

romanticizes mothers' emotional and political struggles, rather than showing them to be in the vanguard of a feminist ethics of care.

Ultimately, Blum's conceptualization of "invisible disabilities" raises some intriguing questions about voice and tangibility that certainly warrant further investigation. Through its fine-grained accounts of child-mother troubles and its accessible language, *Raising Generation Rx* makes an important contribution to feminist studies and public medical sociology that will also appeal to professionals and the general public.

*Solitary Action: Acting on Our Own in Everyday Life.* By Ira J. Cohen. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. xiii+223.

Dmitri N. Shalin  
*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

Historically, sociologists have been preoccupied with social action, ceding activities shielded from observation and driven by private needs to other disciplines. Wandering in the woods or daydreaming, surfing the Internet or practicing music scales, performing routine hygiene or solving a puzzle, doing homework or writing a novel—there is a wide range of practices performed in solitude and often requiring seclusion that tend to evade close sociological analysis, their vital significance for our own and society's well-being left unexamined. Ira Cohen attempts to correct this oversight in his book *Solitary Action* where he focuses on "behavior individuals undertake without intervention by anyone else" (p. 1).

The author pays homage to George Herbert Mead, Erving Goffman, and Harold Garfinkel for their insight into social interaction but takes them to task for their disregard of actions pursued in private. Clearly, society informs such activities, albeit in a manner that evades scrutiny—a defect Cohen proposes to rectify in this engaging, mostly nontechnical book that should appeal to general and scholarly audiences alike.

Delineating his research domain, the author divides solitary actions into four types: peripatetics, regimens, reflexives, and engrossments. Peripatetics encompass freewheeling, often aimless wanderings either in physical or virtual space, such as when we randomly sample new cityscapes, browse the Internet without a particular agenda, or speed down memory lane. The absence of a narrowly defined goal and external constraints that distinguishes peripatetic acts sets them apart from "regimens," which encompass drills, take-home assignments, house-cleaning chores, and other exercises where the agent follows a well-trodden path in furtherance of a set goal. Peripatetics and regimens are marked by low personal involvement in the performed activity, and that is what differentiates them from high-involvement solitary pursuits. The latter come in two varieties: "engrossments" we enjoy while playing solitaire, solving a crossword puzzle, reading a formulaic novel; "reflexives" we embark on while developing an artistic project, solving a scien-

tific problem, or doing craft work. In addition to “involvement,” the author distinguishes another vital dimension along which solitary acts range—“structuration.” While engrossments and regimens are associated with considerable structural constraints, reflexives and peripatetics eschew tight control over an exercise, leaving the specific sequence of steps up to the agent.

With this taxonomy in place, the author proceeds to analyze each kind of solitary activity, rendering numerous examples and offering commentaries that simultaneously illuminate and complicate our understanding of this sprawling domain. We learn that regimens are tiresome and boring because they leave little room for an emergent context to guide the next step, which is repeated over and over again with little opportunity to innovate and improvise. The larger significance of the performed activity fades from view or is pushed out of reach, as is the case with technicians inputting information into a database or novice musicians struggling to master simple scales far removed from a concert-level performance. Engrossments, by contrast, feature rapidly changing contexts requiring great concentration, leaving ample room for skill and generating a good deal of excitement. Playing video games or fitting together pieces of a jigsaw puzzle fit into this category. When solitary activity taxes the agent’s mind and calls for an innovative solution, we deal with reflexives or creative exercises such as those afforded by artistic endeavors or scientific projects.

The book ends with a survey of solitary lifestyles exemplified by Henry Thoreau, Thomas Merton, and May Sarton and a gloss on survival techniques in forced confinements endured by Jacobo Timerman, Terry Anderson, and other prisoners. The reader gains insight into a range of solitary practices undertaken by agents compelled to uphold their humanity or voluntarily attempting to reinvent it under the conditions of radical isolation.

A few things come to mind as one gauges the writer’s theoretical claims and assesses the prospects for research in this emerging paradigm. The opposition between social and solitary action should not be pressed too far, as the author clearly recognizes. Acts insulated from observation unfold according to rules and exhibit cultural patterns just as actions performed in public may follow unique pathways and fulfill private agendas. Also, we need to remind ourselves that the proposed classification is an ideal-typical construct, that activity of one kind can morph into another—what starts as an engrossment may end up a chore—and that one must gauge the emergent status of solitary action in situ.

Sociologists do investigate solitary behavior when they ask respondents about their leisure activities, physical exercises, sexual practices, household routines, and other acts performed out of sight. What social scientists want to know is how much these exercises vary according to age, gender, income, education, and other sociodemographic characteristics. Cohen has a different agenda in mind. He sets out to investigate why some solitary actions excite us while others leave us cold, which routines are apt to increase or alleviate stress, what kind of structure germane to a solitary act allows the agent to harness a hidden rhythm and facilitates serendipitous discovery. The di-

alectics of repetition and innovation that Cohen discerns at the heart of solitary activity is a promising avenue for future research in this area.

I want to take issue with the notion that classic interactionist sociology has little of value to say about the present subject matter. Interactionists have puzzled over minds in solitude a great deal. As Mead argued, mindful agents carry out an internal dialogue outside the collective settings and unleash their unconscious “I” in pursuit of a solitary action transcending the conventional “Me.” Herbert Blumer drew attention to self-interaction, while Norbert Wiley explored the dialogical self, both authors straining to show how reflexive practice innovates the routine and routinizes innovations. And Erving Goffman incisively analyzed solitary exercises of slot machine aficionados and mass culture consumers devouring cheap novels and packaged thrills. These ideas should come in handy as the author continues his research on the vital role solitary practice plays in sustaining human society.

*Driving after Class: Anxious Times in an American Suburb.* By Rachel Heiman. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015. Pp. xx+288. \$29.95 (paper).

Alexandra K. Murphy  
*University of Michigan*

The 1990s are remembered fondly as a decade of prosperity. Yet, as Rachel Heiman’s *Driving after Class* reminds us, it was also a time of unease. Alongside the ability to purchase bigger homes and larger cars was a sense, among the middle class, that their economic position was becoming precarious. Bringing us into the intimate spaces of suburban middle-class life—from family living rooms and cars to inside shopping malls—Heiman traces how such class anxieties permeated everyday life, shaping the habits, discourse, and expectations of adults and children alike.

The book is based on two years of fieldwork and interviews in one New Jersey middle-class suburb—“Danboro.” Heiman’s focus is largely on residents who had settled in Danboro in the 1970s and 1980s after fleeing racial and class changes in Brooklyn, New York. This context is an important backdrop to her analysis. It amplifies her subjects’ feeling of insecurity and informs current fears that their suburban way of life is being undermined by a wave of more affluent families moving in. A key argument is that in the face of uncertainty, the middle class develops what she calls “rugged entitlement”—a sense of an enduring right to middle-class living despite it being less attainable. Such sensibilities shape a range of individualistic strategies residents use to feel, and attempt to become, more secure.

One such strategy is the policing of class boundaries. Interpersonally, women use gossip to draw lines of inclusion and exclusion between themselves and their friends and neighbors and to make sure, discursively, that they are on the inside. This occurs in the realm of politics as well. In a scene