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## The Psychology of the Quiet Ego

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Egotism is in. For the past few decades, it has been okay to "look out for Number 1," with the assumption that "Number 1" refers to an individualistic notion of the person—and then mostly in the immediate moment, without regard for the individual's own long-term interests. Advertising and marketing campaigns feed our cultural obsession with egoistic pursuits, and political and economic forces help make many self-indulgent behaviors and expectations a perceived necessity. The burgeoning business of self-help books in pop psychology has contributed to the cultural endorsement of excessive self-interest, selling advice on how to be, or to get, anything one wants.

What is wrong with that? To start, excessive self-interest is not entirely in the interest of the self: As the chapters in this book demonstrate, the problems of egotism include not only social disharmony but also diminished personal well-being, health, productivity, and self-esteem. Public messages from academic psychology and the social sciences have taken fierce stands against unchecked egotism (e.g., Lasch, 1979/1991; Twenge, 2006), have surveyed the conflicts in American life between self-interest and collective concern (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Putnam, 2000), and have pointed down paths of lessened ego investment (e.g., Leary, 2004; Schwartz, 2005). In addition, the academic and popular interest in positive psychology demonstrates a widespread concern for the problems of egotism and the ways of transcending it. Finally, the self-help industry is not entirely about selfish gain: Books on the humanistic, prosocial forms of personal growth have always made bestseller lists and are still on the rise in that respect (Korda, 2001). Thus, it is no cultural coincidence that psychological research has recently emerged to examine the transcendence of self-interest. We use the terms *the quiet ego* and *quieting the ego* to connote the individual who routinely transcends egotism as well as the need to turn down a few notches the booming volume of egotism, on both individual and cultural levels.

The blossoming of research on transcending self-interest has grown in scattered patches across the vast field of psychology. With this book we hope to provide a unifying source and framework for understanding and advancing this research. In this chapter, we introduce this research as a new area of scientific inquiry, provide a framework for understanding the empirical research on the quiet ego, sketch psychology's historical interests in quieting the ego, and finally, point to current research and future directions that we find especially

exciting. By way of preview, researchers tend to take one of two approaches to conceptualizing the quiet ego: (a) as a balance between the interests of the self and others or (b) as the development of self-awareness, interdependent identity, and compassionate experience.

### **The Quiet Ego as a Topic of Empirical Inquiry**

This chapter and book are an attempt to give a name to the theoretically disparate research programs that aim toward understanding how people transcend egotism. Rooted in the earliest underpinnings of psychology and philosophy, academic interest in quieting the ego is not new. Most recently, the positive psychology movement has cleared a path for empirical research on quieting the ego. Many of positive psychology's interests deal with quieting the ego, notably forgiveness, gratitude, mutual love, courage, responsibility, altruism, and tolerance (e.g., Snyder & Lopez, 2001). As we discuss later in this chapter, the range of topics dealing with quieting the ego is vast. However, underlying all this research is a central focus on how the individual interprets the self and others—in particular, how the individual might arrive at a less defensive, more integrative stance toward the self and others.

In our struggle to find a unifying language for this area of research, we sought a term that conveyed the concerns of scientific psychology as well as the culture at large. To us, the term *quiet ego* conveys the notion that the core problems of egotism deal with the individual's screaming for attention to the self. Far from meaning a "squashed" or "lost" ego, we see in the quiet ego a self-identity that is not excessively self-focused but also not excessively other-focused—an identity that incorporates others without losing the self. In addition, the phrase *quieting the ego* conveys the sense of process we were seeking.

### **Meanings of Ego and Quiet Ego**

In thinking about the contents of this book on quiet-ego topics, we learned that there were several interpretations of what a quiet ego might be. Some interpreted a quiet ego as a fragile, squashed, or unwillingly silenced ego. Others thought of the "strong, quiet type"—a person who has a self-confidence born of self-understanding and feels no need to talk in depth about things. This latter interpretation is a little closer to the meaning of quiet ego in this volume, although the physical strength and loquaciousness of the individual are not of particular concern.

