

'My single friends have taught me to be more than "just" a wife,' says *Sali Hughes, 33,* who has been with her husband, *Richard,* for nine years.

Last year, my single girlfriend, Katy, moved in with my husband and me while she waited to complete on her new house. One day, as I sat folding washing from the dryer, I noticed a sobering difference between the two piles. In hers, pretty Agent Provocateur fripperies in bonbon shades and chic prints. In mine, comfy, safe white cotton knickers from M&S. Am I so settled I hadn't noticed my descent down the slippery slope to complacency? I logged on to Figleaves.com and splurged.

The single women in my life always make the effort, because they never know what sexy adventure they may have. Why should I give up on that sense of excitement, just because I've found my man? And why should he miss out? It transpired that just one new set of lingerie and a leg wax can be the difference between a night of passion and an evening pairing socks in front of *QI*.

The inspiration doesn't stop at the frivolous. When it comes to juggling, my single friend Jules balances her friends, relationships, work and family with effortless precision. Jules does not plan life around a man's work commitments or a baby's nap schedule – she affords every element the importance it deserves. When I asked her to be on standby for my eldest son's birth, because my husband had to leave the country for a few days in the weeks before my due date, she immediately cleared her diary. It left me wondering – how many married women would do the same?

And in the years since, I find that consciously balancing my life not only strengthens friendships, but also makes for a harmonious and more interesting relationship with my husband. Making sure I snatch the odd solo jaunt to the cinema, or weekend city break with my best friend, makes me relish those cosy evenings with just the two of us and a

curry all the more. And when we sit down to another dinner à deux, I always have something to talk about.


Crucially, watching my single friends live happily and fully has taught me that, married or not, I am responsible for my own happiness. Thinking you are 'completed' by a person is a missed opportunity. When my friend, Lou, found herself single last year, she made herself a fancy breakfast every weekend and sat in bed, wearing new £50 cashmere socks and devouring the papers. She squeezed every last drop of self-indulgent fun from being alone – and it was inspiring.

While it's hugely important to me that I enjoy my marriage, I don't need

it in order to put one foot in front of the other. My husband is a bonus, a cherry on top of what is, I hope, a life in its own right.

I don't want to be defined by being married any more than my friends should be defined by their single status. If I'm unhappy, I've learned to look

first to what I am doing to contribute to how I'm feeling. If I'm bored, I wonder what I can do to revive myself. It ensures I never lose my sense of self and that my husband still recognises the independent woman he married.

Most of all, my single friends have taught me to be extremely grateful for what I have. My husband may not send me sexy texts every day, or whisk me off for romantic dinners, but he's done something more precious. He has been a wonderful father to our boys, an unwavering supporter to me, and held my hair back when I've been sick from food poisoning, telling me I was beautiful throughout. He has been my permanent and unconditional soft place to fall, and my single friends never allow me to forget how incredibly lucky I am to have found him. I look forward to the day when, while they're out there having fun, they find their soulmates, too. 

'Watching single friends live fully has shown me I'm responsible for my own happiness'