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Review of Going Solo: The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone, by Eric Klinenberg.

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ERIC KLINENBERG

Going Solo: The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone

New York: Penguin, 2012. 273 p. \$27.95.

In 2010 the 31 million one-person households in the United States constituted 27 percent of all households, up from 13 percent in 1960. Fourteen million men and 17 million women lived alone; 5 million of them were under age 35 years, 15 million were between 35 and 64, and 11 million were older. Most population specialists could account for these statistics without reading Eric Klinenberg's book. Husbands dying sooner than wives explains much of the sex differential as well as the large number of older one-person households; and increases in divorce and age at first marriage, and the growing disinclination to marry at all, explain why this census category has doubled in prevalence. But Klinenberg has little interest in offering such a demographic account. His focus is on understanding the social-psychological significance of living alone for the "singleton," and the societal significance of ever larger percentages of individuals living outside of family units. To understand these dimensions Klinenberg, a sociologist at New York University, and a team of graduate students interviewed "over 300" largely middle-class urban singletons, most of whom live in New York City. He also interviewed social workers, activists, and urban planners in the US and Stockholm who assist and design for people living alone.

He begins by situating "living alone" theoretically and historically. He attributes its increase to the "cult of the individual" that spread across the Western world over the past 200 years, the rising status of women, the growth of cities, advances in communication technologies, and increases in life expectancy. The next five chapters focus on the particular singleton groups his team interviewed. Chapter 2 treats young professionals who see their twenties and early thirties as a time to continue their education and to establish themselves in careers, not a time for marriage. For them, being able to live without roommates is "a mark of success and distinction," although by their late thirties many, especially women, begin worrying about their singleton lives. Chapter 3 is about "going solo" after divorce. Interestingly, most of the interviewees didn't want to remarry. Women had an easier time adjusting to solo living because of their larger social networks; many men thought that eventually they might need to enter a partnership or marry. Of course, since no *remarried* divorced individuals were interviewed, these views of solo living and marriage might not accurately reflect the feelings of many or most divorced individuals. Chapter 4 describes poor singletons, mostly men living in SROs (single-room-occupancy hotels), who often live alone to escape a problematic domestic situation. Here one finds individuals with past or present difficulties related to mental health, addiction, or unemployment. Chapter 5 depicts the divide between middle-age singletons who permanently identify with that status and those who still see it as a life stage. This split makes it difficult to mobilize singletons politically. Chapter 6 examines those "aging alone." Klinenberg paints a horrific view of life in nursing homes and empathizes with these older singletons. He suggests that the ideal solution for rapidly aging societies is to construct housing that combines separate living quarters with communal areas for eating and socializing. In general, he views the rise of solo living, a trend that many other commentators have equated with societal pathology, in positive terms. He

concludes that we need to redesign our cities to better accommodate the large future increase of singletons.

Going Solo is an interesting approach to understanding what is, in accounting terms, a census category. It might spark demographers to be more theoretically adventurous when analyzing population changes. Of course, there is some overreach with Klinenberg's expansive approach. A recently released convict moving into an SRO, although living in a one-person household, is doing something quite different from a successful thirty-year-old moving into her own Greenwich Village apartment, and both are doing something quite different from the 75-year-old widow who suddenly finds herself living alone in the house she had shared with her husband for fifty years. But considering the census definition of a household unit—one in which “the occupants do not live with any other persons in the structure and there is direct access from the outside or through a common hall”—perhaps a little overreach isn't a bad thing.—D.H.

CHRISTINE OVERALL

Why Have Children? The Ethical Debate

Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012. 253 p. \$27.95.

Christine Overall approaches the question posed in the title of this book as a philosopher. While she concedes that there are many constraints (social and otherwise) on the decision whether to have a child, she assumes that childbearing is voluntary, hence the fundamental decision is to have a child (not the decision to avoid childbearing). As she spells out, this decision has relatively weighty ethical implications from both an individual and a collective perspective. Overall systematically addresses a set of questions about the ethics of childbearing: reasons for having a child (and not having a child), conditions under which childbearing is morally justified (and under which it is not), and whether childbearing is in some instances a moral obligation (and whether in other instances avoiding childbearing is a moral obligation). She reviews reasons commonly given for having children, consisting of “deontological reasons” (the intrinsic value of childbearing itself) and “consequential reasons” (expected positive and negative effects on various individual-level and collective-level phenomena). A complementary set of chapters reviews reasons for not having children. Throughout the argument is thorough, careful, and balanced. Overall concludes that, from the standpoint of ethical philosophy, most of the arguments supporting or opposing childbearing are deficient. She then submits that the most defensible reason to have a child is that it creates a new human relationship (parent–child) with its own unique physical, psychological, intellectual, and moral attributes. The gendered nature of the decision to have a child is a major theme of this book. This is first of all a matter of biology, but it is also a matter of power relations and, most profoundly, the meanings attached to childbearing. Index, bibliography.—J.C.