

Solitary or Social?

THE IMAGE OF THE SAILOR AND THE SEA brings to mind the solitary figure alone in his element. We might think of Santiago and the illusive marlin in *The Old Man and the Sea* or, perhaps, Joshua Slocum, the first to sail solo around the world, or maybe Linda Greenlaw chasing ever smaller catches of swordfish off the Grand Banks.

So we meet an oceanographer and we might expect someone who reflects the same characters of the solitary sailor—one who acts alone, inward turning, a stranger among crowds. Yet, each subject attracts a certain personality, and most people fail to see that oceanographers often enter this field not because they dream of being solitary travelers—one might look to mathematics or theoretical physics for those—but because they are attracted to a science that has the hallmarks of cooperation and collaboration. Oceanography by its very nature is an interdisciplinary science, drawing people who are interested in the integrative qualities of this research. The field self-selects for these individuals.

For this special issue, I wanted to evaluate whether this notion of collaboration really did extend to individuals who practice oceanography day to day. I conducted a kind of sociological experiment in the development and structure of this volume. With their indulgence, I asked colleagues to allow me to set up teams of coauthors for the chapters, making sure to mix junior scientists with senior scientists, but most especially coauthors who had not worked together. In some cases, I asked a junior scientist to be the lead on a chapter, something some scientists might not take lightly. I hoped to create uncommon unions within these teams and then observe how each team worked out the issues of author order or inclusion of new authors and the like. Because I believed my colleagues shared the same sense of cooperation, my experiment couldn't fail. It also meant I wasn't a very good scientist in designing this experiment. I didn't have a control, and I anticipated my result.

The experiment was a resounding success. Of the 15 chapters originally planned, for a variety of reasons, only three teams were not able to contribute to this issue. I was impressed and delighted with the way authors accommodated their unfamiliar working groups. In some cases, teams self-assembled and new authors were folded in, others bowed out, or teams regrouped and a new author took the lead so the work could proceed. Even single-authored papers were not a showcase of an individual's work but reflected the work of multitudes. Many teams referred to other chapters so there would be connectivity among the contributions. Each team made every effort to cover its topic in a broad and comprehensive way to provide readers outside this field an appreciation for the vastness, complexity, and crucial role of our sea of microbes.

An oceanographer is not solitary sailor—and this experiment proves it to me.



LITA M. PROCTOR, GUEST EDITOR