To us, the relatively quieter ego listens to others as part of a psychosocial harmony, whereas the noisier ego tunes others out as one would tune out background noise. The quieter ego is attuned to internal rhythms of people's (including the self's) psychological dynamics, whereas the noisier ego is attuned more to the clamoring boom of people's external appearances. The quieter ego, compared with the noisier ego, has more balance and integration of the self and others in one's concept of the self, a balanced recognition of one's strengths and weaknesses that paves the way for personal growth, and a greater compassion for the self and others. The quieter ego is less under the spell or the "curse"

of the self's (Leary, 2004) responsibilities and social images. The quieter ego realizes that the self is ultimately a construction or story that not only creates a sense of unity and purpose in life (McAdams, 1985) but also casts illusions, some constructive and some destructive. The noisier ego spends much of its energy identifying and defending the construction of self as if it were not a construction, and then asserting itself into the world. However, quiet is not categorically beneficial; there are risks and benefits associated with both quieter and noisier egos. Many of the chapters in this volume describe these trade-offs in great detail.

Turning to a more technical definition, research on quieting the ego has roots in a range of theoretical and methodological approaches, which in turn are rooted in varying definitions of ego. These definitions can be grouped into five (nonexhaustive) sets:

1. Ego = the self, notably affective evaluations of the self, such as self-esteem, self-confidence, self-worth, and self-image (as connoted by a strong, wounded, boosted, or deflated ego).
2. Ego = the self, notably in relation to others, as in identifying with others, bonding with others, and identities that include versus exclude others.
3. Ego = that which constructs, organizes, or evaluates the concept of self; that which is aware of or witnesses experience; James's (1890/1950) "I" (in contrast to "Me"); consciousness itself; one's frame of reference, or, in psychoanalytic theory, the "synthetic function."
4. Ego = the arbiter, defender, or transformer of internal impulses (e.g., of biology and society in psychoanalytic theory).
5. Ego = an ego that too readily capitulates to the id, resulting in self-seeking motivation, egotism, and conceit (as connoted by a big ego).

Of these five approaches to the definition of *ego*, researchers in scientific psychology tend to adopt one of the first three. Definitions 1 and 2 equate the ego with the self. Here, the characterization of ego typically emphasizes an affective dimension (as with self-esteem and Definition 1) and/or a psychosocial dimension (as with relational self-concepts and Definition 2). Whereas Definitions 1 and 2 are more common and straightforward, Definition 3 distinguishes the ego from the self and perhaps requires more explanation. Definition 3 views the self as a construction of the ego. Here, the ego is viewed more as a verb (i.e., a process) than a noun (i.e., a product). The ego (i.e., James's "I") is that which interprets objects and "brands" (James, 1890/1950) them as part of the self (i.e., the "Me") or not. These perceived objects of identification are what constitute one's concept of self.

### **Research Approaches to Ego Volume: Quiet Enough or Ever Quieter?**

Research on the quiet ego that adopts the first three approaches to the definition of *ego* (i.e., Definitions 1-3) involves a primary focus on the individual's interpretations of self and others. However, in line with the varying approaches

to defining the ego, researchers differ in the degree to which they characterize ego-quieting as a good thing. These differences can be described in terms of a primary emphasis on either balance or growth.

*Balance: Seeking a Quiet-Enough Ego*

Research that adopts either of the first two definitions of ego tends to view some ego-quieting as desirable but too much ego-quieting as undesirable. From this perspective, if an ego gets extremely quiet, it can lose its identity or be squashed. Thus, the notion of balance is key in this research (and is seen mostly in theoretical perspectives and operational definitions). Two kinds of balance emerge. First, in line with Definition 1, is a *positive-negative balance* in one's self-evaluations. This research tends to show that one problem with a noisy ego is a relative inability to perceive and think about the negative qualities in one's life, particularly in U.S. culture (see chap. 14, this volume). Of course, too much thinking about those negatives (i.e., too much ego-quieting) results in a squashed ego, and research points to an optimal balance of positive and negative self-evaluation (Bauer & Bonanno, 2001). Second, in line with Definition 2, is a *self-other balance* in one's psychosocial concerns. Too much concern for the self leans toward egotism and narcissism (see chap. 2, this volume), but too much concern for others leans toward unmitigated communion, a condition in which one's own ego or identity is lost (Helgeson & Fritz, 1999). These two forms of quiet-ego balance are in practice related, if only because the tendency to focus on the self to the exclusion of others typically involves an unrelenting push to view the self as positive. In the balance approach to a quieter ego, optimal human functioning involves an ego that is quiet enough to hear others and to balance one's concerns with those of the self (the chapters in Parts I and III of this volume tend to take this approach).

