The Wonder of Interpersonal Relationships II: **Pushing Away to Loneliness from a Sociological Perspective**

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The primary challenge for Introverts often centers on the matter of loneliness. When you remain reticent to engage with other people, then it is possible that we end up feeling lonely. And when we are lonely for an extended period of time, then we are likely to be doing damage to our heart and soul. (Waldinger and Schulz, 2023, p. 92):

> When you're lonely; it hurts. And we don't mean that metaphorically. It has a physical effect on the body. Loneliness is associated with being more sensitive to pain, suppression of the immune system, diminished brain function, and less effective sleep, making an already lonely person even more tired and irritable.

Waldinger and Schulz (2023, p. 94) offer an evolutionary perspective on the threats to be found in an act of "going it alone":

> . . . human beings have evolved to be social. The biological processes that encourage social behavior are there to protect us, not to harm us. When we feel isolated, our bodies and brains react in ways that are designed to help us survive that isolation. Fifty thousand years ago. being alone was dangerous. If the Homo sapiens we mentioned earlier was left at her tribe's river settlement by herself, her body and brain would have gone into temporary survival mode. The need to recognize threats would have fallen on her alone, and her stress hormones would have increased and made her more alert. If her family or tribe were away overnight and she had to sleep by herself, her sleep would have been shallower; if a predator was approaching, she would want to know, so she would have been more easily aroused, and she would have experienced more awakenings in the night.
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> If for some reason she found herself alone for say; a month, rather than a night, these physical processes would continue, morphing into a droning, constant sense of unease, and they would begin to take a toll on her mental and physical health. She would be, as we say, stressed out. She would be lonely.
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> The same effects of loneliness continue today. The feeling of loneliness is a kind of alarm ringing inside the body. At first, its signals may help us. We need them to alert us to a problem. But imagine living in your house with a fire alarm going off all day, every day, and you start to get a sense of what chronic loneliness is doing behind the scenes to our minds and bodies.

It seems that we are truly "wired-in" to be social animals (Aronson, 2018) and are unlikely to survive individually or collectively when left alone. This conclusion is certainly to be found in many sociological and psychological analyses of loneliness—to which I now turn.

A Sociological Perspective I: David Riesman

I focus first on the sociological analysis of loneliness offered by David Riesman (1950/1961) in *The Lonely Crowd.* I begin with Riesman's seventy years ago analysis not only because it was one of the most influential sociological analyses of the 20th Century but also because Riesman offers a particularly intriguing – even perplexing—analysis of loneliness. I begin by identifying the three basic orientations offered by Riesman. There is first a "traditional orientation" in which the identity of an individual in a particular society is subsumed under the identity of their tribe or society. A young member of the tribe quickly becomes attuned to the etiquette of the tribe and is fully aware of age, clan and status differences in the society where they dwell (Riesman, 1950/1961, p. 11) They are truly fish living in water. These young traditionalists are unaware of their own water (traditions)—knowing no others.

In my own presentation regarding Theory A (Bergquist, 2021) I devote considerable attention to the traditional orientation to be found in many African societies. In many cases, an individual member of a tribe is only allowed to claim and assert their individual identity in their late teenage years and early twenties. Furthermore, this individuality is only allowed if they have been faithfully observing all of the traditions and ceremonies of the tribe during the early years of their life. Loneliness does not seem to exist for members of a traditional society (which is saturated with Gemeinschaft and enmeshment). However, this escape from loneliness seems to come at the expense of any personal freedom or any societal change.

The other two orientations are those for which Riesman is most noted. They are "inner directed" and "outer directed." We can turn first to the outer-directed orientation. On the surface, one would assume that this orientation yields a life of right engagement rather than loneliness. Here is Riesman's (1950/1961, p. 21) own summary description of this orientation:

> What is common to all the other-directed people is that their contemporaries are the source of direction for the individual-either those known to him or those with whom he is indirectly acquainted through friends and through the mass media. This source is of course "internalized: in the sense that dependance on it for guidance in life is implanted early. The goals toward with the other-directed person strives shift with that guidance: it is only the process of striving itself and the process of paying close attention to the signals from others that remain unaltered throughout life.

