The Quiet Ego and Its Predictors in Turkish Culture

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Abstract

Although high self-esteem has been seen as a panacea for all sorts of personal and social problems for a long time, recent research has shown its potential negative effects. The concept of quiet ego, defined as a balanced integration with others by turning down the volume of the ego (Bauer & Wayment, 2008), has been coined as a plausible alternative that can mitigate negative effects of fragile high self-esteem. This study aims to examine psychometric properties of the Quiet Ego Scale in Turkish culture, and to investigate its correlates related to personality traits, culture, and well-being. A total of 254 Turkish university students completed the measures of the Quiet Ego Scale, Big Five Personality, happiness, self-esteem, and individualism-collectivism. Factor analyses on the items of the Quite Ego measure supported its construct validity among Turkish participants. As expected, quiet ego was positively associated with the indicators of well-being and certain personality traits. Regression analyses indicated that openness to experience among the personality traits and horizontal collectivism among the cultural orientations were the strongest predictors of quiet ego. Results were discussed considering cultural values and previous findings on quite ego.

Introduction

Although for a long time, the nurturing of a higher sense of self-esteem had been viewed as a sort of panacea for many psychological and social ailments, recent research has shown its many costly negative effects (see Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003). Baumeister, Smart and Boden (1996) were particularly acute in their observation that "the dark sides of high self-esteem" (p.5), when faced with an ego threat from an extrinsic source, tend to rear their ugly head in the form of a panicked psychological need for self-protection. This self-protection needs, stemming from fragile or unstable self-esteem, may manifest violence and aggressive behavior. Thus, a more all-encompassing evaluation of the self is needed in the maintenance of healthy psychological functioning.

This observation led Kernis (2003) to search for a more balanced model for personal self-evaluation, which resulted in his proposing a definition of *optimal* self-esteem, which differentiated between fragile and secure high self-esteem. Kernis characterizes individuals with secure high self-esteem as people who "like, value, and accept themselves, imperfections and all." (p.3). Although this definition still retains an emphasis on the "I", it maintains the importance of being able to look at oneself in a way that overcomes selfish desires, in a more external, and thus objective way (Bilgin, 2007).

Focusing on one's self, with a highly egoistic sense of self, and making a conscious effort to control one's behavior, generally backfires. Therefore, Leary, Adams and Tate (2006) proposed a strategy known as *hypo-egoic self-regulation* – a self-regulatory strategy, which requires alienating oneself from the self-focus. Hypo-egoic self-regulation is defined as "relinquishing conscious control over one's own behavior". Furthermore, Leary and his colleagues suggested two ways to reach this hypo-egoic state. One is to decrease the amount of time spent in a state of self-awareness, meaning behaving as automatically and unconsciously as possible, and secondly, by practicing learned behaviors such as playing the piano or riding a bicycle, regularly. Regularly alienating the self from past events and future expectations through meditation and transcendence, were also some of the other strategies included. Hence, decontaminating one's perception from selfish and egoistic desires is a prerequisite to achieving a more balanced and positive psychological framework, thereby ushering in the benefit of a quiet ego.

In this framework, the concept of *quiet ego*, proposed by Bauer and Wayment (2008) seems to be a plausible alternative that can mitigate the potential negative effects of fragile high self-esteem. It differentiates the noisy ego from the core self. A quiet ego involves turning down the volume of the ego, and absolving oneself of selfish desires. In other words, it points to a more compassionate conception of self-identity (Wayment, Bauer, & Sylaska, 2014), which necessitates integrating others into the self by turning down the volume of the ego, nurturing a more tolerant view towards oneself and one's personal growth, as well as entering hypo-egoic states such as awareness of the present moment. In this sense, if the ego is conceptualized as a unidimensional continuum, one end of this line would be the screaming ego or noisy ego, which cannot hear any other voices except one's own and cannot see others' points of view because its highly valued ego blurs this view and receives new information by straining the self. The noisy ego is necessarily defensive as it aims to protect its privileges at all times. Those suffering from a noisy ego tend to interpret situations in a defensive way, and respond with positive self-affirmations to protect their ego (Hewitt, 1998). The other end of this continuum is the voiceless ego, which bows to other people so consistently that it cannot hear its own voice. The voiceless ego can be characterized as the loss of identity or the self because this type of ego cares extensively about others' thoughts and ideas. The voiceless ego represents the opposite extreme; it cannot realize its own needs and may sacrifice its happiness and even its existence. The key point for reaching the quiet ego is bringing these two extremes into balance.

