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Ego development and anxiety during emerging adulthood

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During Emerging Adulthood

ABSTRACT

Emerging adulthood is a time period wrought with many life changes (Arnett, 2000); therefore, periods of anxiety that are distressing and may potentially disrupt or challenge ego growth can be expected. This study addressed the question: *What is the relationship between anxiety and ego maturity in emerging adulthood?* Wayment, Bauer, and Sylaska (2014) asserted that the ego in higher levels of development is less defended. This means that the defensive personality organization in the "quiet ego" is integrated in higher-level defensive adaptation, but it remains unclear how Sullivan's (1953) concepts of anxiety might interact with varying levels of ego development. The target sample for this study included men and women between the ages of 18 and 28 years old. Participants completed two online survey instruments including the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, Gorsuch, Lushene, Vagg & Jacobs, 1983) to assess anxiety, and the 14-item Quiet Ego Scale (Wayment et al., 2014) to measure ego development. The results supported this study's hypothesis that ego quietness is negatively correlated with trait anxiety, meaning that higher ego quietness scores are associated with lower anxiety scores. This study supports the relationship originally posited by Sullivan (1953), in which greater ego strength allows an individual to experience anxiety as less threatening and, therefore, the individual can more effectively confront anxiety.

EGO DEVELOPMENT AND ANXIETY

DURING EMERGING ADULTHOOD

A project based on an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

There are many different stage models of psychological development. Each theorist has proposed ideas regarding important themes, milestones, capacities, and issues that pertain to various stages of the developing self. Emerging adulthood is a particular period between adolescence and young adulthood during which various developments may or may not occur for young people in industrialized societies. During this phase, this age group faces many rapid changes and must endure new challenges that have not been previously encountered. A range of new experiences must be coped with through change and personal exploration.

Anxiety is a fundamental human experience. Anxiety is neither a good nor bad experience but it must be integrated so that life is not dominated by fearful living. There is little research that pertains to the experience of anxiety and its effect on healthy ego development in emerging adulthood. Since emerging adulthood is a time period that is wrought with extreme changes, it makes sense that periods of anxiety are distressing and therefore might disrupt or challenge ego growth.

This study addressed the question: *What is the relationship between anxiety and ego maturity in emerging adulthood*. Social work practice will benefit from examining the relationship between ego growth and anxiety in emerging adults. The research question is relevant to social work practice and behavioral therapies because it serves the field to have an understanding of how anxiety functions in this population's experience. In addition to the goal

of making a contribution to the literature through an empirical investigation, it is hoped that an understanding of the implications of the experience of anxiety and ego growth will lead to better treatment interventions; the social work value of competence is directly emphasized.

For the purposes of this study, *anxiety* will be defined as an unwanted feeling of tension or nervousness that might be experienced by an individual physically and/or psychologically. Development will be discussed within the framework of the Bauer and Wayment (2008) concept of *ego quietness*, which focuses 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" (pg. 2). For this study *emerging adulthood* will be defined as the phase of the life span from the late teens through the twenties, focusing on the period between the ages of 18 and 28.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Over the past two decades, social scientists and theorists have focused on emerging adulthood as a new developmental stage, with Arnett (2000) leading the way with his conceptualization of what constitutes an emerging adult. According to Arnett (2007), emerging adulthood is more than a transitional phase; rather, it is a distinct period of development between adulthood and adolescence. Arnett (2000) suggested that emerging adulthood has become a stage of development in itself in part because of cultural, societal, and demographic considerations, particularly as marriage and parenthood are delayed until the mid- or late twenties for most people in Western society. This period of development allows for greater and richer exploration of identity and possible life directions in love and work, coupled with a growing sense of social awareness (Arnett, 2004).

One of Arnett's early studies (2001) focused on adolescents (ages 13-19), emerging adults (age 20-29), and young to mid-life adults (age 30-55). Using a 38-item questionnaire, the study asked participants to evaluate what must be achieved before a person is considered an adult. Several subscales were analyzed, with the highest results in all three groups pointing to individualism as a marker of adulthood. The findings corresponded to Arnett's initial theory (1998) that *adulthood* is about the process of being an individual in society, without reliance on others. One weakness of this study was its design; participants could only respond to questions

by answering "yes" or "no," which limited variations in responses and did not allow for anything beyond black-or-white answers.

A major critique to Arnett's work came from Cote (2014), who challenged many of his conceptions about emerging adulthood. Perhaps Cote's biggest contention was that Arnett cast emerging adulthood as a developmental epoch, while most of what Arnett used to describe the phenomenon of emerging adulthood was more weighted in a societal transition. While this theme was central to Cote's critique of much of Arnett's work, it could be argued that transitional periods in society are in fact developmental. A transitional shift might create a developmental stage by virtue of the transition that is occurring and the particular set of different expectations that are occurring in a population's experience.

Cote (2014) also raised concerns about Arnett's (2004) qualitative study methodology. He argued that Arnett's formulations were based on nonrandom interviews, which showed a likelihood of confirmation bias. While Arnett's research was based on qualitative interviews, he did not provide the methodology of his interviews, which limited the ability of fellow researchers to assess and replicate his studies.

