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Social Character, Interdependence and the Dualities of Other-Directedness

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Abstract

David Riesman's (1969[1950]) exploration of the other-directed characterological form, suited to corporate capitalism and the rise of the service sector, became one of the most influential sociological analyses of the twentieth century. Yet sociologists interested in the contemporary fate of those dispositional qualities suited to mutual adjustment confront a paradox: why, in an age of increasing interdependencies apparently conducive to the sustenance of other-directedness, are we witnessing rising concerns about the resurgence of social sectarianism? Most accounts of this tension rely upon structuralist explanations of late modernity's disruptive impact, or psychologistic accounts of group allegiance. In contrast, we develop a meso-level analysis that highlights an increasingly consequential duality at the heart of other-directedness itself: the qualities associated with this characterological form still facilitate selective forms of mutuality, but the demands it places upon people in the current era have also prompted growing levels of resentment and antagonism.

Keywords: Riesman, character studies, other-directedness, interdependencies, antagonism.

Introduction

Exerting a major influence on the development of sociology, and selling nearly one and a half million copies before the end of the twentieth century, David Riesman's (1969[1950]) *The Lonely Crowd* captured the public imagination in a way few other academic studies could match (Lipset and Lowenthal 1961; Gans 1999; Wrong 1992). Taking as his start point the replacement of tradition-directed and habitually oriented *Gemeinschaft* communities by contractually and deliberately based *Gesellschaft* associations, Riesman's (1969[1950]: 4) focus was on those personal qualities that remained common within modern society and were 'shared by most members of the same

group' as opposed to those individual dispositions 'in which people belonging to the same culture differ' (Fromm 2002[1955]: 76-77; Gerth and Mills 1954: 22). Having mapped the emerging 'inner-directed' social character as it flourished amidst the mobility and mass production facilitated by industrialization, Riesman's (1969[1950]: 11) major concern was the replacement of this characterological form by its *other-directed* successor. Superseding the inner-directed orientation towards attaining instrumental success through productive activity, other-directed qualities were stimulated by the increased significance attributed to interpersonal relations during the twentieth century growth of corporate capitalism and the associated expansion in white collar and service sector employment (Wrong 1992: 381-7).

This interest in issues central to social character was not unprecedented. Exemplified by Weber's (1991[1904-05]) analysis of the 'elective affinity' between Puritan self-disciplining and competitive capitalism, it was also implicit within classical writings on alienation (Marx), personality (Simmel) and anomie (Durkheim) that converged in their concern with personal coherence and social (dis)integration (see also Garrison, 2005). The term 'social character' itself, however, was developed during the 1920s and 1930s by the Frankfurt School social psychologist Erich Fromm (1960[1942]). Engaging with Marx and Freud in particular, Fromm (2002[1955]: 76-77) conceived character as normative in promoting societally adaptive qualities. While not by themselves sufficient to reproduce society, characterological forms imparted limited similarity to people's otherwise diverse self-identities, constituting a meso-level link between institutions and individuals which avoided the assumption that people are identical, and guarded against conflating individuals with society.¹ Change is always possible from this perspective, with Fromm (1960[1942]: 182-5, 244; 2002[1955]: 79) drawing on Spinoza to argue that life's 'active striving' can supersede any characterological form, and recognising that individuals can develop counter cultural qualities in response to institutional developments that damage their class/status position.

This general approach to social character informed a range of influential studies during the mid-twentieth century, including Mead's (1942) *And Keep Your Powder Dry*, Gerth and Mills' (1953)

Character and Social Structure, Potter's (1954) *People of Plenty*, Whyte's (1956) *The Organization Man*, and Cunliffe's (1968) *Soldiers and Civilians*. Resonating most strongly with a period in which the division of labour, immigration, and secularisation had accelerated value diversification, however, was Riesman's (1969[1950]: 265) argument that societal expectations of interpersonal cooperation had reached the stage where individuals often felt 'compelled' to cultivate a range of *other-directed* qualities facilitating the mutual adjustment of perspectives and the capacity to flourish within groups.

The other-directed characterological qualities analysed by Riesman advanced during the early twentieth century, became dominant as the 1950s drew near, and were highlighted again during the 1960s and 1970s as second wave feminists and civil rights campaigners widened those people to whom mutuality was legitimately extended. Yet academics interested in their more recent fate confront a paradox. Why, in an age of increasing global interdependencies, thought commonly to have magnified the importance of mutual understanding (Woodward 2019), are we witnessing growing concerns about social sectarianism? Manifest via populist political allegiances, 'identity politics' and the growth of religious radicalism, these developments have been described as a form of 'modern tribalism', involving allegiance to groups whose members perceive themselves as antagonistic to outsiders in general, and established elites in particular (James 2006; Moffit 2020: 10; Chua 2018: 1-3). While individuals remain as interdependent as ever – reliant for sustenance, safety and global environmental survival on complex webs of connectivity – the prominence of sectarian alignments in the current era suggests there may have occurred shrinkage in what Elias (1991) refers to as the subjective 'We' horizons of many people (Moffit 2016).

