



## Family - The New Norm



[1]In "Going Solo," a new research book getting international attention for its focus upon "The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone", **NYU Sociology Professor, [Eric Klinenberg](#)** [2], **delves into the myths and misconceptions about living alone.** For instance, Aristotle said, "The man who is isolated . . . or has no need to share because he is already self-sufficient . . . must therefore be either a beast or a god."From Biblical stories about the Garden of Eden, through Aristotle, the Greek poets, sociologists and primatologists, writers and researchers have noted that our species have organized themselves around the will to live with others, not alone.

~~But during the past half century, we have embarked on a remarkable social experiment - we have begun settling down as singletons:~~

**Today, more than 50% of American adults are single, and 31 million - roughly one out of every seven adults - lives alone. People who live alone make up 28% of all U.S. households, which means that they are now tied with "childless couples" as the most prominent residential type - more common than the nuclear family, the multi-generational family, or the roommate or group home.**

Let's compare that to 1950 when 22% of American adults were single. Four million lived alone, and they accounted for 9% of households. Living alone in 1950 was far more common in the sprawling Western states - Alaska, Montana, and Nevada - and was usually a short-lived stage on the road to a more conventional domestic life. Today living alone is most common in big cities - throughout the country. **In Seattle, San Francisco, Denver, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and Chicago, there are between 35% and 45% of all households with just one person. In Manhattan, 1 of every 2 households is a one-person household.**

And lest you think this is only a phenomenon in America, living alone globally is skyrocketing, rising from about 153 million in 1996 to 277 million in 2011 - an increase of around 80% in 15 years.

~~**What factors are driving this trend according to the research conducted by Professor Klinenberg?**~~

**First is the rise of women.** The mass entry into the labor force has meant more and more women can and are delaying marriage, support themselves, leaving a marriage when needed, and buying their own home.

**Second is the communications revolution.** Today, living alone is not a solitary experience. Through technology we can stay at home and stay connected.

**Urbanization is the third factor.** Cities support a subculture of single people who live on their own but want to be out in public with each other. this makes being single a much more collective experience.



**Longer longevity (the fourth factor)** has been more beneficial to women - living longer than spouses - sometimes by 5, 10 or 20 years - and usually in these later years they choose to live alone.

**The solo dwellers today are primarily women: 18 million compared to 14 million men. More than 15 million living singly are between thirty-five and sixty-four. 10 million are elderly. Yet young adults between 18-34 are the fastest-growing segment of the solo-dwelling population.**



[3]Klinenberg tells us his research has lead him to make a strong distinction between living alone and being alone or being lonely. "People will live alone whenever and wherever they can afford to do it. . . At certain times in modern lives, living alone is the more desirable state. **For young professionals, it's a sign of success and a mark of distinction, a way to gain freedom and experience the anonymity that can make city life so exhilarating.**" Similarly, for someone divorced, it's a way to reassert control and often move away from the loneliness of a bad marriage.

As it relates to building your personal safety net, Professor Klinenberg says, "Americans are quite anxious about isolation. **We believe in self-reliance, but we also long for community. We make the assumption that when someone is alone, there's something wrong, and they don't have what they want or need.**"

**"We need to make a distinction between living alone and being alone, or being isolated, or feeling lonely.** These are all different things. In fact, people who live alone tend to spend more time socializing with friends and neighbors than people who are married. . . living alone is not an entirely solitary experience. It's generally a quite social one."

**So next time you hear of a friend or relative living alone, try not to jump to conclusions.** Are they isolated or independent? Do they have close connections with safe networks of friends and family? Do they seem to be reaching out for help or content. Stay in touch, keep your eyes and ears open - are they expressing their need for privacy or are they becoming isolated and distant from those around them. There is a difference.

~~(Steven Kurutz of the New York Times takes a quirky and humorous [look](#) [4] at what it can mean, and what you can do when you live alone.)~~

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[3] <https://personalsafetynets.com/file/180>

[4] <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/23/garden/the-freedom-and-perils-of-living-alone.html>