One can conclude from this description that the outer-directed person is actively participating in life outside themselves. They establish a life-long sensitivity to the thoughts and needs of other people. How could they ever be lonely leading this relationship-rich life. Yet, it is not quite this simple.

The etiology of inner-directed can be traced to the Western European Renaissance and Reformation, with its emphasis not only on individualism but also exploration and expansion (resulting in colonization and exploitation) (Riesman, 1950/1961, p. 14). As one might expect, Riesman considers the inner-directed person to be particularly vulnerable to loneliness. In keeping with a propensity to push rather than pull this person is directly aligned with an Introverted personality trait.

This embedment of inner-direction as a personality trait is aligned with Riesman (1950/1961, p. 15) proposal that the inner directed orientation is formed (or at least nurtured) early in life: ". . . .the source of direction for the individual is 'inner' in the sense that it is implanted early in life by the elders and directed toward generalized but nonetheless inescapably destined goals." As a sociologist, Riesman is situating an inner direction in a Gesellschafts society and perhaps even a disengaged family structure.

Riesman doesn't leave his analysis of inner directed at this rather superficial level. Even in offering a seemingly obvious contrast between tradition directed and inner-directed orientations, Riesman (1950/1961, p. 15) notes the "complexities":

> . . . in societies in which tradition-direction is the dominant mode of insuring conformity, attention is focused on securing strict conformity in generally observable words and actions, that is to say, behavior. While behavior is minutely prescribed, individuality of character need not be highly developed to meet prescriptions that are objectified in ritual and etiquette-though to be sure, a social character capable of such behavioral attention and obedience is requisite. By contrast, societies in which inner-direction becomes important, though they also are concerned with behavioral conformity, cannot be satisfied with behavioral conformity alone. Too many novel situations are presented, situations which a code cannot encompass in advance. Consequently the problem of personal choice, solved in the earlier period of high growth potential by channeling choice through rigid social organization, in the period of transitional growth is solved by channeling choice through a rigid though highly individualized character.
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> This rigidity is a complex matter. While any society dependent on inner-direction seems to present people with a wide choice of aims-such as money, possessions, power, knowledge, fame, goodness--these aims are ideologically interrelated, and the selection made by any one individual remains relatively unalterable throughout his life.

Embedded in early life, the inner-directed orientation yields a rigidity of choice that might in its own way be comparable to that found in a tradition-based society. Furthermore, because of this early installment, the inner-directed person might have grown accustomed to their relative isolation and even loneliness (Riesman, 1950/1961, p. 158):

> The inner-directed person, reading a book alone, is less aware of the others looking on; moreover, he has time to return at his own pace from being transported by his reading—to return and put on whatever mask he cares to. The poker game in the back room, with its praise of masks, fits his habituation to social distance, even loneliness. His successor, dreading loneliness, tries to assuage it not only in his crowd but in those fantasies that, like a mirror, only return his own concerns to him.

If the inner-directed person can habituate to their loneliness – and seek out external interpersonal relationships that are primarily transactional then who is the "successor" that Riesman mentions? This person is outer directed. It is this person who is "lonely in a crowd."

Riesman arrives at this conclusion by suggesting that the outer-directed person is fundamentally quite fearful of being left alone without external direction or support. Loneliness might frequently accompany an inner-directed person, but it is feared by those who are accustomed to being with other people. He

proposes that is particularly difficult for the outer-directed person to identify and appreciate their own distinctive strengths and perspectives.

As we find also in the 1950s studies of organizational conformity—such as those articulated in *The Man in the Gray-Flannel Suit* (Wilson, 1955/2002*)* and *The Organization Man* (Whyte, 1956) —the outer-directed person has made a pact with the Devil. They give up (and continue to give up) their personal identity and "soul" (Brisken, 1996) on behalf of the collective identity of their organization or society. When they are alone, the outer-directed person finds no identity and a soul that is hollow. It is no wonder that they fear being alone.

