

News for Life after 55

The Extraordinary Rise and Appeal of Living Solo

*Hello. This newsletter highlights key findings from Dr. Eric Klinenberg's book called *Going Solo*. The statistics may be numerous, but they really help to paint the picture of the revolution we are experiencing.*

A revolution

A revolution is happening in our way of life. Going solo, living on one's own, has become a dominant way of living in urban areas for all age groups including young adults, midlife people, and elders. According to Dr. Klinenberg's research, in most major U.S. cities, 40-46% are solo dwellers compared to a mere 9% in 1950, who were seen as *sick* or *immoral*. And women are leading the way with statistics showing that 18 million women compared to 14 million men are solo dwellers.

Living solo is a worldwide phenomenon, says Dr. Klinenberg, with some of the world's most affluent societies leading the way including Sweden (47% living solo), Norway (40%), Germany (39%), and the Netherlands (36%). The U.S. is actually in the middle of the pack with 28% of all households living solo. According to Dr. Klinenberg, the individual not the nuclear family is becoming the basic unit of social organization.

These solo dwellers are redesigning our urban landscapes. Dr. Klinenberg has found that people who live solo are more socially active than those who live with others and give rise to rich urban neighborhoods with their cafes, restaurants, community centers, civic associations, and local shopping areas. Frequenting libraries, parks, and gyms and using support services like house cleaning, food preparation, and home delivery all add to the ways that solo dwellers are learning how to live well.

What is giving rise to this surging lifestyle of living solo? According to Dr. Klinenberg, four sweeping social changes have brought this about including the rapid rise in the status of women, the communications revolution, mass urbanization, and the longevity revolution.

The rising status of women

Dr. Klinenberg has found that men's and women's participation in higher education and the paid workforce is



more balanced than ever before. Today women make up the majority of the undergraduate students, and 54% of college graduates are women. As a result, women have gained financial autonomy as well as a way to break out of the traditional domestic sphere.

Dr. Klinenberg research has also found that women's now have more control over their own lives with easy access to contraception and with the social acceptability of divorce rising steadily since the 1960's. These changes have given people in their 20's, 30's, and even 40's new found freedoms to date, explore, and discover the joy of being alone and with others.

The communications revolution

The second driving force, according to Dr. Klinenberg, is the communications revolution. In 1940, only 1 in 3 U.S. households had telephones. Now we have TVs, radios, personal computers, tablets, and mobile phones. And since the early 2000's, the Internet has provided solo dwellers diverse and creative ways to stay connected.

Massive urbanization

The third driving force, says Dr. Klinenberg, is mass urbanization. In 1900, the majority of the U.S. population lived in rural areas while today 80% live in cities. Dr. Klinenberg's research has found that subcultures thrive in cities and provide enclaves for solo dwellers to share similar values, orientations, and ways of life.

The longevity revolution

The fourth driving force is the fact that we are living longer than ever before. Since 1900, life expectancy has increased 30 years. In 1930, not even 10% of the population reached 65, now 1 in 6 people are 65+. Dr. Klinenberg has also found that we are maintaining our physical health and capacity for independence unimaginable a century ago.

And women specifically often outlive their spouses by decades says Dr. Klinenberg, and aging alone has become a common experience for women. In 1900, 10% of widowed women lived alone and by 2000, 62% did.

Dr. Klinenberg has found that both older women and men prefer to live alone rather than move in with family, friends, or an institutional setting. In 1950, 1 in 10 people 65+ lived alone, today it is 1 in 3. This is not merely an American phenomenon says Dr. Klinenberg—Japan, Germany, Italy, and Austria are just a few of the countries where aging alone has become a clear preference.

Why is living solo preferred by many?

Why do so many prefer to live solo? Dr. Klinenberg has found that living solo allows us to pursue *sacred* modern values of freedom, flexibility, and personal choice. Living solo:

- Lets us do what we want, when we want, on our own terms
- Liberates us from the constraints of a domestic partner's needs and demands
- Allows us to focus on our development
- Gives time and space for restorative solitude

It isn't just self-oriented pursuits, says Dr. Klinenberg who has found that those living solo compensate by becoming more socially involved and create thriving communities as highlighted earlier.

