



Nonattachment, the Quiet Ego & Political Polarization: An Analysis of a Potential Solution to Tribalism in American Society

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Nonattachment, the Quiet Ego & Political Polarization: An Analysis of a Potential Solution to
Tribalism in American Society

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Abstract

The present study explores the Buddhist view of nonattachment, the Quiet Ego, the current state of polarization in the United States and how a deeper understanding of the relationship between these concepts and societal realities could help lead to a possible reduction in tribalism in American Society. As a first step toward this larger project, this research investigates the relationship between a Buddhist approach to nonattachment and the Quiet Ego. The relationship between nonattachment and a Quiet Ego was measured to determine if fostering nonattachment may be related positively to a more Quiet Ego. Participants 25+ years old (N=88), were recruited online using Amazon Mechanical Turk and completed self-report questionnaires. The results found that Nonattachment was positively correlated to a Quiet Ego. The researcher hopes that these results combined with existing research related to The Quiet Ego and the Psychology behind tribalism and political polarization will encourage further exploration of the connection between these phenomenon and perhaps even potential public health or educational programs aimed at effective reduction of extreme polarization and acute societal conflict.

Frontispiece



Figure 1. Reigan-do, Kumamoto (own photo)

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my wife Vickie who has graciously listened to my unending rants on how attachment poisons everything while dealing with the demands of her residency in anesthesiology. I extend the same gratitude to family and friends and offer sincere thanks to Dr. Dante Spetter and Chris Berlin who helped me focus my thoughts and produce a work worthy of submission. Lastly, this thesis is dedicated to the thinkers that laid the foundation on which this work rests: Kwame Anthony Appiah, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius and others that knowingly or unknowingly, understood what incredible weight is lifted off the human spirit when unnecessary attachments are unbound.

Table of Contents

Frontispiece.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Chapter I Introduction.....	1
Attachment.....	5
Nonattachment	6
Mindfulness.....	6
The Quiet Ego	7
Buddhism & Psychology	8
Nonattachment Research and the NAS	9
Study Aim & Hypothesis	17
Study Significance	19
Polarization	20
The Psychology of Polarization	21
A Possible Solution: The Quiet Ego	22
Nonattachment in Modern Application	24
Significance Summary	27
Chapter II Method.....	29
Participants.....	29
Measures	30
Nonattachment Scale	30

The Quiet Ego Scale	31
Procedures	31
Data Collection	32
Data Cleaning.....	32
Data Analysis	33
Chapter III Results	34
Chapter IV Discussion	40
Research Limitations	44
Conclusion	45
Appendix 1. The Quiet Ego Scale.....	52
Appendix 2. The Nonattachment Scale (NAS).....	53
References	55

Chapter I

Introduction

“That which for the immediate person is his whole life or, provided he has a modicum of reflection, that part of it to which he is peculiarly attached, is snatched away from him by ‘a stroke of fate’. In short, he has, as he says, suffered a misfortune; his immediacy receives such a jolt that it is unable to reproduce itself: he despairs”

- Søren Kierkegaard: The Sickness Unto Death

Homo Sapiens emerged onto the evolutionary scene almost 200,000 years ago and have left an eclectic, mysterious and often destructive trail of relics, belief systems, and monuments from the Pyramids to the Taj Mahal in their wake as they have tried to understand their significance in the cosmos. It would appear that certain organizing principles like hierarchies, religions, and technology stick while others fade into history as the Overton Window of understanding human experience narrows. Are there perhaps truths evident in certain teachings that re-emerge time and again because they are more tightly bound to recurring collective and galvanizing human realities? It is the researcher's contention that some mental frameworks do more closely parallel human reality and may allow for more peaceful, healthy functioning societies if tapped into appropriately. In particular, the understanding of nonattachment and the adoption of methods through which one might increase it could be a path to cultivate said societies.

Modern humans are in the business of optimizing the mind and body to create surgical procedures that save lives, prescription drugs to treat mental disorders, fasting

and sleep regimens to maximize human potential, psychedelics to expand consciousness and for clinical applications while meditation is practiced to increase well-being (Bush, 2021). But something is missing. Bush claims that his philosophical mentors including Lao Tzu, Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha), Marcus Aurelius, Michel de Montaigne, Victor Frankl and others tapped into something more timeless and transformative that could be a cornerstone of well-being and an adaptive tool that could allow for collective and communal flourishing.

For the purposes of this study, it is important to put a name to at least one of the concepts that is shared by the mentors cited in *Designing the Mind*; attachment. Lao Tzu, in the *Tao Te Ching* urged students to consider how man could hold onto ephemeral thoughts and emotions when even heaven and earth could not make rain fall without end or strong winds never cease to stop. All humans feel anger, sadness, and excitement yet one's attachment to those emotions determines their duration and severity. The Buddha too explained the impermanence of emotions and thoughts with a metaphor. He said that emotions were "Like writing on water." If an unwanted thought emerged in an enlightened mind, it was just like writing on water—the moment it arises, it can simultaneously disappear. Marcus Aurelius instructed followers to choose not to be harmed. He believed that once the choice is made not to feel harm, then no harm has been done. What do these concepts have in common is that they contradict the human tendency to identify with one's emotions and thoughts reveal an understanding of impermanence. One does not remain sad or angry or excited in perpetuity. Further, they understand that this does not apply only to emotions but also to other things we identify with. No one is born a Democrat or Republican but rather chooses to identify as one

which means it is possible for one's affiliation to change. People get divorced, lose children, change careers, and lose prized possessions. Everything is impermanent and at the heart of the Buddhist view of impermanence and how this relates to human suffering, attachment is problematic and is seen to be the primary cause of our misery.