Explanations for this paradox tend to draw on either structuralist approaches that identify geo-political socio-economic developments as exposing people to the dynamics of contemporary radicalism and populism (e.g. Fukuyama 2018), or individualistic and psychologically based accounts of group membership (e.g. Sunstein 2019). In contrast, this paper offers an alternative that builds on social character studies. In so doing, we explore the co-existence of interdependence and

antagonism by explicating the dualities and associated tensions within other-directedness as these develop within a late modern context. These developments enable us to explicate how a characterological form that, for much of its history, was associated with interpersonal cooperation and mutual adjustment has now evolved to nurture social sectarianism and resentment.

The Emergence of Other-Directed Social Character

The other-directed social character developed within a socio-economic system that had left behind classical competitive individualism: the single-minded inner-directed pursuit of success in the world of material production was no longer, in itself, optimal for personal advancement (Riesman 1969[1950]: 126-9). Instead, Riesman suggests that qualities associated with interpersonal attunement, emotional sensitivity, and the ability to compromise became prized within an environment dominated by corporate capitalism, the growth of consumption, white collar work, the service sector, and a broader milieu in which 'fitting in' was essential for accumulating economic and social capital (Bourdieu 1986). In these conditions, the importance of others was such that Riesman (1969[1950]: 126, 136) introduces his discussion of this emergent characterological form with reference to Simmel's conception of sociability as the interactional pattern in which *people*, rather than instrumental purposes, constitute the 'frontier' of action. Rather than being pre-occupied with external markers of success, the priority for individuals moves towards interpersonal qualities: the other-directed character wants to be *liked* by others and to receive 'the assurance of being emotionally in tune with them' (Riesman 1969[1950]: xxxii).

Explicating in more detail the growth of these qualities in the early twentieth century, Riesman examines the promotion of other-directedness in patterns of socialisation manifest through childhood stories, the media more generally, peer groups, and normative modes of parental discipline. While the earlier inner-directed child was through these means equipped with a work ethic oriented towards achieving by 'doing', and a 'psychological gyroscope' suited to a long-term 'push for success' by exploiting opportunities not yet 'fully determined', other-directeds were

encouraged to develop a 'radar' sensitive to interpersonal 'signals from far and near' (Riesman 1968 [1951]: 16, 25, 42, 111). In these circumstances, the drive for individual accomplishment involved a desire for 'success within a group', for 'approval from the peers', with children learning acceptable emotional responses from their contemporaries and realising that '[t]emper, manifest jealousy, [and] moodiness' are 'offenses' against group codes and that 'knobbly or idiosyncratic qualities and vices' need to be 'eliminated or repressed' (Riesman 1968 [1951]: 72).

As other-directed qualities became prominent in childhood socialisation, Riesman also finds evidence of their growing importance within the workplace. He illustrates this with reference to changing business practices including the increased significance of networking, the enhanced emphasis attributed to interpersonal qualities in recruitment practices, and the prioritisation of 'customer satisfaction' and employee well-being (Riesman 1969 [1950]: xviii, xxxviii, 111, 115, 136). This is exemplified by Goldsen and Lowe's (1946) findings regarding the heightened efforts managers felt they had to make to gain the approval of colleagues in processes of newly validated consensual decision-making. The spread of other-directedness was also evident in Mills's (1967[1946]) depiction of the 'fixer' character and Fromm's (1997) account of those 'marketer' personalities during the mid-twentieth century. Nowhere was the advancing importance of other-directed qualities clearer, however, than in the changing status of, and behaviour expected within, organisational meetings.

Exploring what he refers to as the 'meetingization of society', Van Vree (2011) details how the post-1930s internationalisation of business required greater focus on the coordination of activities across global markets. As chains of economic and organisational connectivity became more complex, the significance of meetings (alongside other communications technology) grew apace, *as did* the other-directed behaviour required in them (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris 1997). Bendix (1974[1956]: 332), for example, noted the increasing importance in meetings of being 'brave when others fear, calm when others are excited, [and] self-controlled when others indulge'. Such qualities were also encouraged by the growing numbers of meeting manuals that constituted guides to other-

directed behaviour. As Van Vree (2011: 253) explains, such texts suggested that listeners be 'animated' and 'expressive' when receiving the contributions of fellow participants and warned that failing to consider the reactions and views of others, or even using such terms as 'disagree', could 'destroy' collegial relationships and personal reputations (Zelko 1969 [1957]: 135-8).

Other-directed tendencies were evident not only in childhood socialization and the workplace, but also assumed wider cultural prominence. The concern to *understand* others, for example, was apparent in the reality television that emerged during the mid-twentieth century. The 1954-55 season of the Ford Foundation's arts and culture program *Omnibus* featured hidden cameras and interviews with people from around the world as guides to empathising with and appreciating the views of others (McCarthy 2004: 23). Proving immensely popular, these offerings expanded into various formats during the late 1950s, with Riesman referring to Allen Funt's covertly filmed records of real people in unusual situations as products of one of the 'most ingenious sociologist[s] in America' (McCarthy 2004: 21). Elsewhere, Kodak capitalised from the 1950s on increased other-directedness (exhibited by individuals in terms of how they appeared to spectators) by developing marketing campaigns which aimed 'to get people in the habit of taking a picture whenever they wanted to show others what a good time they were having' (Stephens-Davidowitz 2017: 99). The success of this trend could be seen in the changing style of yearbook photos, while its impact was enhanced later with the spread of technology (Cruz and Thornham 2015).