*Growth: Seeking an Ever-Quieter Ego*

Research that adopts Definition 3 tends to view ego-quieting as desirable, period. From this perspective, an ego can get quieter and quieter without becoming lost or squashed. This approach generally contends that "the ego quiets as it grows" (see chap. 18, this volume). The ego's frame of reference for viewing the self widens in psychosocial space, such that the view of self is not lost but instead becomes increasingly more integrative. From the balance/quiet-enough perspective, a growing ego tends to connote a big or inflated ego. From the growth perspective, a growing ego becomes increasingly aware of the self (cognitively), less defensive (emotionally), increasingly interdependent in its construal of self and others (cognitively), and increasingly more compassionate toward others and the self (emotionally).<sup>1</sup> As the ego grows, the self neither

A balance between the self and others is implicit here (note that the first two qualities of a growing ego just listed are agentic concerns, whereas the next two are communal concerns). In fact, balance itself is part of what grows (i.e., self and others become increasingly more optimally balanced) as part of the developing, quieting ego.

takes up all of one's psychosocial space nor gets entirely crowded out by considering others. Instead, the ego's very interpretations of self are progressively transformed in a sequence that proceeds roughly from selfish (preconventional) to group focused (conventional) to interdependent (postconventional). The interdependent self<sup>2</sup> is not a lost self; in contrast, it is stronger, more resilient, and more self-assured than ever. In the growth approach to a quieter ego, optimal human functioning involves an ego that becomes ever quieter as it gradually identifies with an increasingly wider and deeper psychosocial world (the chapters in Parts II and IV of this volume tend to take this approach).

#### *A Shared Resonance*

The balance and growth approaches are not entirely at odds; in fact, we perceive more similarities than differences at a broader level. To start, the two views share a common interest in transcending egotism. Although the two groups advocate turning ego volume down either just enough or all the way, these images have more to do with definitions of *ego* and *ego volume* than with the resulting qualities of a quieter ego. Both groups present empirical research to support the psychosocial benefits of nondefensive awareness, interdependence, complexity of perspective taking, and compassion toward self and others. In the end, both approaches can well incorporate both balance and growth, even if the empirical measures or theoretical orientations at hand are primarily rooted in one approach or the other.

#### *Position on Self-interest*

Egoistic self-interest seems not only to bring some short-term gain but also to cause long-term pain, for others as well as for the self (see chaps. 2-4, this volume). In addition, self-interest itself is an essential component of psychological health and social interaction (a personal sense of competence and self-understanding are critical to most widely accepted models of psychosocial development, e.g., Erikson, 1950; for a discussion of the problems of unmitigated communion, see Helgeson & Fritz, 1999). The balance approach calls for a balance of interests in the self and others. Similarly, the growth approach calls for an ego that transforms self-interest from being individualistic to increasingly interdependent. The problem with excessive self-interest is a matter of either self-other imbalance or lack of psychosocial growth.

Having distinguished these approaches to the study of quieting the ego, we now turn to the qualities of a quieter ego itself that are common to both camps.

<sup>2</sup>Here the term *interdependence* has a different meaning than in research on individualism versus collectivism (in which collectivist interdependence can also function as unmitigated communion; see chap. 14, this volume). In the present context, *interdependence* refers to a level of maturity at which one understands both one's psychosocial independence (something that itself takes some maturity) and one's inextricable connectedness with others and culture. This kind of interdependence generally does not develop before young adulthood, if at all (Labouvie-Vief, 2006; Loewinger, 1976).