Cote offered a study by Silva (2012) as a counterpoint to Arnett's formulation of emerging adulthood. After her qualitative coding was finished, Silva found that four major themes were present in the time period of emerging adulthood, illustrating different perspectives towards becoming an adult. These four themes challenged much of Arnett's more traditional conceptualizations of emerging adulthood, which focused more on identity development. Interestingly, Silva's work focused more completely on emerging adults who came from working-class backgrounds while Arnett's work (2001, 2004) consisted mostly of subjects who were college students or graduate students. It is reasonable to assume that these experiences of

"emerging adulthood" could differ vastly depending on events that occurred during an individual's life. In his defense, Arnett (2000) stated that the only consistent characteristic in the stage of emerging adulthood is that it is a period where there are many variations in how we find a sense of identity, and that it was possible to conceive that Silva's work might fit with Arnett's conceptualizations of increased identity.

While Cote's (2014) critiques are valid, it is not unfathomable to believe that emerging adulthood—whether viewed as a period of transition or as a developmental stage—does cause individuals to encounter certain themes. And while these themes might be ripe for further deconstruction, the focus on this time period in life points to more specific inquiry and therefore is relevant for further study.

Earlier Theoretical Models of Developmental Experiences

In the mid-twentieth century, American psychiatrists and psychologists took an interest in extending Freud's developmental theories beyond biology by focusing on sociological and cultural influences. Harry Stack Sullivan's *Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry* (1953) brought a different perspective to the growing body of psychoanalytic literature. Sullivan believed that interactions between the client and their outside world were fundamental to understanding a person and their difficulties. He proposed the concept of a *self-system* to describe how people organize their perceptions and experiences. This self-system centers on feelings of security and competing feelings of euphoria, which react to an individual's own interpersonal operations as well as to the internal stimulus of anxiety. Sullivan believed that anxiety is a cause for various interpersonal mechanisms since people must confront personal anxiety to get more satisfying needs met. As an example, consider an individual who experiences anxiety in the context of applying for a new job that they believe might be more rewarding and fulfilling. A person who

is comfortable with their experience of anxiety will still apply for the job, perhaps realizing that the anxiety is adaptive, while a person with less-integrating tendencies and increased security operations will not apply for the job.

Sullivan (1953) posited stages of interpersonal functions and believed that various themes surface throughout the developmental experience. These developmental epochs trace the interpersonal tasks that are necessary for individuals to experience fulfilling relationships that Sullivan believed to be, "the principle source of satisfactions in life" (p. 34). The tasks begin in infancy and continue through young adulthood. Sullivan believed that extreme anxiety and its maladaptive defenses could potentially become pathological, since interpersonal style would be delayed and developmental epochs not met (Greenburg & Mitchell, 1983 p. 100). For example, an individual might desire intimacy with others but is not able to confront the extreme anxiety of the experience to meet new people, so defenses might be employed to limit contact with potential intimate connections. Sullivan's concepts of anxiety provided the basis for this current study.

Erik Erikson was another Neo-Freudian psychoanalyst who believed that ego function moves in stages that are dependent upon completion of the previous stages for the individual to move forward in ego development. Erikson (1950) believed that for psychological health to be attained, the ego must successfully navigate various themes throughout the lifecycle. Each of these stages poses conflicting themes that individuals need to reconcile within themselves. Erikson also concerned himself with social aspects of the ego, which often helped to color these themes in development (Hoare, 2002 p. 30). For example, Sullivan's stage of early adolescence addressed the interpersonal need for individuals to understand their sexuality and sexual attractiveness in relation to their peers. Erikson focused more on the intrapsychic and social

needs of finding identity by experimentation. While these examples are not necessarily mutually exclusive, there are differences in their theoretical approaches.

While the interpersonal vs. the intrapsychic focus is a major difference in these theories, it is worth considering that there also are major similarities, and that the theories can be strengthened when integrated. Erikson (1950) and Sullivan (1953) provided differing views of human nature that concern both development and internal processes of the individual to achieve wellness in living. The essential similarity is that identity (which is fundamentally Erikson) can only be formed through an individual's interaction with the interpersonal world, which is dependent upon interpersonal skills (fundamentally Sullivan). Since humans are social creatures, the concept of "identity" cannot be formed without interaction with peers. Therefore, these theories, while different, are not opposed to one another.

Both of these perspectives led to a multi-dimensional stage theory based on both internal and external ways of relating. There is a social focus of the ego from Erikson and a focus on interpersonal skills from Sullivan that shows how well a person is interacting with their outside world and what stage is occurring. These developmental stages show a level of functioning that is both thematically and functionally relevant to understanding human interactions in developmental stages. The individual attaining a sense of internal and external mastery is one of the most important similarities between these theorists.