There are a number of critical features of quiet ego, basically stemming from positive psychology. Because it aims to increase people' happiness and health, and to compose a new ego in a more integrative way, many well-known concepts, such as sacrifice, aggression, negative affectivity, are also related to quiet ego. However, Bauer and Wayment (2008) have specified four main characteristics of quiet ego. The first component is *detached awareness*, which can be defined as a non-defensive interpretation of the present situation without giving more weight than necessary to expectations and previous experiences. A non-judgmental way of processing information and seeing a situation

the way it is, helps people quiet their ego. This component was named *objective aware-ness* in later studies (Wayment, Wiist, Sullivan, & Warren, 2011). The second feature of the quiet ego, *interdependent identity*, can be defined as a conceptualization of the identity as a part of relations with others (Bauer & Wayment, 2008; Wayment, *et al.*, 2014). It is not simply conforming to others' views. It recognizes and acknowledges the fundamental similarities rather than differences between people. The third component, *perspective taking*, is defined as the projection of others' points of view onto the self (Wayment, *et al.*, 2014). Shifting away the focus from the self to the other is a prereq-uisite for nurturing a quiet ego. Understanding other people's points of view leads indi-viduals to be less ego-centric (Davis, 1983). The fourth component, *growth*, can also be seen as a last step of the quiet ego, containing all other characteristics of quiet ego such as mindfulness, interdependence, and perspective taking. Bauer and Wayment charac-terized the growth component of the quiet ego as a development through time, in a "hu-manistic and prosocial" (p. 13) way. Those who can reach a certain level of growth re-flect on their current life as a process (part of a long road) instead of seeing the future as a result or a target point.

Aim of the current study

Since the content of self-concept and its reflections to the interpersonal relations vary widely across cultures (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007; Markus & Kitayama, 2010), the concept of quiet ego should be examined in collectivist cultural contexts, many of which, such as Buddhism and Sufism, inherently contain and counsel different components of the quiet ego.

The first aim of the current study was to investigate the psychometric properties of the Quiet Ego Scale in Turkish culture – a culture, which is marked by a close knit emo-tionally interdependent collectivist context.

Wayment and her colleagues (2014) investigated the relationship between the quiet ego and numerous psychological constructs in the United States. Considering their find-ings, the second aim of this study was to replicate the study in the Turkish cultural con-text, thereby identifying the potential culturally-specific limits of their scope. Therefore, both variables previously employed by Wayment and the other critical variables, espe-cially culturally sensitive ones which are conceptually associated with quiet ego, were included in our study. Specifically, we aimed to examine personality and cultural predic-tors of quite ego in Turkish culture.

Method

Participants

Turkish university students (N = 254) in a large city in Turkey participated in the study using the online Surveymonkey program. Of the participants, 131 were women and 123 were men with a mean age of 22.04 (SD =2.01; range =19-33). A total of 232 participants received a bonus credit for their participation in the study, while all other participants attended the study completely voluntarily.

Procedure and Instruments

Data was collected after receiving approval from Middle East Technical Universi-ty (METU) Human Subjects Ethics Committee. Before the study, the Quiet Ego Scale (Wayment, *et al.*, 2014) was translated into Turkish and then translated back inde-pendently by two experts fluent in both languages.

The Quite Ego Scale.

Participants' egos were measured in volume through the 13-item Quiet Ego Scale (QES) developed by Bauer and Wayment (2008) and adapted into Turkish by research-ers. The QES had satisfactory reliability (α = .70) in this study. The factor structure and other psychometric properties of the QES were given in the result section.

Personality measures.

Five basic personality traits, namely: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability (or neuroticism), and openness to experience were measured using the 44-items of the Big Five Inventory developed by Benet-Martinez and John (1998) and adapted into Turkish by Sümer and Sümer (2003). All of the dimensions had satis-factory reliability coefficients in the current study ($\alpha_{extraversion}$ =.81; $\alpha_{agreeableness}$ =.67; $\alpha_{conscientiousness}$ =.77; $\alpha_{neurotic}$ =.75; $\alpha_{openness\ to\ experience}$ =.78).

Well-being measures.