Riesman exemplifies this outcome of an extreme outer-directed orientation in the life of gangsters (at least as portrayed in movies and novels) who become cut off from the law-abiding community and eventually their own gang (Riesman, 1950/1961, p. 155). In his later collection of essays, *Individualism Reconsidered* (Riesman, 1954), Riesman also reflects on the alienated and lonely life of many tyrannical American business leaders of the late 19th Century. While some of them were guided by a moral compass embedded in church and societal traditions (a mixture of transactional and autotelic relationships), others were motivated entirely by greed and status. They made full use of abusive (top/down) transactional relationships on behalf of these immoral goals. In contemporary times, we can witness the closing scenes of the last *Godfather* movie, with Michael Corleone (the gangster and businessman) sitting alone and alienated at his palatial lakeside estate.

On the concluding page of *The Lonely Crowd,* Riesman (1950/1961, p. 307) offers these final words of guidance and encouragement to those he identifies as outer-directed—who are standing lonely in a crowd:

> If the other-directed people should discover how much needless work they do, discover that their own thoughts and their own lives are quite as interesting as other people's, that, indeed, they no more assuage their loneliness in a crowd or peers than one can assuage one's third by drinking sea water, then we might expect them to become more attentive to their own feeling and aspirations.

For Riesman, the goal is to recognize that one can find their personal identity and integrity when seeking to separate from the crowd and mindless conformity to collective thought and behavior.

A Sociological Perspective II: Philip Slater

Another sociologist, Philip Slater (1970/1976), begs to differ with David Riesman. The problem of loneliness resides primary in the individualistic bias to be found in modern cultures (particularly in the United States) rather that in some over reliance on the opinions and behavior of other people. There is not enough of the "crowd"—rather than too much crowd. Slater (1970/1976, p. xiii-xiv) first makes this point in his poignantly conveyed myth of American:

> Once upon a time there was a man who sought escape from the prattle of mis neighbors and went to live alone in a hut he had found in the forest. At first he was content, but a bitter winter led him to cut down the trees around his hut for firewood. The next summer he was hot and

> uncomfortable because his hut had no shade, and he complained bitterly of the harshness of the elements.
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> He made a little garden and kept some chickens; but rabbits were attracted by the food in the garden and ate much of it. The man went into the forest and trapped a fox, which he tamed and taught to catch rabbits. But the fox ate up the man's chickens as well. The man shot the fox and cursed the perfidy of the creatures of the wild.
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> The man always threw his refuse on the floor of his hut and soon it swanned with vermin. He then built an ingenious system of hooks and pulleys so that everything in the hut could be suspended from the ceiling. But the strain was too much for the flimsy hut and it soon collapsed. The man grumbled about the inferior construction of the hut and built himself a new one.
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> One day he boasted to a relative in his old village about the peaceful beauty and plentiful game surrounding his forest home. The relative was impressed and reported back to his neighbors, who began to use the area for picnics and hunting excursions. The man was upset by this and cursed the intrusiveness of mankind. He began posting signs, setting traps, and shooting at those who came near his dwelling. In revenge groups of boys would come at night from time to time to frighten him and steal things. The man took to sleeping every night in a chair by the window with a loaded shotgun across bis knees. One night he turned in his sleep and shot off his foot. The villagers were chastened and saddened by this misfortune and thereafter stayed away from his part of the forest. The man became lonely and cursed the unfriendliness and indifference of his former neighbors. And in all of this the man saw no agency except what lay outside himself. for which reason, and because of his ingenuity, the villagers called him the American.

Contained in this myth are three elements that Slater (1970/1976, pp. 8-9) wishes to identify and analyze regarding the creation of loneliness: (1) the desire for community, (2) the desire for engagement, and (3) the desire for dependence. The American seems to have lost a desire for each of these three elements that make up a viable society and that lead us away from loneliness. He, like all Americans, is producing that which is a source of major frustration for us.

Specifically, Slater's (1970/1976, p. 9) thesis is that Americans have voluntarily created and voluntarily maintained, a society that downplays or even discouraged the fulfillment of these needs. They go "underground" and in this capacity gain greater power and produce harm (including loneliness). Given this dynamic of production and frustration, I think it is important to summarize Slater's approach to each of these elements and relate each to other factors I have already identified in this essay.