Loevinger (1976) represents the continuation of stage-like development in her model of stages based around ego development.   Her greatest contribution was the synthesis of developmental epochs (psychoanalytic and cognitive) that allowed for a more in-depth understanding of stages (Labouvie-Vief, 1993 p. 34). According to Gilmore and Durkin (2001), Loevinger's (1976) focus on the ego was constructed to gauge the process of integrating themes

that occur in the ego process (p. 542). The authors pointed out that Loevinger's sentence completion test, and her research method to attain stage-development level, showed good validity and re-test reliability (Gilmore & Durkin, 2001, p. 545). The two stages of Loevinger's (1987) model that correspond to emerging adulthood are Conformist and Self-Aware. The conformist is often focused on group rules and the fear of punishment but has more strict criteria for what group they belong to. The next stage is Self-Aware; Loevinger believed that this is the stage that most adults reach. In this stage there is more focus on being able to see many different answers to scenarios in life and to have the ability to have a basic understanding of self-awareness.

Bauer (2008) responded to Loevinger's (1976) developmental stages with his own theoretical and empirical analysis of developmental stages. In a sense, Bauer synthesized Loevinger's work by showing how the ego shifts, rather than focusing on the details of specific developmental ego epochs. He believed that the ego presents different qualities when it is going through maturing developmental manifestations. Bauer (2008) described this experience of growth as "ego quieting," although his descriptions are very theoretical. Bauer's conception of ego quietness even incorporates Piaget's (1970) ideas that view earlier developmental cognitive stages as "noisy" (the author specifically cites Piaget's ego-centeredness stage.) Wayment et al. (2014) define these themes of ego quietness by identifying characteristics such as detached awareness, inclusive identity, perspective taking and growth.

Wayment et al. (2014) devised their own scale based on the work of various developmentalists such as Erikson, Loevinger, and Piaget, but this is a fairly new work. Wayment et al. (2014) asserted that the ego in higher levels of development is less defended. This means that the defensive personality organization in the "quiet ego" is integrated in higher-

level defensive adaptation but it remains unclear how Sullivan's (1953) concepts of anxiety might interact with varying levels of ego development. Anxiety and its maintenance are not specifically investigated throughout the 2014 Wayment et al. study; this leaves gaps in the literature for further inquiry. Therefore it remains unclear what relationship exists, if any, between ego development and anxiety. This study will allow a clear investigation to show if anxiety is at all affected by how developed the ego becomes. By addressing this gap in the literature, the concept of the Quiet Ego can be further shaped and understood in relationship to anxiety in emerging adulthood.

Recent Research on Emerging Adulthood

In their study, researchers Bauer and McAdams (2010) investigated the importance of narrative goals that lead to ego growth. This work continued a theme of focusing on the coherent narrative to indicate identity stage.   Waters and Fivush (2014) define a coherent narrative as having three essential factors: chronology of telling, the context (where events took place), and a theme that discusses the meaning of the events. Most recently, Waters and Fivush (2014) investigated the idea of a coherent narrative identity being an indicator of dynamic identity construction. These studies focus mostly on the idea of positive identity formation based on the ability to create a coherent narrative. Other researchers such as Adler, Harmeling and Walder-Beisanz (2013) contend that while narrative coherence in therapy is a marker of ego development, it might not be a marker of psychological well-being. Waters and Fivush (2014) refute this claim in their most recent study to show that narrative ability was in fact a predictor of psychological health along with stage development.

The conflicting literature causes the researcher to question whether ego development is a predictor of psychological health. Difficulties in living might be universal regardless of stage

development. Again, there is a gap in the literature with regard to anxiety since none of the studies specifically investigate anxiety. In Sullivan's formulations (1953), anxiety may cause difficulties in the human experience; however, anxiety is not pathological and must be confronted so that the individual may lead a more fulfilling life.

Syed and Seiffge-Krenke (2013) conducted research that tracked the creation of personality development in terms of ego development. In their study, the authors looked specifically at the ego development of emerging adults with the trajectory of ego development within the family of the identified participant. Syed and Seiffge-Krenke show that ego development is not automatically transferable from family to child. Instead, the study results suggest that ego development is individually focused on the emerging adult who is partaking of their self-world experience (Syed & Seiffge-Krenke, 2013). The participator in the world, rather then a traceable lineage, forms identity. The study tracked 98 participants over a 10-year period; the participants were families with a child between the ages of 14 and 24. The children in the family completed Loevinger's sentence completion test in three waves, while the family also completed various scales to measure family environment. These two study arms gave multiple statistics to analyze such as ego trajectory and relation to family environment.

Pathology and Its implications In Development

Sheets, Duncan, Bjornsson, Craighead and Craighead (2014) analyzed how personality disorders can predict a high recurrence of major depressive disorder. The study showed that various factors contributed to the recurrences of major depressive disorder. Participants were assessed for personality pathology and then examined for major depressive disorder using the Beck anxiety inventory. Various factors were indicated for a higher likelihood of recurrence, such as interpersonal hypersensitivity, antisocial conduct, and social anxiety (Sheets, Duncan,

Bjornsson, Craighead & Craighead, 2014 p. 540). These factors are seemingly linked with a disparity in ego development and interpersonal skills.