### Prototypical Qualities of a Quieter Ego

It is probably impossible to map out the entire field of quiet-ego research. In attempting to generate a list of quiet-ego phenomena, we stopped at approximately 100 topics. Just about any topic in psychology can have some relation to the problems or transcendence of egotism. This book showcases a range of the research that has examined quiet-ego topics; however, it only begins to scratch the surface. For example, in addition to the specific areas addressed by the chapters in this book, there are potential physiological, neurological, immunological, and biological influences related to ego defenses; specific self-related emotions, such as depression and anxiety; and ego-quieting behaviors. Some (and only some) important quiet-ego topics not showcased in this volume include emotional intelligence (e.g., Salovey & Grewal, 2005), gratitude (e.g., Emmons & McCullough, 2004), forgiveness (e.g., Rye, 2005), outgroup tolerance (e.g., Brewer & Pierce, 2005), consumerism (Kasser & Kanner, 2004), community service (Metz & Youniss, 2005), the psychobiological limitations to a quiet ego (e.g., Kemeny, 2003), and the psychobiological benefits of meditation (e.g., Davidson et al., 2003).

Despite the vast range of quiet-ego topics, we posit four prototypical qualities of a quieter ego: (a) detached awareness, (b) interdependence, (c) compassion, and (d) growth. Our aim in positing these four qualities is not to stake a claim of truth about the quieter ego but instead to stimulate an empirically informed dialogue about the basic components of the quieter ego.

First, *detached awareness* deals with a nondefensive sort of attention: mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Langer, 1989), that is, being aware of the positives and negatives of a situation or of the self or others and being focused on the present (or even the past or the future, as appropriate to the situation). Here *detached awareness* refers to a subjective interpretation of the present situation in which that interpretation is not predicated on how that situation makes one feel about oneself; that is, the person's awareness is detached from egoistic appraisals of the situation (as we discuss in the next paragraph, *detached* does not refer to a lack of interpersonal communion). Detached awareness depends on a certain degree of openness and willingness to accept what one might discover about the self or others (among other things), but neither of those two alone guarantees detached awareness. Among its many benefits is that detached awareness allows for a less defensive interpretation of the self and others in the present moment.

Second, *interdependence* deals with a largely conceptual interpretation of the individual's mutual relations with others (from dyads to groups and beyond), that is, a balanced or developmentally more integrated interpretation of the self and others. Central to interdependence is the capacity to understand other people's perspectives in a way that allows one to identify with those other people. This interdependence is not mere conformity or agreeableness; it involves the ability to see past differences to more underlying, unifying aspects of other individuals' humanity. This interdependence, as well as compassion, may seem to be at odds with detached awareness. However, detached awareness is precisely what facilitates those two, especially in times of conflict. For instance,

when intimate partners are in an argument, the capacity to mentally detach from one's own views, ideals, and expectations is precisely what clears a path toward understanding the perspectives of both self and other (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998).

Third, *compassion* deals with a largely emotional stance toward the self and/or others that involves acceptance, empathy, and a desire to foster the well-being of the person or group. We view interdependence and compassion as closely related because they are the relatively more conceptual and more emotional facets of psychosocial identification. Either one can trigger the other. For example, the conceptual understanding of one's interdependence with others may lead to compassion, and one's feelings of compassion may lead to a conceptual interpretation or insight that the self and others are interdependent.

Fourth, *growth* deals with a humanistic or prosocial kind of development over time, where one either is concerned with or actually establishes heightened levels of quiet-ego qualities, such as awareness, interdependence, and compassion. Even the mere subjective concern for growth can quiet the ego. Like nondefensive awareness, growth-oriented thinking clears a space for understanding multiple perspectives. Part of the problem of egoistic self-interest is a limited scope of time by which one interprets the situation; egotism channels the mind toward the immediate moment (see chap. 2). In contrast, a concern for growth forces the individual to question the long-term effects of current actions. Furthermore, growth interpretations view the present situation (notably, conflicts) as part of an ongoing process instead of as a permanent end (which, if one is under threat, can be easily exacerbated into a threat to one's self and existence; see chap. 3).