Community

The critique that Slater offers begins with his identification of individualism as a major culprit in American culture. With an emphasis on individual identity and achievement comes a pervasive pull toward competition and push away from community. Competing egos are forged and found in the American marketplace. These egos expand in size as American organizations become (and are glorified for becoming) BIG. To be small is to have lost the battle for supremacy. To be large and controlling of a specific sector of American society is to have won the battle.

Along with the competition comes an emphasis on private ownership. We own our home, our business and our life. No trip to the laundromat. We have our own washer and dryer. We attend to our own garden rather than some community garden. We look for entertainment at home—be it television or the Internet. Most importantly, we purchased self-help books rather than looking for assistance from our neighbor or our "helping" institutions. COVID-19 only made matters worse. We "try to minimize, circumvent, or deny the interdependence upon which all human societies are based." (Slater, 1970/1971, p. 13) We look for (and long for) what Slater identifies as the "Freedom Fix."

As the American in Slater' myth conveys, there is no room for any intrusion into our private life. Turf is clearly defined--and we are left alone to savor our personal gains. Everything is pushing us away from one another. Like the mythic American, we are left alone and lonely. Slater notes that the universe is not made up of unrelated particles. It is instead constituted of tightly interconnected parts.

As Miller and Page (2007) have noted, our world is not just complicated (many parts)—it is also complicated (interdependent parts). Similarly, viable societies are complex not just complicated. The Freedom Fix and Illusion of Independence simply don't work. We are left in a state of alienation and loneliness as an estranged "particle" without any connection to other "particles" (people). Societies are unlikely to survive for long when many isolated particles try to solve shared problems while remaining competitive. It does work when members of a contemporary society try to find stability while taking many individual actions that often are contradictory.

Engagement

Slater proposes that loneliness also comes from a "compulsive . . . tendency to avoid confronting chronic problems." (Slater, 1970/1976, p. 18) They avoid these problems because it would require interacting with other people in their community. For Slater it is a matter of either denying that a large-scale problem (such as climate change) exists until it becomes a crisis or looking to some magical external source to solve the problem ("some new technology will solve it all.").

In order to provide a broader context to what Slater is proposing. I wish to introduce a concept from the behavior sciences. This concept concerns the way in which we locate control in our lives (individually and collectively). On the one hand, we can retain an internal locus of control with most matter of importance residing within our own prevue and subject to our own actions. On the other hand, we can retain an external locus of control in which the most important issues impacting our personal and collective life reside outside of our control. We have to look elsewhere for action and resolution. This external source might be a new technology that someone else has developed, a governmental policy that some other people are going to enact or the resolution of some war that people other than myself will be fighting. The source can also transcendent—such as fate or God.

I would suggest that reliance on someone else or something else to solve our personal and collective problems (especially the collective problems) resides in an external locus of control. For Slater, the assumed inability to engage in the resolution of important issues and turning to external sources comes from and leads to a withdrawal of collective action. Even when we do act individually or take action as an assembled group or community there are likely to be consequences of this action that we can't anticipate.

Slater notes poetically (Slater, 1970/1976, p. 19) that we are "perturbed by our inability to anticipate the consequences of acts, but we still wait optimistically for some magic telegram, informing us that the

tangled skein of misery and self-deception into which we have woven ourselves has vanished in the night." Thus, even when we appear to be engaged in action that is founded in an internal locus of control, there is ultimately a reliance on some external mediation (the "magic telegram") that will either solve everything or tell us that we did "the right thing."

According to Philip Slater, it gets even more complex. We are actually drawn into our inability to solve problems. With the help of our media, we are fixated on disasters, crises and doomsday scenarios. We slow our car down to observe an automobile accident and spend a few extra minutes watching the replay of a dysfunctional government hearing—or even a replay of 9/11. In recognition, at some level, of our ambivalence regarding that which is unsolved, we assign blame for the failure of resolution onto those people and parties who are "responsible" for the failure. We are disgusted with our own fascination and find it "easy to project our self-disgust onto those who do the confronting." (Slater, 1970/1976, p. 23).