Barry, Nelson and Christofferson (2013) examined other interpersonal difficulties in emerging adulthood such as shyness and anxiety. They found that shyness and anxiety often hindered developmental growth, such as Erikson's concept of identity development. The authors did not use a strictly ego-assessing instrument such as Loevigner's sentence completion test. Instead they used the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (Balisteri, Busch-Rossnagal & Gesinger, 1996), which focused on various domains, including religion and occupation. The interpersonal difficulties that Barry et al. (2013) review also validate Sheets et al.'s (2014) concept of interpersonal difficulty as a predictive factor of psychological difficulty. This current study provides a basis for further inquiry into assessed stage development and anxiety level. While there are many studies that investigate ego development and many that investigate pathology and its implications towards development, there are no current studies that investigate anxiety specifically and its correlation to ego development. Therefore, this investigation is particularly relevant to the growing body of research in ego development and its relationship to anxiety in emerging adulthood.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to understand how anxiety and ego development are linked in emerging adulthood. The researcher hoped to answer the question: *What is the relationship between anxiety and ego development in emerging adulthood?* The study examined whether specific domains of anxiety or anxiety level in general are linked to emerging adults' levels of ego development. Building on the various developmental theories discussed previously in this study, the researcher hypothesized that participants who scored at higher levels of Ego Quietness on the Wayment et al. scale (2014) would experience less anxiety.

Sample

The target sample for this study was men and women between the ages of 18 and 28 years old. The study population consisted of emerging adults in schools; however, efforts were made to broaden the sample pool to include emerging adults who were not involved in higher education by recruiting through online community forums such as Facebook and Craigslist. The primary sampling frame consisted of students in the five-college area of Western Massachusetts, particularly Smith College School for Social Work in Northampton, MA.

This study relied on non-probability purposive sampling rather than random selection, which is more practical to implement but often is less desirable because it leads to a non-representative sample. However, snowball sampling made it feasible to recruit a larger number of people for the online survey, since potential participants were asked to refer friends and family

to the study. The researcher hoped that using an online survey instrument with the potential to reach a broad audience would help recruit a sample with diverse racial, ethnic, and sociocultural backgrounds. To further promote diversity, the survey was open to all participants, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, and physical ability.

Participants were asked to answer demographic questions that would allow for comparisons on such important variables as age, race, school history, work history and ethnicity. More specifically demographic questions assessed educational status (high school education, past college experience, currently attending college, completion of bachelors degree, currently enrolled in graduate school, or completion of graduate degree) and employment status (e.g., currently not working, working part time, or working full time) (Appendix A).

Data Collection

As noted previously, potential participants were recruited to take part in an anonymous, online survey administered via the Survey Monkey site. The Facebook and community forum advertisements, as well as the snowball sampling email, and an advertisement for teachers to present to their students all included a description of the research study and a link to the questionnaire, with a request to help with recruitment by forwarding the link to other people or posting it on their Facebook profiles (Appendices B, C, & D). Following the link brought potential participants to an online form with an explanation of the study, screening questions, and informed consent. Individuals who did not meet inclusion criteria were redirected to a screen that explained that they were ineligible to participate in the study and thanked them for their time. Participants who met study inclusion criteria and agreed to participate were directed to the survey instruments (Appendix E). At the end of the survey, participants were again asked to

share the questionnaire link with other individuals who met the eligibility criteria and could potentially take part in the study.

Ethics and Safeguards

This study was designed and undertaken with approval from the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee (Appendix F). Risks and benefits of participation were evaluated according to the ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research.

Instruments

Two survey instruments were administered via the Survey Monkey site. After informed consent was obtained and demographics were recorded, subjects were asked to complete the Quiet Ego Scale (Wayment et al., 2014); permission to use this instrument was granted by Heidi Wayment, Ph.D., via personal email to the researcher. The Quiet Ego Scale (QES) is a 14-question instrument that attempts to measure ego development in four domains: detached awareness, inclusive identity, perspective taking, and growth (Appendix G). The instrument authors tested their QES against various other psychological instruments and concluded that the preliminary data showed promising reliability and validity. The study was specifically noted to have a positive correlation to self-compassion, self-determination, authenticity, and self-transcendence, and was distinctly accurate at assessing coping efficacy, resilience, and personal well-being.

Participants in this study were then prompted to complete the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, Gorsuch, Lushene, Vagg & Jacobs, 1983), which was scored to measure anxiety (Appendix H). This instrument asks questions that measure different types of anxiety, such as trait and state anxiety. Trait anxiety refers to the potential to experience anxiety in the

future, whereas state anxiety is more focused on immediate anxiety that is being measured in the present moment. A person with less trait anxiety is less likely to experience significant increases in state anxiety. State anxiety can occur, however, even if there is less trait anxiety. The strength of this instrument is that it gauges how people feel in the immediate moment and what traits they have in place to deal with potential anxiety in an ongoing way.