The brain is not wired to accept this without a fight. Humans want to be justified in their anger, correct in their political views and permanently secure in their desired and highly coveted positions or roles. This fear of losing a self that has been built through attachment to roles, possessions and opinions is called "Ego-Identification" by Eckhart Tolle. Indeed, the word identify comes from the Latin words *idem* and *facere* which mean same and to make. Thus, to identify with something is to make it a part of oneself (Tolle, 2016). As we inhabit new roles as a father, a Democrat, an athlete and use the word "my" (My country, My party, My opinion) with increasing frequency, the new self needs to be defended and protected more and more causing inner conflict. On its face, there is nothing wrong with an identity built around preferences, titles, or possessions, but attachment adds an unstable element to the mix. When being a Muslim, Yankees fan, or Democrat no longer is an acknowledged impermanent state but rather who one is, a challenge to it transforms into an existential threat. If being rich, beautiful, or part of a religious group becomes inseparable from self, a loss of fortune, fading of beauty or insult to religious belief can cause suicide, plastic surgery or religious violence (Cooke, 2019). The 5th century Buddhist text, the Pali-Canon also states that human attachment is integrally linked to suffering. In the text, it is explained that one can become attached to pleasant feelings, painful feelings, and even neutral feelings. Those who don't

understand attachment can become attached to the aging process, anger, despair and more which leads to more suffering (Bodhi & Dalai Lama, 2005).

The importance of the relationship between attachment and suffering cannot be understated. For Buddhists, nonattachment is considered one of the key steps in the path toward enlightenment (*Nibbana*). The Pali Canon lists a series of important requirements on the path to Nibanna that includes a lessening of pride, ending rumination, eliminating desires and the extinguishing of attachment (Bodhi & Dalai Lama, 2005). Achieving Nibbanna, more commonly known as Nirvana (Sanskrit), requires the uprooting of attachment. The idea of attachment is baked into Buddhist symbols as well. The Buddha is often seated under the tree of immortal life with two celestial beings guarding the gates. One celestial being has a mouth open representing desire for life, the other closed to signify fear of death. Buddhists believe that if you have fear for your life, you cannot truly gain entry to the garden (i.e. transcendence). If however, you no longer are attached to your ego-existence as a separate permanent and enduring entity, you may enter. (Cambell & Moyers). This belief has stood the test of time. Henepola Gunaratana, one of today's most celebrated Buddhist teachers and author of *Mindfulness in Plain English* said that true mindfulness includes total nonattachment and no clinging to anything in our lives. This total nonattachment alone allows us to be free of human weakness. (Gunaratana, 2011). If a clinging to ego-identity, grasping onto one's view with fear and indignation, or taking what is relative to be absolute causes suffering, then nonattachment could ease it. What else may it impact? Before delving into the discovery of Buddhist thought by the West and current research on nonattachment, it is important to define

some key terms that will be integral to answer the question of the relationship of the Buddhist view of nonattachment and a self-identity known as the Quiet Ego.

Attachment

In Western psychology, attachment most often refers to Bowlby's conceptions of secure and insecure attachment styles between parent and child. According to this literature, the basis of attachment theory is the notion that people are born with a psychological system that desires close proximity to caregivers (Bowlby, 1982). There is extensive research showing that secure attachments to caregivers is associated with well-being (Grossmann et al., 2006). Additional studies have shown that insecure attachment can lead to depression in children (Spruit et al., 2020).

Buddhist attachment, however, is distinct from the more frequently studied parent-child (and subsequent peer-partner) forms of attachment. From a Buddhist perspective, attachment implies a form of desire akin to grasping and unnecessary (or "maladaptive") coupling to objects, states of mind or people for which letting go produces a range of mental suffering, from discontentedness to extreme fear. In addition, attachment from a Buddhist view often is associated with clinging to positive experiences while avoiding negative ones (Agarwal, 1982). The Buddhist view suggests that a need for permanence in valued relationships, self-concepts, and other phenomena, and the need for these to be unchanging and unfailing, inevitably leads to suffering. Letting go of these fixations and ruminations can lead to a more adaptive state of nonattachment in which one is able to accept more fully the ubiquity of impermanence and change.