These four qualities of a quiet ego are closely related, and yet each has been studied relatively independently. Each one can be viewed as a state, a trait, a skill to cultivate intentionally, and a trigger for the emergence of the others. Furthermore, these four quiet-ego qualities, either individually or collectively, can be found at the root of most quiet-ego characteristics. For example, gratitude involves an awareness of one's lack of provision and some sense of interdependence. Humility involves self-awareness tempered by self-compassion. Wisdom has been defined as any one of the four or as a combination of any of the four. Finally, a quieter ego is not defined by behavior, any more than the ego (or the self) itself is a behavior. The relative quietness or noisiness of the ego is a matter of how the individual interprets the self and others—with detached awareness in a balanced, integrated, compassionate, or growth-oriented manner.

### **Psychology's History of Concern With Quieting the Ego**

Interest in quieting the ego has an enduring, distinguished history in psychology. Indeed, it may well be historically one of the field's central theoretical concerns, although an actual body of research on these concerns has emerged only recently. In the historical sketch that follows, we highlight some of the key

elements of ego-quieting that are found in research today but that were emphasized by the great figures and movements in psychology's history.

Perhaps the most famous use of the term *ego* is the Latin translation of Freud's *das Ich*. Here, the ego, among other things, is trapped between the selfish (i.e., other-less) desires of the id and the equally strong desires of the superego. Freud's intrapsychological model of the ego resonated with a theme long found throughout the arts and humanities—that the individual is torn between the pull of biology and society, or between agency and communion (Bakan, 1966). To resolve these conflicts in the immediate moment, the ego uses a range of defenses, the more immature of which cause problems not only for others but also, eventually, for the self. Freud proposed a path to help resolve inner conflict that deals with a central element of quiet-ego research today: awareness of one's ego defenses. Jung (1951/1978) elaborated on this process, identifying layers of unconscious ego defenses that are encountered and defused along the path of individuation. Psychoanalytic theories eventually came to emphasize the social nature of the individual (e.g., Erikson, 1950; Horney, 1950/1991; Sullivan, 1953/1992), advocating another key element of quiet-ego studies, namely, balance of self and others in one's sense of self. Although the strictly psychoanalytic views of ego and self are largely different than those of contemporary research on ego-quieting, the basic ideas of awareness and balance as necessary for healthy functioning took hold in the field.

To awareness and balance the humanistic psychologists (e.g., Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1961) added at least two key ingredients of a quiet ego: (a) growth and (b) compassion. Regarding growth, the humanistic movement shifted the emphasis of therapy away from unearthing egotism to transcending it. In other words, personally working on the kinds of things that foster growth—such as openness, humility, self-awareness, acceptance of self and others, genuineness, and self-improvement—would pave a more promising path toward optimal human functioning than would regurgitating one's troubles.

William James (1890/1950, 1902/1990) stands out among many great figures in psychology's history for having paved a path toward empirical research on quieting the ego. His famous chapters on the stream of consciousness and the self, as well as his *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902/1990), all suggest the immense pull toward egotism, the difficulties of transcending it yet the human need to transcend it, and some paths toward that aim. James's division of the self into the I and the Me—plus his descriptions of the "empirical" self's constituents, self-esteem, and other processes of self-identity—have all shaped current research on the self and on quieting the ego in particular. His examination of mystical states of consciousness, in which workaday perceptions of the self are expanded to the point of perceived unity with all people and the universe, pointed to the role of an expanded self-identity in quieting the ego. In a philosophical sense, James's plea for psychology to adopt a position of radical empiricism, in which anything perceived could be studied scientifically, opened researchers' minds to the possibility of empirically studying the effects of the ego, even if doing so would be difficult (on this point, we see how far psychology has come in merely 100 years). From his philosophical approach to scientific psychology to the actual phenomena he considered, James made clear that quieting the ego should be of central concern to the field of psychology.