Data Analysis

All survey data were collected anonymously and electronically via SurveyMonkey.com and were analyzed with the assistance of a research data analyst with Smith College School for Social Work. After the survey was closed, the data were downloaded into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and sent to the consultant for statistical analysis.

Participant responses to the 14-item Quiet Ego Scale were tallied for a final overarching score; after this, participant scores of each of the four Quiet Ego subscales were recorded for further analysis.

Additional analyses included scoring the specific four domains of the QES of detached awareness, inclusive identity, perspective taking, and growth to see if there were specific differences between the four domains when compared with school status, employment status, and anxiety. Another analysis attempted to find the specific domain that might be most correlated with anxiety, along with trying to determine whether or not school and employment status affected the correlation. The researcher's primary hypothesis was that as ego quietness increases, anxiety level decreases.

One limitation to the study is based around time. The study did not allow for follow up or a longitudinal approach, providing only a brief snapshot of how participants are going through life and how they relate to anxiety. Additionally, the sampling method was a limiting factor, in

that it allowed for greater and more convenient recruitment of participants at the expense of

diversity within the sample.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

This study addressed the question: *What is the relationship between anxiety and ego maturity in emerging adulthood.* The researcher's primary hypothesis was that as ego quietness increases, anxiety level decreases. The results support the hypothesis that ego quietness is negatively correlated with trait anxiety, meaning that higher ego quietness scores are associated with lower anxiety scores. This is significant since it points to the hypothetical relationship originally posited by Sullivan (1953) that as the ego strengthens it allows an individual to experience anxiety as less threatening and to more effectively confront anxiety on a regular basis. However, since there was no correlation between state anxiety and ego quietness this shows that day-to-day anxiety is a typical phenomenon that must be dealt with regardless of ego development.

Online Survey

Sixty-seven participants entered data into the Survey Monkey site while the survey was open. Data from two participants were eliminated due to a glitch in the Survey Monkey system that occurred during the testing phase. Analyses and results in this study are based on the data provided by a total of 65 participants.

Demographic Data

Age. The majority of participants (47.69%, $n = 31$) were between the ages of 26 and 28. Of the remaining subjects, 27 (41.54%) were ages 22-25, and 7 (10.77%) were 18- 21.

Employment. Participants were asked to indicate their work status. The largest

representative groups within the sample, 25 and 22 participants respectively, indicated they

worked part time (37.88%) or were not currently working (33.33%). Nineteen subjects (28.79%)

indicated they held down full-time jobs.

Education. Participants were asked about their current academic status. Only one

participant (1.54%) was not involved in either undergraduate or graduate studies. No participants

indicated they were receiving vocational training.

Race and ethnicity. The majority of participants, 80.30%, identified as White ($n = 53$).

Eight subjects (12.12%) identified as Asian; 2 participants (3.03%) identified as biracial; and 3

participants (4.55%) identified as "other." The majority of participants (91.94%, $n = 57$)

identified as non-Latino/a or Hispanic origin, while 5 (8.06%) identified as having Latino/a or

Hispanic backgrounds.

Ego Quietness and Anxiety Scales

Ratings on some items on the Ego Quietness, State Anxiety, and Trait Anxiety scales

were reversed so that high scores indicated a high level of ego quietness, state anxiety, and trait

anxiety. Several questions in the instruments were reversed, meaning that the numerical value of

their results was also reversed.

Items reverse-scored for state anxiety were: 1, 2, 5, 8, 10, 11, 15, 16, 19, and 20.

Items reverse-scored for trait anxiety were: 21, 23, 26, 27, 30, 33, 34, 36, and 39.

Finally, items reverse-scored for the QES were: 2, 6,10,11, and 14.

Mean score for Ego Quietness was 3.80 ($SD = .42$); for State Anxiety, 41.86 ($SD =$

11.31); and for Trait Anxiety, 42.41 ($SD = 10.17$).

Total Ego Quietness scores were correlated with total State and Trait Anxiety scores using Pearson Product Moment Tests, resulting in a significant negative correlation between Trait Anxiety and Ego Quietness, $r(49) = -.339$, $p = .017$, but not between State Anxiety and Ego Quietness, $r(51) = -.113$, $p = .430$ (See Table 1).

The four Ego Quietness subscales—detached awareness, inclusive identity, growth, and perspective taking—were each correlated individually with State and Trait Anxiety (Table 1). Two of those correlations were significant: detached awareness and Trait Anxiety were significantly negatively correlated, $r(49) = -.286$, $p = .046$; growth and Trait Anxiety were also significantly negatively correlated, , $r(49) = -.313$, $p = .028$. The Ego Quietness subscale means were: detached awareness ($M = 3.11$, $SD = .94$); inclusive identity ($M = 3.41$, $SD = .79$); perspective taking ($M = 3.77$, $SD = .63$); and growth ($M = 4.56$, $SD = .50$).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations with Anxiety Scales

