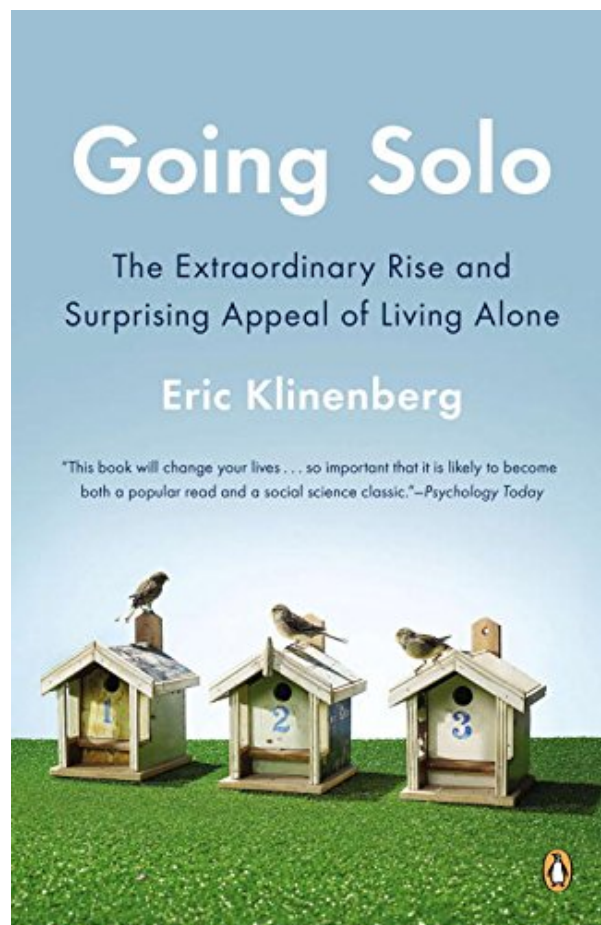


GOING SOLO: THE EXTRAORDINARY RISE AND SURPRISING APPEAL OF LIVING ALONE BY ERIC KLINENBERG



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Going Solo

The Extraordinary Rise and
Surprising Appeal of Living Alone

Eric Klinenberg

"This book will change your lives . . . so important that it is likely to become
both a popular read and a social science classic."—*Psychology Today*



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GOING SOLO: THE EXTRAORDINARY RISE AND SURPRISING APPEAL OF LIVING ALONE BY ERIC KLINENBERG PDF

With eye-opening statistics, original data, and vivid portraits of people who live alone, renowned sociologist Eric Klinenberg upends conventional wisdom to deliver the definitive take on how the rise of going solo is transforming the American experience.

Klinenberg shows that most single dwellers—whether in their twenties or eighties—are deeply engaged in social and civic life. There's even evidence that people who live alone enjoy better mental health and have more environmentally sustainable lifestyles. Drawing on more than three hundred in-depth interviews, Klinenberg presents a revelatory examination of the most significant demographic shift since the baby boom and offers surprising insights on the benefits of this epochal change.

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Most helpful customer reviews

231 of 242 people found the following review helpful.

Important work, but very unbalanced

By Maysi Sem

Eric Klinenberg has written an important work that has many useful facts about those of us who choose to live alone, but he has missed at least half of the picture by ignoring two very important things: those of us who identify as introverts (those who prefer their own company and derive a sense of reality from within rather than without), and the majority of elderly people who are not down and out, living in NYC, and who are having a great time living in retirement communities and on their own.

With regard to introverts, it is striking that Klinenberg does not even refer to Anneli Rufus and her book 'Party of One: The Loner's Manifesto'. This is a must-read for anyone writing about living alone. Klinenberg's bias towards extroverts and those who need interaction with others in order to maintain their mental health shows over and over again, especially in his writing about elderly people. For many people,

reaching middle age and beyond is a wonderful time when at long last we no longer have to be around other people all the time and can enjoy that solitude we have been craving for decades. Those of us who are true introverts never need to worry about "filling empty hours" - it's unthinkable. We've spent our lives waiting for a time when we actually have more time to devote to the hundreds of things we've never had a chance to do because we had to spend so much of our time working. Klinenberg's cautionary tales about becoming ill are worth reading, especially in a country with such a horrific health care system, but he focuses solely on the really sad, horrible tales, mostly limiting his discussion to NYC.

Meanwhile, out in what Stephen Colbert would call "the heartland," there are millions of elderly people who are not wasting away alone in some SRO or nursing home, but who are instead enjoying an excellent quality of life, living independently in apartments and cottages that are part of retirement communities that provide round-the-clock health care when needed. My mother has lived in such a community very independently for the past 20 years and she loves it (she will be 90 this year). She and my father were not wealthy (they were educators), but they saved up their money, made some sensible investment decisions, sold their house and moved to a retirement community in their 70s when they were both still healthy. Today my mother is very active, goes out, attends cultural events, volunteers, has dozens of friends, gets excellent medical care, usually eats one meal a day with friends in the central dining room, and can still cook for herself. Having gotten to know her friends and a host of other elderly people living in nearby retirement communities, this is a common tale, not an exception. There are many such places dotted across the US, and although some of them are prohibitively expensive - and not worth the cost - most are just as affordable as living in an apartment complex.

So don't let Klinenberg's book scare you. It's a very incomplete work written by a clearly biased individual. Yes, it's important to get the word out that living alone is becoming increasingly popular, so he deserves praise for doing that. However, this change in living styles is a cause for great celebration, in my opinion. At last we can live the way we want to rather than putting up with the old models of marriage, family, kids, ad nauseum! Notice how difficult it is, even for an 'objective sociologist' to put a positive spin on this revolutionary change? For those of us who have lived alone for years and love it, the appeal is not 'surprising' at all.

