

Studying two of her friends who had divorced their husbands, she identified a different attitude to dating and accurately predicted they would be married again within three years.

"About five years ago my friends divorced their husbands and I thought, 'They're going to be married again soon.' It was something about their psyche, a different way of thinking about marriage and relationships to me, and both were very open and available. Soon they were both very happily married so I started thinking, 'OK, maybe it's not about what's out there. Maybe it's about me,' and I was shocked when I worked out that I was scared of commitment and had a fear of getting involved," she says.

Now Edinburgh based, Barr has 12 years experience in the personal growth field under her belt and found it easy to tailor her programme towards the matter of finding love. Breaking it down into seven steps, she has devised day-long workshops to run in Edinburgh and Glasgow that help women identify where they've been going wrong.

"The workshops uncover, clarify and develop what you need to know to find the right relationship," says Barr.

The seven steps include setting clear intentions, deciding what you're looking for and are willing to compromise on, clearing away past issues and limiting unconscious beliefs and practical advice on how to get out there.

But what if women haven't been going wrong. What if there really is a dearth of decent men out there?



OPPOSITES ATTRACT Barr (far right) has applied her business acumen to the dating world. Below: Renee Zellweger



What if women are picky for good reason, having discovered that some of them can indeed turn out to be lying, cheating scumbags who they'd never want to see again unless down the barrel of a shotgun?

"There's got to be some compromise involved," says Barr. "We have this idea we'll find Mr Perfect but there is no Mr Absolutely Perfect," she says.

"Try not to be put off by the smallest thing because then you're not giving people a chance. Very often the people we are looking for don't come in the packages we expect."

So if your date turns up wearing sandals with socks?

"Ignore it. Learn to accept him as he is because you'll never change him. Accept that in relationships there are things that you put up with."

According to Barr, the number one way to meet a partner is through friends, followed by clubs, work and then the internet.

Initially aimed at women, the



SEVEN STEPS TO FINDING LOVE

1 SET AN ABSOLUTE, CLEAR INTENTION FOR WHAT YOU WANT AND VOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

You have to make the commitment that you are going to make it happen. Say: "I am going to do whatever it takes," and mean it.

2 KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR

There's no absolutely perfect person out there. We all have areas that we think really need to be right and others that we will compromise on and those will be different for everyone, so work out what these are.

3 CLEAR AWAY PAST ISSUES

There are often things in our past that hold us back, such as fear of getting hurt, memories of old relationships such as 'the one that got away' or someone who hurt us, and ideas of who we should be with.

4 LOOK AT WHAT UNCONSCIOUS BELIEFS YOU MIGHT HAVE

There could be a fear of commitment or getting hurt, fear of losing control or falling in love and those tend to be unconscious. neuro-linguistic programming techniques can be used to explore these beliefs.

5 DIG DEEPER INTO EXPLORING THE UNCONSCIOUS BELIEFS YOU HAVE UNCOVERED

People think: "I'm not good enough", "I have to be perfect in order to be loved" or "what if they discover the real me?" and they need to work at shifting those unhelpful ideas before they can move on.

6 EXPLODE THOSE LIMITING BELIEFS

Use emotional freedom and NLP techniques, picturing and visualising.

7 PRACTICAL STEPS

Get out there and find a partner. Ask friends, join clubs, go online. Just do it.

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workshops might expand to men if there's demand, she says, although in her experience they're not as likely to sign up for a workshop designed to resolve relationship issues.

"Women are more open and receptive. Men will say they're interested, but will they really come along? And mixed workshops don't work. However, we'd like to run courses for men in future."

Or could it be that now the women have decided to be less picky and might be willing to overlook considerations they may have baulked at in the past - failure to come home of an evening and spending a month's wages in one night at the casino, say - the men won't need to bother with workshops as we'll find them perfect just as they are?

"No, there are good reasons why some men are unsuitable and that's why they've been rejected. But it helps to work out in advance what areas you can't compromise on so that you can come and go on others," says Barr. "A big part of this is working out what you

'A BIG PART OF THIS IS WORKING OUT WHAT YOU WANT'



want and not being afraid to voice it." OK, I want Johnny Depp, despite his propensity to waste his talents playing pantomime parts and the fact he's married to that bag of bones Vanessa Paradis, and I'm prepared to overlook George Clooney's commitment issues. Is that the kind of thing?

Barr laughs. "They might turn out to be not very nice people. And if you want a particular kind of person you have to be prepared to put the work in to be like that too. If you want witty, intelligent, funny, caring, you have to make yourself that person too." Ouch.

So who does Barr expect at her workshops?

"Women from their mid-thirties to early fifties, who are thinking, 'Will I ever find someone?' And then there's the biological clock. When I was 25, I thought by 30 I'd be married with kids.

By 30 I thought it would be by 35, then by my late thirties I was wondering if it would ever happen," she says.

For many, it's not a problem of meeting the opposite sex - there are internet sites galore - it's landing a second date or taking things further.

"Women need to change their internal attitudes to life and relationships. They're meeting men but not getting a second date. My programme is more about the psychological goings on, what's happening in your mind, so it's not the logistics to getting a date. You can go on the internet and do that. It's how to keep them," she says.

And has Barr managed to keep her man so far, six months on?

"Well, it's great for now and if I hadn't used my techniques, I wouldn't have gone out with him at all." ■

For further information on *beswitchedon* or the forthcoming workshops, visit www.beswitchedon.com. The next *Awaken Love* one-day workshop is at The Bonham, Edinburgh, 3 July