Satisfaction with life, subjective happiness, and personal growth were measured as indicators of general well-being. Participants' overall life satisfactions were measured with 5 items on a 7-point scale using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener *et al.*, 1985; Durak, Senol-Durak & Gencoz, 2010). The Subjective Happiness Scale (Ly-ubomirsky & Lepper, 1990; Doğan & Totan, 2013) was used to measure participants' happiness levels. Nine-item subscale of personal growth dimension of the Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) was used to assess the growth aspect. All the indicators of well-being showed satisfactory reliabilities (Cronbach's α for life satisfaction = .83, subjective happiness = .79, growth dimension = .65).

Cultural orientations.

Participants' levels of individualism-collectivism were assessed using the INDCOL scale developed by Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, and Gelfand (1995) and were adapted into Turkish by Wasti and Erdil (2007). The scale classifies the basic cultural orien-tations into four dimensions, namely: horizontal individualism, vertical individualism, horizontal collectivism, and vertical collectivism. Collectivism and individualism levels represent how much a person sees oneself as a part of a culture. The difference between vertical and horizontal level is about equality. The scale consisted of 37 items; items were rated on a 5 point scale. All factors showed higher reliability coefficients ($\alpha_{horizontal}$

Self-esteem.

Self-esteem was measured with a Turkish version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965; Çuhadaroğlu, 1986) with 10 items (α = .87).

Results

Psychometric Properties of the Quiet Ego Scale

Prior to the main analysis, data was screened for missing values, outliers and required assumptions of the analysis. An explanatory factor analysis was conducted with the Varimax rotation in order to test the factor structure of the Turkish Quiet Ego Scale. Results revealed a four-factor structure explaining 58.60% of the total variance. Because one of the originally reverse items ("I find myself doing things without paying much attention") had negative inter-item correlation with the other items, this was excluded from the Turkish version of the scale, considering a potential mistranslation or misunderstanding on this item. Further analyses were conducted with the remaining 13 items. The obtained factor structure was consistent with the theoretical base of the Quiet Ego concept and it was similar to the original scale.

In order to test the validation of the Turkish Quiet Ego Scale, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using LISREL 8.0. Two alternative models were tested. The first model was the single factor structure 13 items. Consistent with the original factor structure, the second model was the four-factor model consisting of perspective taking (4 items), interdependent identity (3 items), personal growth (4 items) and objective awareness (2 items). For evaluating the models and assessing the model fits, the ratio of chi-square to its degrees of freedom (X^2/df) less than 3, goodness of fit index (GFI) over .90 and root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) value less than .08 were used as criterions. Table 1 presents the fit indices for the two models tested in the current study.

RMSEA = .134). Compared to the single factor model, the four factor model yielded a good fit to the data and items were loaded on the targeted factors. The second model fit to data (X^2(59, N = 254) = 135, p < .001, X^2/df = 2.29, RMSEA = .07, GFI = .92). An investigation of the modification indexes suggested that correlated errors should be allowed between two items (M8 and M13), which indeed had the same meaning; one was the reversed interpretation of the other one. With inclusion of one error covariance, the revised model showed an improvement on the model fit. The results of the analysis yielded a better fit to the data, (X^2(58, N = 254) = 117, p < .001, $X^{2/}df$ = 2.02, RMSEA = .06, GFI = .93). The correlated errors between the other items were minimal and therefore no further modification was made. Correlations between the latent factors varied between .13 (between objective awareness and growth) and .52 (perspective taking and interdependent identity) suggesting the relative independence of the factors. Factor loadings varied between .31 and .75. The factor loadings and explained variances for each item were given in Table 2. Thus, considering the major indices for model fit, the four factor model with 13 items had satisfactory RMSEA, and X2/df indicating construct validity of Turkish Quiet Ego Scale.

Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for perspective taking, interdependent identity, personal growth and objective awareness were .71, .66, .62, and .49, respectively. Considering that the dimension of objective awareness had only two items, its Cronbach's alpha reliability was relatively low. The four subscales were used by calculating their mean scores in the following analyses.

Table 1
Confirmatiory factor analysis fit indices of alternative models for the Turkish QES

Models	X^2	df	X^2/df	GFI	CFI	RMSEA (90% CI)
Single Factor Model	359.24	65	5.52	.82	.70	.13 (.12; .14)
Four Factor Model	135.59	59	2.29	.92	.90	.07 (.05; .08)
Revised-Four Factor Model	117.70	58	2.02	.93	.92	.06 (.04; .08)

Note: X^2 = Normal Theory Weighted Least Squares Chi-Square; GFI = goodness of fit index; CFI= comparative fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; 90% CI = 90% Confidence Interval for RMSEA.