We have another option, according to Slater. We can simply run away from the problems that confront us. He observes that the founder of American society (who have replaced the native American population) could always escape a problem (such as urban pollution or corruption) by moving West. The "new frontier" would be free of pollution and corruption (until we begin polluting and corrupting this new frontier). Even the migration to the North American shores was based on an escape from the unsolved problems (such as religious repression) that the immigrants faced in Europe (or other regions of the world).

Slater proposes that those who pushed away from engagement in their home country "were not personally successful in confronting the social conditions in their mother country but fled in the hope of a better life. By a kind of natural selection, America was disproportionately populated with a certain kind of person." (Slater, 1970/1976, p. 20). This "kind of person" was someone who assumed that everything of importance was out of their control (external locus of control) and that the one act of control that they did possess was escape and moving away from the problem. There was also the option of discarding those items or issues that are problematic or burdensome.

We live with what Slater calls the "Toilet assumption." (Slater, 1970/1976, p. 21) We flush our "unacceptable" behavior down the toilet. We throw that which we wish to ignore into the trash (whether this be a partially consumed product or an entire ethnic or racial community). When the trash has accumulated, we move on to another part of the world—leaving the trash to rot back in the community we left behind. I find evidence of this when I take a train in California or the Eastern United States. All of the unwanted debris has been left beside the railroad tracks: old cars, oil cans, used lumber or steel beams . . . and people (living in tents located by the tracks). We use, misuse, throw away and leave behind. Like the American in Slater's myth, the trash never really is abandoned. The vermin (be they problems precipitated by the trash or the trash that remains in our heads and heart) never go away. We are left alone, surrounded by our trash.

Individualism is thus established as a failure to trust the capacity of people to gather together on behalf of successful solution to a major problem. We chose not to engage because we don't think engagement with other people makes any real difference. Furthermore, this is all self-reinforcing (one mirror reflecting a second mirror). We don't' engage because we believe engagement doesn't work, leading to greater intensification of the unresolved problem. This, in turn, leads to even stronger and more resistant belief that the problem is unsolvable. Thus, we are truly beholding to external forces and feel

alienated from our own personal strengths and purposes. As Slater (1970/1976, p. 25) notes, "our world is only a mirror, and our efforts mere shadowboxing—yet shadowboxing in which we frequently manage to hurt ourselves" – leaving us, like Slater's mythic American, alone and afraid.

Dependence

Loneliness for Philip Slater resides in yet another condition of many contemporary societies. We seek out independence—from a very early age—yet need other people and in our often "childish" attempt to be independent find that we must rely on other people and hate this reliance. The outcome is blaming other people and willful isolation. Like the mythic American that Slater described, we are left resenting the assistance (or even offer of assistance) by other people—and are left in loneliness.

Our "independence" is often expressed through the demands we make to have options from which we can choose – whether it be a brand of cereal or a political leader. The choices we are "allowed" to make are often trivial, yet they give us a shallow sense of independence—a "false freedom" (Bergquist, 2020a). These choices also lead us to take personal possession of products and political positions. We "consume" and personally possess in order to find what we believe is freedom (Fromm, 1955). In fact, as Slater (1970/1976, p. 28-29) observed, our possessions load us with next freedom-restricting obligations (such as earning a living in order to pay for these possessions). This leads us to purchase more goods thereby declaring our sustained freedom (be it ever so false or at least trivial) Another self-fulfilling cycle is engaged with new possessions leading to the acquisitions of even more possessions. To offer one of Philip Slater's quotes: "I can't believe I ate the whole thing!").

Another outcome associated with a quest for independence is recognition that internal locus of control can be quite fragile. We rely on that which is unreliable. According to Slater (1970/1976, p. 29) this has led to a corrective reliance on some form of external monitoring (and ultimate control). Slater writes about "chaperonage" as a policy (and social norm) that pervades our society. We don't trust the teenager's internal control (especially as related to passion and sexuality)—as a result, for many years, we required a young, unmarried couple to be "chaperoned" when they were dating. Something of a similar character is engaged with regard to the regulation of our impulse to gain power (political chaperonage), accumulate wealth (economic chaperonage) or engage in many other societal activities.

