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Thirty-something

Professor David Crystal

This phrase, 'thirty-something', it came in in the 1980s referring to people of an unspecified age between 30 and 40. These were members of the baby boom, the people who were born 20, 30 years before and entering their 30s now and not knowing how to cope – or at least, that was the idea.

It was the name of a television series. It also became the name of a film. People who had lost their freedom, was the idea. Children, they'd got now, demanding jobs, approach of middle-age, gloom! There's a website which says it's 'personal growth for thirty-somethings'.

It's used both as an adjective – 'she's a thirty-something career woman'. And it's also used as a noun, as I just did – 'the thirty-somethings'.

And then, the ending got applied to others. We started to hear 'twenty-somethings'. And now we've got 'forty-somethings' – that was a television show in 2003, 'Forty-Something'.

Well, it can be any age. The implication is always that there's a set of values or problems associated with that age.

Me? I'm sixty-something!



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