The GFI and RMSEA indicated a poor fit for the single factor model (GFI = .82,

Table 2   *Sumer - 413*

Factor loadings and explained variances of item of the Turkish QES

Factors and Items	Factor loadings	R^2
Perspective Taking		
4. Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place.	.74	.55
13. I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision.	.71	.50
8. When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to put myself in his or her shoes for a while.	.64	.41
11. I sometimes find it difficult to see things from another person's point of view.*	.41	.17
Interdependent Identity		
12. I feel a connection to people of other races.	.66	.44
3. I feel a connection to all living things.	.61	.37
7. I feel a connection with strangers.	.60	.36
Personal Growth		
5. For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.	.80	.64
9. I have the sense that I have developed a lot as a person over time.	.54	.30
14. When I think about it, I haven't really improved much as a person over the years.*	.37	.14
1. I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world.	.31	.09
Objective Awareness		
10. I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.*	.75	.56
6. I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing.*	.44	.19

* items were reversed.

Correlational Analysis

Pearson correlation analyses were conducted in order to examine the relationship between a quiet ego and the other study variables. As seen in Table 3, the quiet ego was significantly correlated with almost all of the study variables ranging from .14 to .53. It was strongly and positively correlated with the measures of well-being, such as life satisfaction ($r = .30$, $p < .001$), well-being ($r = .53$, $p < .001$) and happiness ($r = .32$, $p < .001$). Among the personality variables, openness to experience ($r = .50$, $p < .001$) had the highest correlation with the quiet ego. Unlike other personality traits, neuroticism negatively correlated with the quiet ego ($r = -.34$, $p < .001$). As for cultural orientations, horizontal dimension ($r_{HI} = .21$, $p = .001$; $r_{HC} = .26$, $p < .001$) had higher correlations than vertical dimension ($r = .14$, $p = .018$). Contrary to expectations, self-esteem showed a low but negative correlation ($r = -.15$, $p = .013$) with quiet ego.

Table 3

Pearson Correlation Coefficients between study variables and the Quiet Ego

Variables	Quiet Ego
BFI	
Extraversion	.25**
Agreeableness	.32**
Conscientiousness	.31**
Neuroticism	-.34**
Openness	.50**
Life satisfaction	.30**
Happiness	.32**
Well-being	.53**
Self-esteem	-.15*
INDCOL	
Horizontal Collectivism	.26**
Horizontal Individualism	.21**
Vertical Collectivism	.14*
Vertical Individualism	-.09

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.

Regression Analysis

Major variables were regressed on quiet ego separately to examine the predictive power of personality and cultural orientations using a series of regression analyses. Since gender differences were detected on a number of variables except quiet ego, gender was entered in the first step to check for its effect.

In the first regression analysis, the big five personality traits were entered as the predictors of a quiet ego. As in Table 4, results revealed that personality characteristics significantly predicted the quiet ego ($F(6,247) = 22.82$, $p < .001$) with openness to experience ($\beta = .41$, $p < .001$) as the strongest predictor. Furthermore, agreeableness ($\beta = .13$, $p = .025$) and neuroticism ($\beta = -.19$, $p = .001$) also significantly predicted quiet ego.

Table 4   *Sumer - 414*

Regression of Personality Characteristics on Quiet Ego

Variables	B	β	t	Sig.
Step 1				
Gender (1 = F, 2 = M)	,00	,00	,04	,96
Step 2				
Gender	.03	,03	.64	,51
Extraversion	,01	,02	,50	,61
Agreeableness	,10	,13	1,26	,02
Conscientiousness	,06	,09	1,56	,11
Neuroticism	-,11	-,19	-3,30	,00
Openness	,30	,41	7,43	,00

Note: ΔR^2 = .35, and F_{change} = 27.38, p < .01 for the step 2.

The second regression analysis was run with the four major dimensions of cultural orientations as the predictors of quiet ego. As shown in Table 5, results revealed that cultural orientations significantly predicted quiet ego (F (5,245) = 6.10, p < .001). Both horizontal collectivism (β = .20, p = .006) and individualism (β = .18, p = .005) positively predicted quiet ego while vertical individualism (β = -.15, p = .015) negatively predicted the quiet ego, suggesting that horizontal aspect of the collectivism is associated with quiet ego.