The Paradox of Interdependence

Riesman (1969[1950]: xiv) welcomed the rise of other-directedness, concluding that it was associated with 'an immense increase of openness, tolerance and empathy' and 'a more humane and accommodating responsiveness' between people. Nevertheless, sociologists interested in the subsequent fate of those dispositional qualities suited to mutual adjustment and cooperation confronted a paradox (Lasch 1991 [1979]; Meštrović 1997; Sennett 1998; Putnam 2000). Other-directed characterological qualities remained relevant to an era in which social interdependence had

advanced. Elias (1983; 1987; 2000 [1939]: 375) remains the most compelling guide to the long-term processes informing this development, suggesting that the advancing division of labour within pacified regions required a transformation of external controls into internal controls as ‘a function of the perpetual hindsight and foresight instilled’ in individuals from childhood alongside their ‘integration in extensive chains of action’. Other-directed behaviour is demanded and made possible by these ‘pressures operating upon the individual’ (Elias, 2000[1939]: 374); pressures that advanced within modern bureaucracies to the extent it was necessary to internalise the need for a ‘constant, precisely calculated adjustment of behaviour towards everyone’ (Elias 1983: 91, 111).

If there has been a growth in social interdependence apparently conducive to maintaining other-directed qualities, however, concerns have been raised in recent decades about a growth of social sectarianism manifest through what has been termed ‘modern tribalism’ (James 2001). The term ‘tribalism’ has a long history in anthropological explorations of traditional societies (Berman, Eyoh and Kymlicka 2004), but sociological discussions of *modern* tribalism appeared during the 1990s in analyses of the fragmented group-based nature of late modernity (Meštrović 1994; Maffesoli 1995). Recently, Sunstein (2019: xii) argued that the fracturing of social and political life from the latter twentieth century resulted in a ‘rebirth of tribalism’, across the United States, and Europe, with people aligning themselves with sectarian groups ‘defined in terms of politics, religion, race, and ethnicity.’ Relatedly, Chua (2018: 1) suggests that recent tribal behaviour is evidenced by the widespread tendency for individuals to benefit ‘their own kind’, even when they personally gain nothing, and to ‘penalize outsiders, seemingly gratuitously’. These general diagnoses cover wide-ranging forms of conflict and dissensus, emanating from contrasting theoretical perspectives, but the phenomena to which they refer question the dominance of other-directed characterological forms and their orientation towards mutual adjustment, sympathy and consensus.²

Theorists have not neglected the paradoxical co-existence of an interconnected global environment, and the apparent growth of sectarian group affiliations, yet rely generally on two explanatory perspectives. Sociological and political analysts draw predominantly on

methodologically holistic approaches that locate the cause of antagonistic affiliations and behaviours in structural changes. Associating modern tribalism with populism, Moffitt (2016) locates the rise of discontent against the status quo in a new and culturally compelling style of political performativity determined by the emergence of new media. Embedding new media within the structural emergence of 'network societies', that become 'too large to be controlled', Castells (1997: 28, 65-66) provides us with another example of this holistic approach by arguing that such changes cause other-directedness to be replaced by 'defensive reactions' and 'resistance identities' in which radical forms of religious affiliation, and the aggressive return to patriarchal values, vie with 'progressive' identities based on alternative conceptions of ethnicity and sexuality. Also focused on the pervasiveness and determining power of 'social facts' operating above individual horizons is Fukuyama's (2018) argument that global economic changes have caused financial distress and status erosion among the most disadvantaged. These developments occasioned the rise of an identity politics which fragmented, and injected historically high levels of antagonism into, mainstream politics.

Opposing such structuralist accounts are psychological explanations of group affiliation and antagonism rooted in social identity theory (Burke and Stets 2009; McKeown, Haji and Ferguson 2016; Sunstein 2019). Forged during the 1970s by Tajfel and Turner, this approach held that experiencing oneself as part of a group was integral to human nature, core to social character, and produced favouritism to 'insiders' and prejudice/discrimination to 'outsiders' (Robinson 1996). Such analyses suggest that universal psychological processes produce groups, and that group conformity pressures affect people's judgment (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Tajfel 1981; Sunstein 2019). Individuals are oriented towards group affiliations, distinguish themselves from others based on such membership, and conceptualise and act antagonistically against other groups to promote their self-esteem (Jenkins 2008: 112-113). Other-directed qualities associated with empathising, and seeking mutual adjustment, are from this perspective extended *only to* fellow group members. The temporary dilution of strong 'we' and 'they' boundaries that appeared to mark the zenith of other-

directness is within this context simply a temporary abeyance of ultimately unavoidable psychological propensities (Tajfel 1981: 342).