Single dwellers whether in their 20's or 80's are happier than ever, leading active, fulfilling lives, and have more environmentally friendly lifestyles than their married counterparts, says Dr. Klinenberg. And not surprising, he has found that living solo is one of the most stable household arrangements.

Is this a new phenomenon?

In the early twentieth century, Greenwich Village in New York City became a harbinger of what was to come, says Dr. Klinenberg. The Village was famous for its intellectuals, artists, and activists including Georgia O'Keeffe, Emma Goldman, Eugene O'Neill, Alfred Stieglitz, Walter Lippmann, Claude McKay and other ordinary people living in the Village



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Events & Services

The *Crafting Your Life After 55* Workshop — Come explore creative ways to recognize and align with your life purpose after retirement. One participant said: *Outstanding! Amazing! Inspiring!* Capitola Recreation
Saturday, June 1st and 8th, 10 am to 12:30 pm, 4400 Jade St., Capitola CA
\$73 Resident/\$93 Non-resident. Call (831) 475-5935 to register.

The *Crafting Your Life After 55* Workbook Release 3.0 Is Available

With Release 3.0, the workbook now contains all the information covered in the workshop with even more exercises. It also provides guidance on cultivating flow in your life and taking healthy risks. One participant said: *This was one of the best things I've done for myself since retiring. So valuable.*

\$19.95 plus \$6.74 tax and shipping, \$26.69 total

Pay using PayPal or send a check to Robin Everest

1555 Merrill St., Santa Cruz CA 95062. Please include your shipping address.

Robin Everest has taught *Finding Your Life's Work* workshops throughout the San Francisco bay area and now leads *Artist's Way* and *women's 62+ hiking* groups. She retired in 2018, from teaching professional writing at Santa Clara University.

who enjoyed modern freedoms in what Christine Stansell called the *cradle of liberated personae*. This bohemian culture with its focus on new found autonomy enjoyed *life without father* said Gertrude Stein and created a community of individuals who took up a variety of personal, political, and aesthetic causes.

According to Dr. Klinenberg, women's ability to find work in the paid labor market was a key part of this self-actualization because it gave them financial freedom and a way to break free of the typical domestic role.

This bohemian culture, says Dr. Klinenberg, created intimate cafes, salons, and saloons and a cultural gathering place in Washington Square Park, which became a place for self-expression and public display. In a ten year span, the Village became an urban enclave for solo dwellers. And this modern, independent lifestyle (with *New Women* at the fore) began to spring up in Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and other major U.S. cities.

What to do with this gift of freedom?

Helen Gurley Brown, who wrote *Sex and the Single Girl*, said that living solo demands guts, conviction, and the fortitude to live alone. In other words, we have to *develop the capacity* to live solo.

Some of the words of wisdom Dr. Klinenberg gained from his interviews with solo dwellers include the following:

- Go out and enjoy the vibrant street life
- Become a regular at a local exercise studio
- Develop a new set of urban friends
- Get a dog for companionship and exercise
- Enjoy eating out
- Take classes like art and music
- Attend public events like talks and concerts
- Go shopping with friends
- Enjoy the peace of coming home and the chance to decompress
- Read, write, and meditate

Three things that I would also recommend for solo retirees include:

- Go discover and enjoy classes, interest groups, and monthly gatherings through the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) through the University near you.
- Find an *endeavor of interest* where you spend 2-3 mornings or afternoons a week learning and growing. One student of mine was a retired first-grade teacher and is now creating readers for them. Another is learning the craft of carpentry. A third paints in her art studio.
- Volunteer at a community organization. One student who knew power tools is now helping seniors with their home projects.

An opportunity for self-actualization

Living solo also brings the opportunity to discover who we are more fully. Mystics throughout the ages used their time alone to know themselves in a deeper more profound way. And the transcendentalists like Emerson and Thoreau espoused the virtues of solitude as a way to follow the laws of our inner nature.



Dr. Klinenberg shares that few hermits and aesthetes were true solitaries and lived in or near settlements and villages that they frequented often. Thoreau built his cabin at Walden Pond on land owed by Emerson and frequently received home cook meals from his mother. Georgia O'Keeffe often visited neighbors in the afternoons.

In conclusion, as you are learning, living solo gives us the promise of many gifts both personally and socially. If we are *up to the challenge*, it is waiting for us.