Discussion

In the present study, the psychometric properties of the Quiet Ego Scale were investigated. Furthermore, the power of a number of critical variables, including personality traits, indicators of well-being, and cultural orientations in predicting quiet ego were examined. The findings of Wayment and her colleagues' (2014) study were largely replicated in the Turkish context supporting the validity of the Quite Ego Scale.

Although initial explanatory factor analyses yielded four factors representing the originally produced dimensions of the QES, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis on the items of the QES in order to validate its factor structure for the Turkish cultural context. The findings confirmed that the Turkish Quiet Ego Scale, with its four stable factors, was a reliable and valid scale for measuring individuals' abilities to turn down the volume of their noisy ego. The four-factor structure of the original English version

was totally replicated amongst Turkish students. Considering that the four factors, perspective taking (*i.e.* compassion), interdependence, growth and detached awareness (*i.e.* mindfulness), contained only a few items each, we proposed that researchers utilize the global scale by using the total score. Critical indicators of well-being, such as happiness and life satisfaction, were found to correlate strongly with the quiet ego, suggesting that the quiet ego may have protective health functions by enhancing quality of life. As for the other study variables, although almost all the correlations were moderately significant, they do not pose a risk for the validity of the scale. Rather, the results confirmed that the quiet ego is a different concept to all other psychological constructs examined.

Table 5

Regression of cultural orientations on the Quiet Ego

Variables	B	β	t	Sig.
Step 1				
Gender (1 = F, 2 = M)	.00	.00	.07	,93
Step 2				
Gender	.02	.03	.49	,62
Horizontal Collectivism	,15	,20	2.76	,00
Horizontal Individualism	,14	,18	2.84	,00
Vertical Collectivism	.02	.02	.33	,73
Vertical Individualism	-.01	-,15	-2.44	,01

Note: ΔR^2 = .11, and F_{change} = 7.62 , p < .01 for the step 2

Regarding the big five personality characteristics, the strongest predictor of quiet ego was openness to experience. This suggests that individuals who welcome new experiences and have an open stance toward new situations and sudden changes in circumstance were more likely to possess a quieter ego. This finding may imply that openness to new experience creates a tendency to decrease an individual's defensiveness and self-protectiveness regarding desires, instincts, and motives. In addition, considering that neuroticism was the second strongest predictor of quiet ego, fragile self-esteem, anger, high anxiety and other characteristics typifying neuroticism seem to turn on the volume of ego. In sum, openness to experiences and neuroticism seem to be critical components of the quiet ego in the Turkish cultural context.

Although neuroticism may have important implications on the quiet ego in Turkish

culture, Wayment and her colleagues (2014) did not find a significant relationship between the quiet ego and neuroticism in the United States. Consequently, a cross-cultural comparison is needed, because there may be both universal and cultural specific components of the quiet ego which ought to be identified.

As would be expected, only the horizontal dimensions of the cultural orientations positively predicted the quiet ego, suggesting that a non-hierarchical social structure creating a climate for closeness and feelings of belonging to others is important for quieting the noisy ego. Horizontal collectivism (HC) is a composition of collectivism and benevolent values (*i.e.* desire to increase the well-being of the group and the individual's in one's inner circle), and horizontal individualism (HI) refers to the inclusion of the universal (*i.e.* "understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature", Schwartz, 1994, p. 22) to individualist values (Triandis, 1996). Thus, it follows that self-directedness is the main component of HI, and benevolence is of HC both in Singapore and the United States (Soh & Leong, 2002). Considering that benevolence and universalism are the values of self-transcendence (Schwartz, 1994), greater consideration for other people and a belief in the universal aspects of humanity work to rein in the catastrophic consequences of an unrestrained, screaming ego.

Although this study represents an important contribution to the current literature, it also has some limitations. This was, after all, conducted on university students only, and has little claim to represent Turkish culture in its entirety. Future studies thus, ought to replicate the findings using a more representative community sample.

With these caveats in mind, the current study has contributed to the current literature, especially to positive psychology. Moreover, the Quiet Ego Scale has now been adapted into Turkish, and so can be used in future research. Given that quiet ego is a relatively new concept in the field, it is important to test its validity in different cultures in order to fully evaluate its universal application. To the best of our knowledge, the current study is hopefully just the first step in this direction.

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