Two closely related fields—personality psychology and social psychology—are each influenced by James's (1890/1950) portrayal of the self and are at the heart of much contemporary, empirical research on quieting the ego. Both fields have historically framed the self in terms of others (Allport, 1937; Erikson, 1950; Mead, 1934/1967). Social psychologists have found creative, shocking, and often humorous ways of demonstrating just how selfish people are. Experiments in social psychology over the past 70 years have shown that given the slightest incentive or threat individuals are quick to exhibit blind obedience, ruthless conformity, fierce ingroup dedication and outgroup exclusion and discrimination, self-protection, self-serving biases, blaming of others, and to otherwise place other people at a disadvantage (e.g., Milgram, 1953; Sherif, 1958). However, these types of findings were not counterbalanced with research on the ways in which people could reduce their excessive self-interest. Current research in social psychology is increasingly showing how people do just that (some excellent examples of which appear in this book).

The field of personality psychology approaches the quiet ego as a property of the individual person rather than the situation. Adler (1927/1998) argued that the self is a fiction that people create. Kelly's (1955) theory of personal constructs advanced that idea, emphasizing the constructed and malleable nature of the self. In these constructivist approaches, the relatively quieter ego is more aware of the fact that the self is a set of constructs; the noisier ego is less aware of this fact, and this diminished awareness limits the capacity to grasp others' points of view (e.g., Loevinger, 1976). In his dynamic study of the whole person, Murray (1938) outlined, among other things, a set of needs that function and compete to varying degrees within the individual, many of which can, on balance or in combination, form relatively noisier and quieter egos (e.g., needs for dominance, aggression, exhibition, affiliation, and understanding). Erikson's (1950) psychosocial theory of personality development demonstrated how the ego develops in proportion to its capacity to identify with an increasingly broader spectrum of people and psychosocial concerns. Murray's and Erikson's work helped pave the way for narrative research (e.g., McAdams, 1985), in which the subjective interpretations of self and other—which are at the heart of the ego's quietness or noisiness—can be studied empirically. Another important tradition in personality psychology, especially in the past 25 years, is the study of broad personality traits. Allport (1937) identified a vast array of traits that helped later researchers to distill the famous Big Five traits, one of which, Openness to Experience, is central to quieting the ego (as seen in numerous chapters in this book).

Developmental psychology has also contributed a great deal of theory and research on quieting the ego. In most theories of cognitive and social-cognitive development, *development* is defined loosely as an increasing capacity to differentiate and integrate conceptual perspectives (e.g., see Piaget, 1970). This increasing integration of perspectives involves a corresponding, normative decline in egocentrism throughout childhood and adolescence (and may continue in adulthood; Labouvie-Vief, 2006). Vygotsky (1978) argued that nothing facilitates this kind of development like interactions with other people and actively incorporating their views into one's own, which are key elements of a quieter ego as presented in this book. Many of the famous theories of psychosocial

personality development chart precisely these capacities as they progress over time (e.g., Erikson, 1950; Kohlberg, 1969; Loevinger, 1976). Finally, underlying all this work (notably, Piaget, 1970) is the breadth and depth of human development outlined by James Mark Baldwin, who charted human development as an increasing ability to integrate, among other things, perspectives on the self and others (Broughton, 1981).

### **The Future of Quiet-Ego Studies**

In the past, empirical investigations in psychology have emphasized the varieties of human egotism, whereas most research on quieting the ego takes a more constructive approach, emphasizing the varied paths toward transcending egotism.

The frontiers of studying the quiet ego scientifically seem to point down at least a few paths. One involves adopting new perspectives on previously existing concepts and theories in psychology. Examples from this book include the study of narcissism as a social trap (chap. 2), the trade-offs of noisy and quiet egos in terror management theory (chap. 3), the undesirable effects of self-enhancement bias (chap. 4), mindfulness in the processes of self-identity versus mindlessness (chap. 7; see also Langer, 1989), whether identifying with persons or groups better facilitates a quieter ego (chap. 12), the different paths toward a quiet ego in the individualist West and collectivist East (chap. 14), the viewing of downward social comparison as a vehicle for compassion instead of merely self-aggrandizement (chap. 15; see also Wayment, 2004), the questionable assumptions of rationality and self-interest in the organizational sciences (chap. 17), and wisdom defined in terms of increasing capacities for meaning making and selflessness (chap. 20).