	State Anxiety	Trait Anxiety	Mean	*SD*
1. State Anxiety	-		41.86	11.31
2. Trait Anxiety	.68*	-	42.41	10.17
3. Ego Quietness	-.11	-.34*	3.80	0.42
4. EQ-Detached Awareness	-.05	-.29*	3.11	0.94
5. EQ-Growth	-.15	-.31*	4.56	0.50
6. EQ-Inclusive Identity	-.09	-.18	3.41	0.79
7. EQ-Perspective Taking	-.03	-.07	3.77	0.63

Note. *$p < .05$; EQ = Ego Quietness Subscale

CHAPTER V

Discussion

This study investigated the relationship between the concept of the Quiet Ego and anxiety in emerging adulthood, that period of the lifespan between adolescence and young adulthood when young men and women must cope with rapid changes and new challenges. The results of this study support the hypothesis that ego quietness is negatively correlated with trait anxiety, meaning that higher ego quietness scores are associated with lower anxiety scores. This is significant since it points to the hypothetical relationship originally posited by Sullivan (1953), that as the ego strengthens it allows an individual to experience anxiety as less threatening and to more effectively confront anxiety on a regular basis. However, since no correlation was found between state anxiety and ego quietness, this suggests that day-to-day anxiety is a typical phenomenon that must be dealt with regardless of ego development.

The more specific domains of detached awareness and growth on the Quiet Ego Scale (QES) also showed themselves to be significantly correlated with trait anxiety. This suggests that these two areas are responsible for most of the relationship between ego quietness and anxiety. It is possible to hypothesize that an increase of growth in ego quietness is exactly what Sullivan (1953) was looking towards when he formulated his theories concerning the confrontation of anxiety. More specifically, fear of anxiety might actually keep an individual in a safe space that does not allow them to confront anxiety and therefore keeps them from achieving more meaningful achievements and experiences for longer-term satisfaction. In his paradigm, Sullivan believed that individuals are constantly in flux between satisfaction and

security, and that the key to overcoming this difficulty may lie in confronting anxiety (Greenburg & Mitchell, 1983). Therefore, to achieve greater mastery of anxiety, the quiet ego may employ a detached awareness that keeps the individual aware of feelings and situations without the judgment of the process.

The significance of attaining detached awareness with a focus on growth may lead to a quieter ego in emerging adulthood. Since emerging adulthood is a period where identity is shifting, it is reasonable to focus on themes of growth and detached awareness to potentially mitigate anxiety. This research shows that detached awareness and growth are helpful in a population confronting many different types of challenges on the road to becoming adults. Clinical social work practice implications in therapy might focus on an individual learning to tolerate discomfort so that a more satisfying situation is found both for the individual and others around them. This therapeutic interaction exemplifies what Wayment et al. (2014) define as "growth."

Using Sullivan's conceptualizations, it is important for individuals to confront anxiety and push past the discomfort of anxiety on a regular basis. Trait anxiety is the gauge that this study uses to point out this phenomenon. This study shows that the most important part of the process of confronting anxiety involves taking a detached awareness approach to life experience, which Wayment et al. (2014) describe as being closely related to mindfulness. They discuss how this involves individuals' working to notice their internal process on a moment-to-moment basis so they might achieve a greater sense of being emotionally able to move through life. With a focus on the moment to moment in place and a focus on internal states being utilized (detached awareness), individuals might have the opportunity to move through life focusing on more important goals. Attaining goals will inevitably lead to an increased sense of growth and

therefore create a reciprocal relationship, allowing individuals to continually confront and master more intense anxiety. In Sullivan's terms, this approach will allow the individual to work past security operations while embracing anxiety to allow for more pleasurable and meaningful experiences.

This current research supports the findings and creation of Wayment et al.'s concept of the Quiet Ego as a developmental tool for understanding compassionate growth. In their 2014 study they found that the Quiet Ego was associated with overall psychological growth. This current study supports their hypothesis and adds to the growing body of literature on this topic.

One limitation and area of concern for this study is that it was largely based on the responses of White-identified graduate students. Cote's critique (2014), while not greatly affecting the scope of this study, is important to remember since its implications point out that differences in class background might vastly change the outcome of studies concerning adults between 18 and 25 years old.   The lack of demographic diversity in this study is important to note because different ethnic, racial, and class backgrounds might greatly affect generalizability. More studies must be conducted with this in mind so that the results will be more generalizable. Nonetheless, this study shows promise for practice implications for emerging adults who are dealing with anxiety.