These structural and psychologistic explanations provide contrasting respective accounts of how social facts can destroy other-directedness, and of the potential for enduring psychological predispositions to limit the reach of these qualities and ensure they are supplemented by antagonism. While the former tends to occlude the agentic significance of common personal qualities beneath those large-scale processes, however, the latter offers an ahistorical depiction of individual dispositions unable to understand how shared views and dispositions may render individuals *variably* open to the attractions of group affiliation, and why these might change over time.

There is an alternative to these dominant accounts. Elias (1994) argued that the co-existence of interdependence, antagonism and conflict can be explained by the creation of established-outsider relations, yet social character in this account becomes an epiphenomenon of unequal 'power ratios'. In contrast, we seek to develop a distinctive account of this paradox that remains grounded in that meso-level approach adopted by social character studies. It has become commonplace for meso-level analyses to focus on the 'institutional' dimension of societal existence or the salience of social networks (Treadway et al. 2009; Faist 2010). The defining feature of such studies, however, is their identification of, and attribution of causal significance to, a dimension of social/material life possessing an intermediary relationship with macro/structural 'social facts' such as the economy, and micro level factors focused upon the individual (Fine 2012). Viewed from our concern with social character, this approach encourages us to view the coexistence of interdependency, antagonism and resentment as emerging from the *relationship between* the qualities of other-directedness themselves, individuals' existing dispositions, and the wider society in which this characterological form operates.

This focus on the tensions generated by social character as they are cultivated not only among historically embedded individuals but also against the backdrop of specific socio-economic

circumstances can again be supported by classical sociology. Weber (1991[1904-05]) argued that the Puritan character was challenged by the psychologically devastating doctrine of predestination; a tension mitigated by individuals' adoption of a systematic commitment towards secular work. Durkheim's (1984; 1974[1914]) depiction of an emergent 'cult of the individual' was hedged by concerns that this valuation of personal difference was vulnerable to the anomie occasioned by rapid change, and the egoistic dimensions of homo duplex. Distinctive strains were depicted in Marx's (1973: 83-4) account of how the 'isolated accumulator' constituted a characterological form exposing individuals to the alienated identities promoted by the division of labour.

Against this background, we now explore further the difficulties associated with the specific (and peculiarly challenging) parameters of other-directedness. We begin by focusing on the relationship between this characterological form and its consequences for *individuals*, and then explore how other-directedness was complicated further by its emplacement within an *environment* dominated by corporate capital. Having explicated what we refer to as the dualities of other-directedness emerging from these relationships, we explore how they have come to be, in the present, conducive to the rise of antagonism and resentment that has been crystallised within the sectarian form of modern tribalism.

Social Character, Individuals and the Social Context

Turning first to the relationship between those socially normative views and behaviours integral to other-directedness, and individuals' responses to these qualities, it is worth engaging with Mead's (1982; 1972 [1934]) conception of the 'I/Me' configuration. Mead treats this relationship as universal among social beings, and is therefore partially vulnerable to the charges of psychological essentialism we levied at individualist accounts of group affiliation (Archer 1995). Given his interrogation of how social actors respond *actively* to the pressures of *others*, however, Mead's analysis can usefully be interpreted as an explanation of the demands posed by other-directedness

at a time when people's 'I' responses had already been cultivated through traditions of individualism.

Mead's (1972[1934]: 138; 1982: 2) argument revolves around the proposition that individuals experience themselves indirectly from the collective standpoint (the 'Me'), while maintaining part of themselves able to react to these pressures (the 'I'). In this context, the social groups/organised communities to which individuals belong can indeed influence their views and experiences (a process necessary for the formation of any characterological form) (Mead 1982: 16). Irrespective of the power of the 'generalised other' (or for our purposes 'generalised *other-directedness*') that emerges from these circumstances, however, Mead (1972 [1934]: 193) insists that the individual's 'definite self' is not a pale shadow of collective processes, but can choose to 'adjust' to them or engage in 'fighting it out' through of 'self-assertion'.

Placing Mead's considerations more fully into the context of our concerns, the strength of this 'I' can reasonably be interpreted as historically variable. Seen from this perspective, by the time other-directed qualities coalesced into a characterological form in the early twentieth-century, the contexts in which people's own responsive capacities were cultivated had already been shaped by traditions of expressive and utilitarian individualism. Assessing the cumulative impact of these traditions, Simmel (2007: 68) concluded that in the nineteenth century they established a general 'drive to separation, autarchy and self-reliance'; qualities also emphasised within the inner-directed characterological form (Cortois and Laermans 2018).