Slater (1970/1976, p. 31) concludes that: "under stable conditions external controls work perfectly well. Everyone knows her own place and her neighbor's and social deviations are quickly countered from all sides. When conditions fluctuate, norms change, people move frequently and are often among strangers, this will no longer do." Thus, external chaperonage is challenged when conditions are unstable—and they certainly are unstable in a mid-21st Century world of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence and contradiction (VUCA-Plus) (Bergquist, 2020b). This being the case, then nothing is quite safe when it comes to reliance on external control as a guide for internal control. Both sources of control seem to be uncertain. We are left alone with no reliable control—as was the case with the American in Slater's opening myth.

Slater vs. Riesman

There is one final matter to settle. This is the difference that Slater reports in his perspective as opposed to that offered by David Riesman. I offer the following extended (and a bit confusing) quote from Slater

(1970/1976, p. 36) regarding his differences with Riesman. I follow this quote with my own take on what Slater is saying:

> Riesman overlooks the fact that the individual is sacrificed either way, If he is never sacrificed to the group; the group will collapse and the individual with it. Part of the individual is, after all, committed.to the group. Part of him wants what "the group" wants, part does note No matter what is done some aspect of the individual will be sacrificed.
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> An individual, like a group, is a motley collection of ambivalent feelings, contradictory needs and values, and antithetical ideas. He is not, and cannot be, monolithic, arid the effort to pretend otherwise is not only delusional and ridiculous, but also acutely destructive, both to the individual and to society.
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> The reason a group needs the kind of creative deviant Riesman values is the same reason it needs to sacrifice her: the failure of the group members to recognize the diversity and ambivalence within themselves. Since they have rejected parts of themselves, they not only can't tap these resources but also can't tolerate their naked exposure by others. The deviant is an attempt to remedy this condition. She comes along and tries to provide what is ''lacking" in the group (that is, what is present but suppressed). Her role is like that of the mutant - most are sacrificed but a few survive to save the group from itself in times of change. Individualism is a kind of desperate plea to save all mutants, on the grounds that we don't know what we are or what we need. As such it's horribly expensive - a little like setting a million chimps to banging on a typewriter on the grounds that eventually one will produce a masterpiece

I introduce concepts from two fields – psychoanalysis and evolutionary biology--In helping to clarify and expand on Slater's critique of Riesman. First, Slater is rightfully pointing out that there are powerful group dynamics that can influence (even determine) the thoughts and behaviors of those who are members of a group (or society). The "deviant" in a group is needed to bring in diversity as well as challenge established (and reinforced) assumptions. As Slater notes, the deviant is often sacrificed on the altar of established group norms – even if the group at some point challenges their existing assumptions and even changes the way they are operating.

In my final (fifth) essay in this series on interpersonal relationships, I introduce a description offered by Wilfred Bion (1995) regarding the way in which groups operate in order to manage and reduce the anxiety that is inevitably aroused when the group addresses challenging personal (and collective) issues associated with what Slater identifies as the "motley collection of ambivalent feelings, contradictory needs and values, and antithetical ideas" residing in each member and in the group as a whole. In our time of VUCA-Plus, these challenges are even more daunting. Bion suggests that we process and remove some of the "bite" of our collective anxiety through a process he calls "metabolism." The identification and sacrifice of a deviant is one (often destructive) way in which to metabolize anxiety associated with this deviant's perspectives. Slater is correct in questioning Riesman's (and any other sociologists) failure to note this powerful collective dynamic. The crowd can be dangerous—as is the rampant individualism that Slater has criticized.