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APPENDIX A: Demographic Questions

I am currently (check one):
☐ 18-21
☐ 22-25
☐ 26-28

I work (check one):
☐ Part time
☐ Full time
☐ I don't currently work

School History (check one):
☐ I am currently enrolled in a full time college
☐ I am currently studying part time in college
☐ I have completed my undergraduate education
☐ I am currently in graduate school
☐ I have completed graduate school
☐ I am enrolled in vocational training
☐ I am not in school currently

I identify racially as (check one):
☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
☐ Asian
☐ Black or African American
☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
☐ White
☐ Bi Racial
☐ Other

My ethnicity is:
☐ Latino or Hispanic origin
☐ Non Latino or Hispanic origin

APPENDIX B: Recruitment Letter for Social Media

To all young adults,

   I am conducting a study that focuses on the sorts of anxiety that people often experience in life, especially when entering a new stage of development. The goal of this work is to try to further understand how young adults deal with anxiety and how this process is affected by self-development.   In this case self development refers to ego quietness which gauges how individuals experience the world and their place within it. The survey will take 20 minutes and will be aiding the development of theory for people entering adulthood. The study will search to find the relationship that anxiety and development have together. This might inform literature and understanding for anyone working in the age range of emerging adulthood. If you are between the ages of 18-28 and have 20 minutes, I would greatly appreciate your participation in this study. You will be asked to complete a survey and rate your level of anxiety in several areas—all anonymously. Before the study begins you will be asked to sign a consent form and also answer basis demographic questions. The link to the survey and more specific information can be found here….

APPENDIX C: Sample Email to Teachers for Recruitment

Dear (teacher's name),

      My name is Alexander Rascovar and I am a Smith College School for Social Work MSW candidate. I am currently conducting a survey that is investigating the relationship between anxiety and ego quietness. Wayment, Bauer & Sylaska (2014) define the quiet ego as an identity that is concerned with the well being of self and others. The goal of this study is to understand the correlational relationship between these two phenomena. This might inform literature and understanding for anyone working in the age range of emerging adulthood.

      The inclusion criteria for the survey is anyone ages 18-28 who has access to a computer. The survey is relatively short and will take approximately twenty minutes. It consists of taking the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory and the Ego Quietness scale after basic demographic data is collected. After the students take the survey they will be asked to further it to anyone they think it might be appropriate for. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns at…

Wayment, H.A., Bauer, J. J., & Sylaska, K. (2014). The Quiet Ego Scale: Measuring the Compassionate Self-Identity. *Journal of Happiness Studies*. Retrieved from http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10902-014-9546-z

      Sincerely,
      Alexander Rascovar
      Smith MSW candidate 2015

APPENDIX D: Sample Email for Snowball Sampling

Hello,

   I am sending you this email because I am currently conducting a survey that is investigating the relationship between anxiety and ego quietness. Wayment, Bauer & Sylaska (2014) define the quiet ego as an identity that is concerned with the well being of self and others. The goal of this study is to understand the correlational relationship between these two phenomena. This might inform literature and understanding for anyone working in the age range of emerging adulthood.

   The inclusion criteria for the survey is anyone ages 18-28 who has access to a computer. The survey is relatively short, entirely anonymous and will take approximately twenty minutes. It consists of taking the State-trait Anxiety Inventory and the Ego Quietness scale after basic demographic data is collected. After the survey is completed you will be asked to further this email to anyone they think it might be appropriate for the study. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns at…

Wayment, H.A., Bauer, J. J., & Sylaska, K. (2014). The Quiet Ego Scale: Measuring the Compassionate Self-Identity. *Journal of Happiness Studies*. Retrieved from http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10902-014-9546-z

   Sincerely,
   Alexander Rascovar
   Smith MSW candidate 2015

APPENDIX E: Explanation of Study, Informed Consent, and Inclusion Criteria

SMITH COLLEGE

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Smith College School for Social Work ● Northampton, MA

…………………………………………………………………….

Title of Study: Ego Quietness and Anxiety in Emerging Adulthood

Investigator(s): Alexander Rascovar, Smith College School for Social Work, XXX-XXX-XXXX

…………………………………………………………………….

Introduction
- You are being asked to be in a research study that is investigating anxiety and ego development in emerging development.

- You were selected as a possible participant because you are 18-28 years old.
- We ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of Study
- The purpose of this study is to understand how anxiety and ego development are linked in emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood is a new developmental area of focus that social scientists have begun studying. During this period of time there is thought to be a sense of exploration and growth in identity. Anxiety is theorized to potentially hinder development of growth within people when it is overwhelming. This study's aim is to understand how anxiety and ego development are linked in emerging adulthood. To understand ego development this study will use the theory of the "quiet ego". The quiet ego is focused on the wellbeing of itself as well as others and has four qualities that are detached awareness, inclusive identity, perspective taking and growth.

- This study is being conducted as a research requirement for my master's degree in social work.
- Ultimately, this research may be published or presented at professional conferences.

Description of the Study Procedures
- If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: Fill out a survey pertaining to questions about ego development and anxiety that will take around 20 minutes.

Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study
There are no reasonable foreseeable (or expected) risks.

Benefits of Being in the Study
- The benefits of participation are gaining insight into your own process of anxiety and ego identity as well as contributing to social science literature.

- The benefits to social work is that theory will be greatly aided in understanding two aspects of ego development and anxiety as it relates to the population of emerging adulthood. This might serve to improve practice implications within emerging adulthood.

Confidentiality
- This study is anonymous. We will not be collecting or retaining any information about your identity.