This socially cultivated 'I', as we interpret it, does not entail a necessary antagonism to other-direction: individuals can respond to the demands of mutual adjustment with 'intelligent sympathy' (Mead 1982: 93). This orientation is further encouraged for Mead (1972[1934]: 310) by the increasingly 'intricate and closely knit and highly organised' 'interlocking interdependence of human individuals upon one another' evident in the early twentieth century (Elias 2000 [1939]: 372). The potential for this sympathy does not, however, mean that a 'general other[-directedness]' can overrule the individual capacity for 'conscious responsibility' and 'novel' experience (Mead

1972[1934]: 178). While other-directedness encourages individuals to see themselves from the perspective of those groups they belong to, becoming too much of 'an object' to oneself can become unbearable for someone possessed of dispositions towards individualism (Mead 1972[1934]: 134-38, 218). This is especially pertinent in relation to the other-directed tendency to experience shame in the event of a declining 'approval rating' from others (shame being *the* other-directed emotion in being stimulated by negative evaluations of the self from the perspective of others; Scheff 1988: 398), and in circumstances where groups act *against* an individual's interests. In both cases, other-directed demands can be experienced as imposing an 'excessive regulation' and 'oppressive discipline' (Durkheim 1952: 276) that may prompt 'revolt' against the 'attitudes' 'of others' (Mead 1982: 31, 73).

If the relationship between other-directedness and individuals contains a potential duality between characterological form and personal dispositions, so too does the relationship between this characterological form and the *socio-economic context* in which it was developed. As Riesman (1969[1950]) clarifies, other-directedness replaced the unambiguous focus on individual success that marked the inner-directed drive for achievement with the twin demands to enhance the performance of the company/organisation *and* to measure success on the basis of interpersonal relationships. The consequences of feeling obligated to pursue these dual goals can, however, damage the integrity of other-directed qualities. As Riesman (1969[1950]: 265) notes, the 'compulsory character' of personalisation within the workplace assumes a certain falsity, 'even where it is not intentionally exploitative' and can become 'a mandate for manipulation and self-manipulation among ... the white-collar ranks' (see also Meštrović 1997: 57).

Embedding other-directed qualities within the environs of corporate capitalism risks, therefore, provoking alienation from this characterological form and the degeneration of sympathetic mutual adjustment into insincere 'presentations of self'. Goffman (1959: 86) identifies the personal price of feeling obligated to engage in such insincerity as 'self distancing'. This technique of defensive shielding protects individuals from performances they feel obligated to

engage in, while avoiding sanctions that may accompany ‘deviations from [other-directed] standards’ (Goffman 1959: 86; Lasch 1991[1979]: 47). Yet it also involves a duality between the individual’s own self and a characterological form that consequently loses its vitality as a ‘collective representation’ (Goffman 1959: 37, 86). The general point here is that other-directed qualities of understanding, sympathy and mutual adjustment tend, *within the socio-economic environment in which they are emplaced*, to become elements of ‘impression management’ (Goffman 1959) or what Hochschild (1983) referred to as ‘emotion work’; *contractually obligated* expressions and manipulations of the self that are possessed of potentially damaging consequences for people’s well-being.

These dualities associated with other-directedness – involving the possible suffocation of the ‘I’, and potential tensions between productivity and collectivity – have, for Riesman (1969[1950]: 101), the capacity to encourage ‘antagonistic cooperation’ conducive to the spread of *resentment*. Antagonistic cooperation refers to the reluctant compliance offered by individuals who feel obligated to act normatively, while the experience of resentment has been associated with the indignation experienced by those bereft of power (Weber 1952). Weber (1952) explored the social consequences of resentment in relation to religious affiliation, but this issue is also applicable to those who feel ‘compelled’ to deploy an intimacy with those they interact within a system that has sanctified ‘the superior values of personalisation’ (Riesman 1969[1950]: 101). What is particularly pertinent about Weber’s analysis, moreover, is its recognition that while antagonism and resentment are experienced and expressed personally, they can propel individuals towards ideas and groups allowing for the *collective manifestation* of this discontent (Turner 2011: 75).

The Contemporary Fate of Social Character

This meso-level approach facilitated by social character studies highlights how the relationship between other-directed qualities, individuals’ existing dispositions, and the socio-economic environment has always contained dualities with the potential to give rise to personal and social

tensions. In what follows, however, we explicate how this potential, which Riesman feared, has come to connect other-directedness to spiralling social sectarianism and resentment, though the first issue to address is whether this characterological form still exists at all. Sayer's (2019) nuanced approach towards virtue ethics suggests that the crystallisation of a deserving/undeserving divide within a history of 'poor blaming' that emerged during the 1970s, alongside the neo-liberal assault on the welfare state, has fatally damaged other-directedness. Relatedly, Putnam's (2000) pessimism about communal resilience and Sennett's (1998) lamentations about the difficulties of maintaining any character contemporarily suggest that the era of other-directedness has passed. The decline of other-directedness is also implied in analyses of the fragmentation of 'traditional' class-based communities (Patton 2014). Finally, theorists of reflexive modernisation argued that 'risk societies' (Giddens 1991; Beck 1992; 2009), transformations in communication media, and 'morphogenetic change' more generally (Archer 2012), produced an uncertainty that eroded other-direction in favour of new 'opportunity-directed' orientations (Shilling and Mellor, 2021).

