


SWF seeks roommate: What's wrong with that?

 chicagobusiness.com/article/20150320/OPINION/150329974/why-is-finding-a-roommate-so-hard-as-an-adult

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Four years ago I wrote a story about how if you live with housemates past your mid-20s, you're weird. The gist of the piece was that financial pressures tied to the recession were forcing 20-somethings to share housing past the arrangement's natural expiration date: that is, a person's 26th birthday or the moment they can no longer stand a wet bathmat, whichever comes first. The young urbanites I interviewed all described feeling pulled toward the one-bedroom apartment by dual desires to demonstrate financial success and to enter the next stage of life. Because, well, grown-ups just didn't have roommates, did they?

I never felt comfortable with that story, though it took me a long time to figure out why. At the time it was published the premise didn't apply to me: I was shackled up with a partner, the other socially sanctioned living arrangement besides going solo for American adults. But in the years since that relationship ended, I have pinged from one housing extreme to the other, from a studio in Rogers Park to a room in a house in north London shared with four other people. Now I'm 34, rent a two-bedroom condo in Sheridan Park and am searching for a housemate. And at last I understand why that old story has haunted me.

Every word of it perpetuates the idea that if you live with unrelated folk past a certain age, you must be either financially unsuccessful or a study in Peter Pan-like immaturity. So when I first told my friends I wanted a housemate, I felt a reflexive defensiveness, like the preference was embarrassing. Then there's my friend who dumped the 40-something man she was seeing partly because he lived with someone, and the colleague who felt reluctant to explain her roommate to potential dates. There's also the crazy-making assumptions built into a **November study by the real estate website Zillow** that concludes there are almost 139,000 "hidden households" in Chicago of adults living together for economic reasons, rather than getting their own apartments, the way God and capitalism intended. You can practically hear the company's chief economist howling, what is wrong with these people?

Without this social stigma, I suspect more adults would at least consider the idea of living with a housemate. Obviously, it saves money. That might be why that stigma lingers while the stigma associated more broadly with being single appears to be dissipating. **Eric Klinenberg writes in his book "Going Solo"** that 28 percent of U.S. households are headed by one person, the highest point in the nation's history, and that some businesses **(though certainly not all)** are beginning to cater to the new market. But while there's money to be made selling right-handed diamond rings to women with disposable income, not so with singletons doubling up on the rent.

Perhaps more important, a housemate can serve as an antidote to loneliness. **University of Chicago psychologist John Cacioppo has found** that loneliness in the elderly increases the chances of premature death. It can disrupt sleep, elevate blood pressure and heighten

depression. None of that bothers me much, but I am bothered by the constant need to either make plans or call my parents if I want to have a conversation with another human being. When I lived in that London house, there was always someone around for a chat or a drink, and the very informality of those interactions is what gave them their sustaining warmth. I miss that informal closeness—the daily recaps, the spontaneous shared meals—and I don't see why I should forego that experience, or wait until I'm coupled again, to get it.

I don't think I'm the only person who feels this way either. Of course, there are plenty of people who love living alone. I don't understand those types, but so what? I'm glad they're well-supplied with housing stock and receiving an increasingly positive depiction in the mainstream media. But I would like to see a cultural shift where living alone no longer is the default option for the uncoupled, 30-plus demographic, where saying “I want a housemate” doesn't feel like a choice one has to explain or defend.

Until then, if you want to buck social norms and live off the Red Line, **hit me up**. References available upon request.