147 of 159 people found the following review helpful.

Going Solo Rocks!

By Elena Portacolone

I loved reading this heartfelt and thorough investigation of a rather unexplored phenomenon as living alone. I enjoyed very much the way the plot unfolds. I could not put the book down until the end, something that never occurs.

As in *Heat Wave*, the account unfolds through the eloquent use of academic literature, the compelling stories of informants, and the author's candid observations. Without revealing too much, I enjoyed how Klinenberg convinced me of the appeal of living alone. I often found myself wondering how the author, a married man with two kids, could explain with crystal clarity the thrill of making it alone of many women like me - buying a home on your own, finding your path, falling in love with your higher self. What I loved the most was how the author employed the "appeal" of the "social experiment" of living alone as the foundation for the discussion of the other side of the coin - the hardships and hazards of living alone in societies not yet equipped to serve legions of one-head householders.

As social scientist who studied for the last four years the condition of living alone in older age in America, I was pleased to finally, for the first time, read such an articulate and entertaining discussion of the many facets of living solo. I appreciated how Klinenberg draws the line between loneliness and living alone, how he highlights the issues of studying social isolation and the importance of proper housing policies. I was taken by the author's account of his grandmother's experience in a high-end assistive living facility (we know

so little about life in these spaces!), his reflection on horrific nursing homes and unaffordable services for older adults, as well as his discussion of best practices in New York and in Sweden.

Finally, whereas *Heat Wave* was a serious book as "social autopsies" should be, *Going Solo* surprised me with some very funny paragraphs where I found myself laughing hard. It was a joy to finally immerse myself into a sophisticated analysis founded on unforgettable ethnographies, clear arguments, and even humor. What an inspiration!

96 of 104 people found the following review helpful.

This Book Will Change Our Lives

By Bella DePaulo

This Book Will Change Our Lives -- For the Better

There are three interrelated trends that are reshaping our personal lives and our society, and all three have been developing for decades:

- * The rise in the number and proportion of people who are single (always-single, divorced, or widowed);
- * The increasing number of years that adults spend unmarried rather than married, with the unmarried years now outnumbering the married ones; and
- * The increase in the number of people living solo.

The last of those three is the topic of a book so important that it is likely to become both a popular read and a social science classic. It is Eric Klinenberg's just-published *Going Solo: The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone*.

Does the title of this review sound like hype? I meant it seriously. This book really will change the lives of people who live solo, and everyone else. At least it should. The main thing standing in the way of an explosion of attention and impact is that the claims are not sensationalized. More people are living solo than ever before in human history. That's just a fact. If Klinenberg had tried to persuade us that, as a consequence of this rise in living alone, America was becoming a nation of isolated, lonely people, and that our civic and community life was in a long period of decline - well, then he would have an instant best-seller, hands-down! In fact, as he notes, the best-selling sociology books in the history of the United States have peddled just such dire messages.

If you wanted to see the rise of solo living as a bad, bad thing, you could comb through *Going Solo*, pluck a few choice excerpts, and make your case. Similarly, if you wanted to declare that living solo is an unmitigated personal and interpersonal good, you could find some quotes that would seem supportive. What you cannot do, if you really do read the entire book, is come away with anything but a deep and complex understanding of what it means to live alone. It can be exhilarating or depressing or both. It can be awesome for some and awful for others.

I don't know the author (though I did talk to him on the phone when he was researching the book), but I did know his previous work. I have to admit that I was a bit wary when I first learned that he was writing a book on solo living. That's because one of his previous books, *Heat Wave*, was about the hundreds of Chicagoans who died alone, at home, during the 1995 heat wave. Would *Going Solo* be the sociological version of Bridget Jones's fear about ultimate fate of people who live single - that they would all "end up dying alone and found three weeks later half-eaten by an Alsatian"? Not hardly.

Eric Klinenberg does tell us about the worst cases - people who really do die alone, and whose bodies remain unclaimed by any other humans. Yet even then, he does not presume to judge: "...when truly isolated people

die alone...we can't actually know whether their solitude was a source of sadness, or satisfaction" (p. 128).

I have so much more to say about this book. I'll save those discussions for blog posts. (Already available is my list of the top 12 things you probably did not know about living solo: [...]) For now, I'll end by returning to the title of this review.

So why will Going Solo change our lives? Here are a few of the reasons:

* The book puts solo living on the map, as a pervasive and consequential feature of contemporary life, not just in the United States, but far beyond. It establishes going solo as a way of living not likely to recede anytime soon.

* The research and the arguments are thorough, balanced, and persuasive. The work is based on more than 300 interviews, collected nationally and internationally, over a 7-year period. The author is an esteemed sociologist, who positions his findings in historical and cross-cultural context.

* Eric Klinenberg explains, for many big important domains of life, why the increase in solo living matters: "The rise of living alone has been a transformative social experience. It changes the way we understand ourselves and our most intimate relationships. It shapes the way we build our cities and develop our economies. It alters the way we become adults, as well as how we age and the way we die. It touches every social group and nearly every family, no matter who we are or whether we live with others today" (p. 6).

* Perhaps most significant, in terms of actually making change happen, is that Going Solo builds up to a final chapter, "Redesigning solo life." There, Klinenberg shares his insights about what societies can do to support and enrich the lives not only of those people who are living alone, but also those who care about the singletons, or who may find themselves living solo in the future.

--Bella DePaulo, author of *Singled Out: How Singles Are Stereotyped, Stigmatized, and Ignored, and Still Live Happily Ever After*

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