These writings highlight changes to the socio-economic environment in which characterological forms develop, pointing to a reduction in conditions supportive of other-directedness, and the emergence of personal qualities more suited to the contemporary era. This is not to say, however, that such changes simply render other-directedness non-viable as a characterological form. Implicit within many of these writings, alongside other accounts of 'liquid' modernity (Bauman 1999) and the contemporary transformation of issues of identity and conformism (Fukuyama 2018; Sunstein 2019), is the recognition that social change is rarely linear or unidirectional. Instead, it involves the continuation or even intensification of certain phenomena, as well as the dissipation of others; a recognition key to our meso-level explication of elements of continuity and change pertaining to social character. On the one hand, we are clear it would be premature to suggest this characterological form is redundant. An advanced division of labour continues to require mutual adjustment, while the continued salience of gender divisions provides a basis for empathy between those facing similar opportunities and challenges (Elias 1983; Skeggs

2004). Furthermore, despite their explications of opportunity-directed individualisation, theorists of reflexive modernity acknowledge the persistence of certain other-directed qualities, as evident in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (1995) identification of new intimacies, and Archer's (2012) exploration of communicative reflexives. Extending this argument further, recent protests associated with the *Black Lives Matter* and *Me Too* movements can be interpreted as illustrating the continued relevance of other-directedness, with the struggle against systemic inequalities including demands for the extension of mutuality and respect.

On the other hand, however, the precise content and parameters of contemporary other-directed qualities *do* seem to have changed; a possibility anticipated by Riesman's (1969 [1950]: xix) implication that the dualities associated with this characterological form make it vulnerable to ontological 'thinning'. The diminution of other-directedness was also emphasised in Lasch's (1991[1979]; 1984) indictment of American culture in which he charted the rise of 'minimal', narcissistic individuals committed to social relationships only insofar as they 'mirrored' their *own* drives, views and behaviours. This prioritisation of the 'I' suggests that other-directedness had not only become ontologically reduced, but was also interpersonally restricted (Riesman 1969[1950]: xix).

In the contemporary era, then, there remain contexts requiring mutual respect and sensitivity to others' feelings, and in what follows we examine a number of areas of social activity and interaction wherein other-directedness continues to be socially significant. What we also highlight, however, is the growing evidence that the *changed circumstances in which other-directedness exists*, and the *motivations of individuals interacting within this milieu*, mean that it can no longer be equated with the 'increase of openness, tolerance and empathy' Riesman (1969[1950]: xiv) envisaged. Rather, we now examine how other-directed qualities have become aligned to and distorted by the *instrumental use* of others, the *avoidance* or expression of *hostility* to genuine difference, and the experience of *resentment* when people are obliged to engage seriously with the interests of others.

Dealing with these each in turn, social media is central to the context in which elements of other-directedness appear to have been maintained, yet the mediated 'mutuality' it affords is often associated with the instrumental use of others (Dijck 2013). While the development of Web 2.0 resulted in the first years of the twenty-first century in over seventy per cent of adults using internet sites to connect with others, many scholars argue that there is a tendency for online communications to involve a 'network sociality' dominated by individuals' *own* desires and interests (Wittel 2001; Marr 2008; Velasquez and LaRose 2015). A prime example of this exists within the 'like economy' (Gerlitz and Helmond 2013); an online context in which the narrowing content of social interaction is evident in the priority accorded to the mere acquisition of 'friends' and the pervasiveness of the 'like button' on Facebook. Accumulating quantifiable popularity across social media sites provides both a degree of social capital and the limited validation of the self, and can also potentially be monetised through the opportunities availed by advertising and social influencing (Fertik 2015).

If social media demonstrates how interpersonal connections are nowadays often used for instrumental purposes, so too does it evidence a lack of engagement with genuine difference. As Miller (2008, 2015) argues, social media has become *the* medium for what Malinowski referred to as 'phatic communication' in which the mere fact of being acknowledged and exchanging data takes precedence over forging genuine intersubjectivity. The tension between other-directed connectivity and engagements with difference is also evident in people's use of online contact to denigrate others. This is evidenced by the frequency of flaming (posting or sending offensive messages) and trolling (deliberately provoking arguments) in which offenders vent outrage, hilarity or incredulity. Connecting with others to express negativity – rather than seeking to *understand* different perspectives, or simply *avoiding* them as was typical of inner-directed characters – is also illustrated by 'online shaming' or 'cancel culture'. Here, lay people, celebrities and politicians identified as 'guilty' of social transgression are criticised and harried online, usually for having expressed views considered exclusionary and inimical to the 'rights' of others (Oravec 2019). Infringements of other-

directedness by some give rise to objections and outrage by others who themselves ignore the qualities of 'tolerance' and 'inclusiveness' they are supposedly defending.

While the institutional context in which social media exists may thus have increased the opportunities for people to express other-directedness, the market environment that has permeated its operation, together with the relatively unregulated nature of the internet, has provided a milieu in which the individualistic tendencies of individuals noted by Riesman (1969[1950]: 101) and others have increasingly come to the fore. Other-directedness continues to remain important to the operation of these milieu, but its content has changed from its classic mid-twentieth century expression articulated by Riesman.

