

## How to Lie with Statistics

Yesterday all the talk channels were abuzz with a new finding taken from the census people. It was widely reported that “More 18 to 34 year old men were still living at home than were living with a spouse.” Furthermore, “Twenty-five percent of those men living at home were not in school and were not employed.”

The impression is that “millennials” [ the word used by the radio hosts ] were all lazy do-nothings. Many listeners may have been surprised into believing this, while others had their own opinions confirmed.

Referring to the title of this post, we now must ask “where is the lie?”

The numbers are correct. The lie is that the numbers are incomplete. What is left out is that large numbers of men (and women) are simply delaying marriage. In the balance between the numbers living at home and the numbers living with a spouse, the latter has been reduced independently by the reduction in those taking a spouse at all. What is left out is the number of single men living on their own. Did that number go up? Would that offset - or even exceed - the drop in the number of married men? And what about the number of men living with a woman who is not his spouse? That would be another category omitted in this report.

Remember this little story the next time your favorite know-it-all tells you something, and then wonder what is being omitted.

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