The perspective of evolutionary biology comes in when Slater introduces the term “mutant.” We now know that if there are no mutations in a population then evolution will not take place. Innovation requires that things are not always going right in a social system. There must be variations if a group, organization or society is to generate innovations. As noted by Stephen Greenblatt in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *The Swerve*, the critical role played by mutations and mistakes goes back many centuries to the writing of Lucretius in *The Nature of Things*. As interpreted by Greenblatt (2011, p. 188), Lucretius is proposing that:

> Everything comes into being as a result of a swerve. If all the individual particles, in their infinite numbers, fell through the void in straight lines, pulled down by their own weight like raindrops, nothing would ever exist. But the particles do not move lockstep in a preordained single direction. Instead, ‘at absolutely unpredictable times and places they deflect slightly from their straight course, to a degree that could be described as no more than a shift of movement.’

In contemporary times, Scott Page (2011) writes about the generation of multiple ideas (mutations) and the power of diversity within any system in his very challenging book, *Diversity and Complexity.* Page suggests that a world filled with many perspectives is one in which good ideas, clear thinking and accurate information is likely to emerge: “if we have lots of diverse paths . . . , we are not likely to make mistakes. If we only have a few paths, mistakes are likely. “ (Page, 2011, p. 240) Page makes the strong case for the important interplay between complexity and diversity. Systems that are complex and diverse will be more resilient and amenable to change:

> Systems that produce complexity consist of diverse rule-following entities whose behaviors are interdependent. . . . I find it helpful to think of complex systems as “large” in Walt Whitman’s sense of containing contradictions. They tend to be robust and at the same time capable of producing large events. They can attain equilibria, both fixed points and simple patterns, as well as produce long random sequences. (Page, 2011, pg. 17)

There is one thing we have learned in recent years with regard to the viability of groups, organizations and communities that has almost become an axiom: if there is extensive variability (disturbance) within the environment in which an organization operates, then there must also be extensive variability (diversity) inside the organization. Page identifies this axiom as the *Law of Requisite Variety*:

> . . . the greater the diversity of possible responses, the more disturbances a system can absorb. For each type of disturbance, the system must contain some counteracting response. . . . The law of requisite variety provides an insight into well-functioning complex systems. The diversity of potential responses must be sufficient to handle the diversity of disturbances. If disturbances become more diverse, then so must the possible responses. If not the system won’t hold together. (Page, 2011, p. 204, 211)

In order to promote organizational innovation, we must encourage leaders and group members to value diversity. Is this more closely aligned with what Riesman is suggesting or does this fit better with Slater’s critique. I would agree with Slater that it takes a well-functioning group to protect and engage diversity. A cluster of individuals who are operating on their personal agenda can never provide adequate protection. Inner-directed perspectives don’t work. However, in order to recognize and honor the

diversity requires that the leader and other members of a group, organization or community tolerate increased ambiguity, effectively manage conflict, and provide safe settings in which alternative ideas can be explored. Both personal (inner-directed) and collective (outer-directed) concerns and strengths must be engaged. This, in turn, requires the identification of strategies (training, setting of norms, creating supportive settings) that enable members of the group, organization or community to live with ambiguity, work with conflict and provide safe places for idea exploration. It is in the fifth essay of this series that I suggest structures, processes and attitudes that ensure Coherence. This is a special kind of interpersonal glue that addresses the matter of loneliness and moves us past the sociological perspectives offered both by Riesman and Slater regarding loneliness.

Conclusions

With regard to the matter of loneliness, we seem to have found agreement between Riesman and Slater. From a sociological perspective—whether offered by Riesman or Slater--it would seem that loneliness is harmful. It is an issue to be addressed by all people in contemporary society. It seems that loneliness is a threat to all of us—whether we are the Introvert or the Extravert who I introduced in my first essay in this series. In pushing against interpersonal relationships, the Introvert might find themselves alone and lonely. In pulling toward interpersonal relationships, the Extravert might similarly find themselves to be alone and lonely.

In taking actions in the world, the American in Slater's myth acted as if he was an extravert; however, the American created conditions of interpersonal isolation as if he was an Introvert. Whether he was an introvert or an extravert, the American in Slater's myth ended up being lonely. Are there other ways in which we can appreciate the dynamics operating in the heart and soul of this American? I would suggest that a study of loneliness from a psychological and existential perspective further enhances our understanding of this important element regarding the wonder of interpersonal relationships—the topic that I address in the third essay in this series.

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