Exploring further whether connectivity entails a negative response to difference and has at times become reduced to a means for venting, it is worth returning to the example of reality television. While McCarthy (2004) examined how such programming was concerned initially with cross-cultural understanding, and propelled by curiosity about how people would act in atypical situations, it has in recent decades characterised by the rise of neo-liberal and neo-conservative politics developed into a different vehicle. Programmes such as *Judge Judy*, *Benefits Street* and *Ten Years Younger* provide the narrative space for viewers to encounter others in order to ridicule those who don't adhere to socially acceptable values in relation to crime, social responsibility, intimate relationships, and body maintenance (Ouellette 2004; Skeggs and Wood 2012). Understanding is here replaced by televisual invitations to make moral judgments that serve frequently to exclude participants from the realm of other-directed respect.

If other-directedness has at times degenerated into the instrumental use of others, and the avoidance of or hostility towards genuine difference, there is also evidence of *resentment* when people are obliged to engage seriously with the interests of others. Here again, it is changes in the institutional context that combine with the internal tensions evident within other-directedness to prompt a rebellion of what Mead (1972[1934]: 156-7) identified as the 'I' element of individual character against conformity. The workplace, for example, has been key to the historical cultivation

of other-directedness, yet recent studies suggest that superficial consent to team working and equal opportunity initiatives designed to increase respect and organisational productive capacity is often underpinned by disruptive ill-feeling (Hegtvedt, Clay-Warner and Ferrigno 2002; Boren and Johnson 2013). As Boren and Johnson (2013) elaborate, even subtle signals of hostility to such policies and practices can hamper their efficacy. In Loftus's (2008: 756) study of the new 'diversity terrain' in the English police force, for example, resentment, resistance and the 'antagonistic cooperation' noted by Riesman (1969[1950]: 101) subordinated the 'spaces of representation for emerging identities' and sustained what could otherwise have been an 'endangered culture' of prejudice. Elements of negativity towards other-directedness are not new, but the suggestion in these studies of team working and equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives is that reaction against their increasingly pervasive and compulsory standing are provoking a significant restriction in the scope of this characterological form.

More general support for the idea that other-directed qualities may be acknowledged superficially, but are resented and often subverted in practice, comes from Stephens-Davidowitz (2017) who highlights the divide between people's publicly stated views and those expressed in relative privacy. This is evident in the discrepancy that exists between survey findings on civic service, charitable donations, equal opportunities, and other matters indicative of mutual respect characteristic of other-directedness, and people's actions offline and online (Stephens-Davidowitz 2017: 106). Data repeatedly show respondents stating that racial prejudice does not influence their voting decisions or other behaviour, for example, but this is contradicted by a host of other findings involving inter-racial resentment and the widespread experience black and ethnic minority people have of racism (Stephens-Davidowitz 2017: 12, 132).

If ostensible commitments to other-directedness in and out of the workplace are sometimes constrained by subterranean resentment, however, a more overt example of this duality concerns the zealous policing of views and persons deemed to infringe 'progressive' values of inclusivity, empathy and tolerance; a phenomenon identified by some as relevant to the contemporary

university (Holmes 2016; McAdams et al. 2008; Crawford and Pilanski 2004). Kristof (2016), for example, highlights universities as bastions of 'liberal intolerance' wherein certain political or religious views are actively discriminated against, and gives the example of a black scholar who never encountered racism on campus but consistently faced discrimination because of his Christian and conservative political views. Indeed, a publication by the independent, non-partisan educational charity *Policy Exchange*, drawing on one of the largest representative samples of UK-based academics in recent years, highlighted pressures for ideological conformity and discrimination against those with alternative viewpoints (Adekoya, Kaufman and Simpson 2020: 7). Around a third of staff indicated they would avoid hiring those who supported Leave in the 2016 Brexit referendum, while up to a half indicated they would mark a grant application lower if it took a right-leaning political perspective (Adekoya, Kaufman and Simpson 2020: 7).

If the ontological thinning and interpersonal restriction of other-directedness has been associated with an upsurge in antagonism and resentment, these responses clearly do not always remain individualised. Instead, they have the potential to evolve into something more disturbing at the collective level (Turner 2011: 75). As Mead (1972[1934]: 156-7) suggests, living in contexts informed by other-directed norms, even when these have been diminished, can breed ill-feeling among individuals who *then* seek self-expression in groups able to *reflect back to them* their own discontent. Anticipating this possibility, Riesman (1969[1950]: xvi) identifies the dangers of 'talk jockeys' who provide echo chambers for personal grievances and spread 'contagious paranoia'. Relatedly, Gerth and Mills (1954: 464, 459) were remarkably prescient in associating these tendencies with the rise of political and religious leaders who utilise resentment as a means of 'audience building' designed to advance 'propaganda campaigns' which threaten 'the rise and spread of totalitarian manipulation and opinion management'. More recently, Connolly (1995) suggests that white, blue-collar men – feeling 'under siege' from those who claim to speak for marginalised others in society – have become a fertile constituency for political populism. Such

tendencies can be seen to have reached new levels with the Trump Presidency in the USA, and the Brexit vote in the UK.