Another path involves the explicit identification of previously existing research as "quiet-ego" topics. For example, research on self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) often focuses on transcending selfish impulses by appealing to a more autonomous orientation toward self and others—where *autonomous* means not simply "independent" but instead the consideration of the authenticity or intrinsic humanity of both the self and others in everyday life (see chaps. 8, 10, and 11, this volume). This research involves a part of positive psychology that deals specifically with quieting the ego.

Yet another path to the future of quiet-ego studies involves the creation of new phenomena for empirical study. Examples in this book include egosystem versus ecosystem goals (chap. 6), humility (chap. 5), self-compassion (chap. 9), allo-inclusive identity (chap. 13), collective angst (chap. 16), growth stories and growth goals (chap. 18), transcending versus occluding undesirable stereotypes (chap. 19), and the redemptive self (chap. 21).

In other words, a great deal of research currently going on in psychology is already dealing with quiet-ego issues. One of the aims of this book is to make this fact known to the field. Looking to the horizon of human potential, one likely source of ideas is humanistic psychology. We tend to view humanistic psychology as focused on some of humanity's deepest and greatest potentials, many of which are just beyond reach of empirical study, but others of which

may well be ready for prime time in research.<sup>3</sup> Theorists in and around humanistic psychology, and transpersonal psychology in particular, have been mapping the more subtle qualities and farther reaches of human growth and ego-quieting (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993). For example, Wilber (2000), along with his proponents and opponents, are generating exciting models of the individual's transformation of consciousness. Much of this work extends scientifically established theory and can be (and to some degree has been) translated into new, empirically measurable constructs.

Another area of promise is cross-cultural studies. Some studies have shown that quiet-ego characteristics function similarly across cultures (e.g., intrinsically motivated goals; Sheldon et al., 2004), whereas other studies suggest that different cultures take different paths to a quiet ego (see chap. 14, this volume). If one looks to the earliest philosophical traditions in the East and West, one sees that cultural concerns for quieting the ego seem to have a universal appeal. Research in this area can help clarify the properties of the quiet ego while also helping to refine current concepts of cultural differences such as individualism and collectivism.

Similarly, we have discovered that Buddhist philosophy and practices are common among many of the researchers interested in this topic. This is not to say that Buddhism is by any means the only path to a quieter ego, but we were pleasantly surprised by how many conversations at the Quiet Ego Conference (see Preface, this volume) involved explicit references to Buddhist notions of compassion, mindfulness, and meditation. Thus it seems that religious ideas— notably the more transcendent, less ethnocentric ones—will be likely sources for future research on quieting the ego, which is, after all, a central concern of religions. Buddhism, as a psychologically minded system of thought, has already been such a source (e.g., see discussions of mindfulness—Brown & Ryan, 2003; emotions that help vs. hinder well-being—Ekman, Davidson, Ricard, & Wallace, 2005; and self-compassion—Neff, 2003). Christianity has already played a considerable role (see, e.g., discussions of gratitude—Emmons & McCullough, 2004; humility—Exline & Geyer, 2004; and forgiveness—Rye, 2005). In the end, we think that research on quieting the ego will continue to spread through the application of rigorous, empirical methods to models of transcending egotism that at one time seemed to be the exclusive domain of the humanities.

We believe that the field of psychology is well poised to help society better understand the costs of excessive self-interest and the benefits of transcending it. This book happens to showcase empirical, psychological research on quieting the ego. However, human interest in quieting the ego is much broader, extending past the sciences and humanities to the arts, politics, business, media, education, religion, and beyond. People interested in quieting the ego from across these areas are contributing in their own ways toward a collective understanding of the problems and transcendence of egotism. We hope this book serves as a first step toward a more unified effort on behalf of psychology to lay an empirical foundation for society's understanding of these issues.

<sup>3</sup>This is not to suggest that no empirical research goes on within humanistic psychology, only that humanistic psychology's existence outside the mainstream of research in fields such as personality, social, and developmental psychology is well known and unfortunately ignored or disparaged.

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