Payments/gift
You will not receive any financial payment for your participation.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw
- The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study *at any time* (up to the date noted below) without affecting your relationship with the researchers of this study or Smith College. Your decision to refuse will not result in any loss of benefits (including access to services) to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely up to the point noted below. If you choose to withdraw, I will not use any of your information collected for this study. You must notify me of your decision to withdraw by email or phone by *March 30th 2015*. After that date, your information will be part of the thesis, dissertation or final report.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns
- You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Alexander Rascovar at arascovar@smith.edu or by telephone at XXX-XXX-XXXX. If you would like a summary of the study results, one will be sent to you once the study is completed. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any problems as a result of your participation, you may contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Committee at (413) 585-7974.

Consent

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this research survey, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study you may withdraw from participating at any time. The procedure involves filling an online survey that will take approximately 20 minutes. Your responses will be anonymous and I will not collect identifying information such as your name, email address or IP address. The survey questions will be about ego development and symptoms of anxiety as well as demographic information such as amount of school history, current work history and racial identity. I will do my best to keep your information anonymous. All data is stored in a password protected electronic format. To help protect your anonymity the surveys will not contain information that will personally identify you. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only and may be shared with Smith College School for Social Work representatives and may be published.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Alexander Rascovar at arascovar@smith.edu. This research has been reviewed according to Smith College School for Social Work IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.   Clicking on the "agree" button below indicates that: • you have ready the above information   • you voluntarily agree to participate   • you are at least 18 years of age and no older then 28 years of age.   If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline participation by clicking on the "disagree" button.

☐ agree

☐ disagree

APPENDIX F: Human Subjects Review Committee Approval Letter

SMITH COLLEGE

School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950   F (413) 585-7994

February 2, 2015

Alexander Rascovar

Dear Alex,

You did a very nice job on your revisions. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Congratulations and our best wishes on your interesting study.

Sincerely,

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Debra Hull, Research Advisor

APPENDIX G: Ego Quietness Scale

My Views and Values (The Quiet Ego Scale)

Citation: Wayment, H.A., Bauer, J. J., & Sylaska, K. (2014). The Quiet Ego Scale: Measuring the Compassionate Self-Identity. *Journal of Happiness Studies*.

Instructions: Below is a list of statements that may or may not describe you. Please read each of the items below and then rate how much you agree or disagree with each.

Response Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 4 = Somewhat agree; 5 = Strongly agree

1. I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world.

2. I find myself doing things without paying much attention.

3. I feel a connection to all living things.

4. Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place.

5. For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.

6. I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing.

7. I feel a connection with strangers.

8. When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to put myself in his or her shoes for a while.

9. I have the sense that I have developed a lot as a person over time.

10. I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.

11. I sometimes find it difficult to see things from another person's point of view.

12. I feel a connection to people of other races.

13. I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision.

14. When I think about it, I haven't really improved much as a person over the years.

APPENDIX H: State Trait Anxiety Scale

A number of statements which people have used to describe themselves are given below. Read each statement and then blacken the appropriate circle to the right of the statement to indicate how you feel right now, that is, at this moment. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any one statement but give the answer which seems to describe your present feelings best. Scores go from 1-4. 1= not at all, 2 = somewhat, 3 = moderately so, 4 = very much so.

1. I feel calm 1
2. I feel secure 1
3. I am tense 1
4. I feel strained 1
5. I feel at ease 1
6. I feel upset... 1
7. I am presently worrying over possible misfortunes 1
8. I feel satisfied.. 1
9. I feel frightened... 1
10. I feel comfortable 1
11. I feel self-confident 1
12. I feel nervous 1
13. I am jittery... 1
14. I feel indecisive 1
15. I am relaxed... 1
16. I feel content 1
17. I am worried 1
18. I feel confused... 1
19. I feel steady 1
20. I feel pleasant 1

STAI - Adult Instrument © 1968, 1977 Charles D. Spielberger. All rights reserved in all media. Published by Mind Garden, Inc., www.mindgarden.com

SELF-EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE STAI Form Y-2

DIRECTIONS

A number of statements which people have used to describe themselves are given below. Read each statement and then blacken in the appropriate circle to the right of the statement to indicate you generally feel.

21. I feel pleasant 1
22. I feel nervous and restless... 1
23. I feel satisfied with myself.. 1
24. I wish I could be as happy as others seem to be 1
25. I feel like a failure.. 1
26. I feel rested... 1

27. I am "calm, cool, and collected"... 1
28. I feel that difficulties are piling up so that I cannot overcome them 1
29. I worry too much over something that really doesn't matter.. 1
30. I am happy... 1
31. I have disturbing thoughts.. 1
32. I lack self-confidence 1
33. I feel secure 1
34. I make decisions easily 1
35. I feel inadequate 1
36. I am content... 1
37. Some unimportant thought runs through my mind and bothers me...................................... 1
38. I take disappointments so keenly that I can't put them out of my mind 1
39. I am a steady person.. 1
40. I get in a state of tension or turmoil as I think over my recent concerns and interests........ 1