To be clear, however, while patterns of resentment associated with populism have rightly been located in a 'rivalrous framework' of competing normative commitments across patterns of inclusion and exclusion (Carreira da Silva and Brito Vieira 2019), it is misleading to see resentment exclusively as a populist phenomenon. Rather, as we have indicated, the potential link between resentment, other-directedness and modern tribalism does not respect easily identifiable lines between 'progressive' and 'regressive' or 'populist' cultural and political responses. As Chua (2018: 8-9) argues, resentment has become ubiquitous for groups irrespective of whether they are classified as privileged or disadvantaged. With elites unaware of 'how tribal their cosmopolitanism is', and studies suggesting a majority of whites believe they have replaced blacks as the 'primary victims of discrimination', other-directed qualities seem blunted by insularity and defensiveness across the political and social spectrum (Chua 2018: 8-9).

This is what is new about the current social context: the dualities present within other-directedness from the start have, with the emergence of a socio-economic environment less supportive of it than in the past, spiralled out to render social relationships more conditional, antagonistic and increasingly restricted in scope. In this context, it is worth taking seriously Mead's (1982: 89, 218) conclusion that individuals who feel overwhelmed by social expectations may seek allegiance to political movements that allow them to engage in 'expression[s] *which otherwise would not be allowed*' (emphasis added). These identifications can at times result in a reconstitution of common views and dispositions at a level of 'higher integration', but may also involve the 'thrill' and 'exhilaration' that comes from the 'removal of restraint and control' associated with identifying and 'lining up against [an] enemy' (Mead 1982: 218). Such warnings reiterate Fromm's (1960[1942]) suggestion that resentment among individuals removed from personally and social efficacious characterological forms can become potent sources for extremist political movements.

Conclusion

This paper developed the sociological tradition of character studies by exploring the contemporary fate of those other-directed qualities identified by Riesman (1969[1950]) as rising to a position of dominance alongside corporate capitalism and the service sector. Assessing this characterological form in its relationship with historically situated individuals and the wider socio-economic context, this meso-level approach enables us to construct a distinctive explanation of the paradoxical coexistence of social interdependence, on the one hand, and modern tribalism, on the other.

There have been three stages to our argument. The first identified the parameters of other-directedness against the backdrop of character studies, and in the age during which it emerged, before explicating this approach towards social life. The second examined the fate of other-directedness contemporarily: rather than being obliterated, other-directed qualities have become thinner and more restricted in scope, reflecting the intensification of a duality wherein the demands of mutual adjustment are accompanied by a trend towards antagonism and resentment among those accustomed to the parameters of individualism. The third stage focused on the capacity for this tension to translate into sympathy and support for sectarian groups that facilitate expression of the 'I' outside the constraints associated with mutual accommodation.

This argument confirms Riesman's (1969[1950]: xix, 139-40) deepest fear that other-directedness could degenerate into the search for 'social, economic and political protection' among groups who mirror the selves of their participants and 'can decide that there are certain outcasts, in class or ethnic terms, to whom the glad hand need not be extended'. The degeneration of this characterological form also resonates with Bauman's (1999) suggestion that individuals have come to treat relationships as no more than 'liquid' resources to be drawn on and discarded depending on whether they continue to sate passing desires, a trend towards 'libidinal consumption' in which other-directedness becomes reduced to the search for connections with those who can produce positive stimulation.

Other-directedness may not be the only characterological form evident nowadays (Mellor and Shilling, 2021; Shilling and Mellor, 2021), but if its present incarnation is failing to connect people to society via a set of qualities shared with fellow citizens, it is worth ending our conclusion by returning to Kornhauser's (1959) warnings in *The Politics of Mass Society*. Kornhauser (1959: 330) expressed concern that societies bereft of sufficiently strong intermediary organisations exposed individuals to the mobilising capacities of potentially extremist elite groups. The atrophy of other-directed social character, signalled by its instrumentalisation and its generation of antagonism and resentment among both 'progressive' and 'regressive' elements within society towards the interests and views of others, allied to the search by individuals for ideas and groups reflective of the 'I', signals a developing constituency for groups that provide vehicles for such discontent.

NOTES:

1. The capacity of social character studies to provide a meso-level link between individuals and the social environment has been marginalised in recent decades in favour of the increased popularity of theories reliant upon notions of the habitus. This paper is not concerned with comparing these approaches, but the advantage of the former is that it refuses the degree of individual/societal congruence apparent in Bourdieusian theories of the habitus which suggest society is installed in subjects 'beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny' and reconciles individuals to their social position (Bourdieu 1984: 466).

2. It is possible to argue that the spread of other-directedness has merely made us more sensitive to social sectarianism, rather than conflict having actually increased significantly, but the argument of this paper precludes that possibility in its suggestion that this characterological form has actually undergone a 'thinning' and restriction inimical to such sensitivity.

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