Nonattachment

Nonattachment, in the Buddhist view, is understanding the impermanence of everything. Whitehead et al. (2018) describes nonattachment as experiencing the world without a need for it to be one way or another. The opposite of the previously mentioned attachment. There is a consensus among most experts in the study of nonattachment that it represents psychological flexibility and the ability to bounce back from anger or insult. Importantly, the nonattached tend to have a well-being that is less dependent on circumstances as well (Sahdra et al., 2010). For example, one might enjoy a sunset, but it is attachment to that moment and its beauty—and the need for this to be a permanent phenomenon or else grieve its passing away—that leads to disappointment when the sun does indeed set. In another example, It is okay to hold a political view, but attachment is the cause of anger if that view is questioned. Youth is a fantastic time of life, but attachment to staying young is what causes the pain of a new wrinkle. The Buddhist view of nonattachment, on the other hand, is a quietness of mind and understanding around life's impermanent nature. As Jiddu Krishnamurti (2010) explains, the need to identify and attach oneself breeds fear but ridding the self of these attachments, allows for true love.

Mindfulness

To be mindful is to pay attention with a full, open awareness to the present moment without judgement. It is to have a consistent awareness of our body, thoughts, the environment around us and to do so in a calm, welcoming manner (Hanh, 1999). Mindfulness could be seen as an opposite force to ruminative thought as rumination tends to lead toward repetitive and often interrupting thoughts often motivated by an un-

fulfilled desire whereas mindfulness is an appreciation for what already is (McIntosh (1997). When one is truly mindful, the past and future seem not to exist. Jiddu Krishnamurti described mindfulness as attention, but attention to everything from the words you hear, the food you are eating, the wind you feel and the thought you think and attention now (Krishnamurti, 2010). Often mindfulness is associated with popular eastern practices like yoga and meditation because these arts stress the importance of focusing on the present moment such as the breath or sensations in the body. Though best articulated in the Buddhist tradition, Kronman (2017) describes mindfulness as an ability to find the beauty available every day from acknowledging the trees, mountains and books as the Tao teaches to noticing the warmth of one's own body as Seneca suggests to the more recent French author Marcel Proust's nudge to enjoy the taste of biscuit.

The Quiet Ego

Wayment et al. (2015) define the Quiet Ego as a self-identity that transcends egoism and establishes a more balanced, less defensive relationship with one's environment. In order to understand what this means, Defensiveness and Ego must be defined. Defensiveness in this context coincides with the more general use of the word (i.e. the anxiousness or anger resulting from the threat of criticism or challenge). Ego in this context is not commonly used to represent self-confidence or self worth through expressions like wounded ego or deflated ego. Nor is it Freud's primal need fulfilling impulse driven by the id and superego. Bauer et al (2008) describe the Ego as a framework or scaffolding that organizes ideas of self. Further, they explain that the Ego, in this context, is seen more as a process than a product. So, instead of a static, unyielding "Me," the Quiet Ego recognizes the changing nature of one's self-concept and allows for

a balanced sense of self that recognizes strengths and weaknesses. This in turn paves the way for personal growth and greater compassion. The Quiet Ego consists of four main parts: Detached Awareness, Inclusive Identity, Perspective Taking & Growth-Mindedness. Detached awareness is a non-defensive present moment orientation, inclusive identity allows one to understand the experience of others, perspective taking increases a feeling of interdependence on others and growth-mindedness encourages a long term focus on experience and a deep understanding of the changing nature of reality (Kaufman, 2018).

Buddhism & Psychology

As recently as the 1970s, Buddhism and its associated practices were seen by mainstream American society as ways to relax or escape. After all, it wasn't mystics and monks that had catalyzed the Enlightenment and spurred the technological revolution that catapulted the Western world to the forefront of world economics, politics and thought. It was science. Newton, Darwin and Einstein were the heroes of the academy, not Buddha, Jesus and Lao Tzu. Like the impermanence understood in Buddhism, much has changed in the last 50 years. With the end of World War II, dialogue opened between the East and West in a way that it never had before. Japanese, Chinese and Indian scholars studied at Western Universities and Western students studying everything from sociology and anthropology to religion and history flooded into Tibet, Thailand, India, Korea and the other centers of Buddhist practice. As a part of this exchange, Scientists from the West visited centers of Buddhist thought and observed many of the benefits of meditation, yoga and other Buddhist practices. Consequently, the disciplines of psychology and neuroscience began to investigate how these practices affected our brains and bodies.

Since then, it has been shown that meditation and mindfulness have far reaching benefits from effectively treating anxiety and depression (Hofmann et al., 2010) to reducing stress and inflammatory responses (Rosenkranz et al., 2016). Mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR) training seems to decrease loneliness in adults (Creswell et al., 2012), loving-kindness meditation can help with PTSD treatment (Kearney et al., 2013) and mindfulness meditation has been shown to decrease blood pressure (Park et al., 2014). Mindfulness has also been shown to improve relationships (Barnes et al., 2007). Research even indicates that meditation helps take the default mode network offline which has been shown to increase happiness and form stronger connections between the posterior cingulate, dorsal anterior cingulate, and dorsolateral prefrontal cortices which often correlate with better cognitive control and self-monitoring (Brewer et al., 2011). This is all to say that the field is now inundated with research showing the positive benefits of mindfulness and meditation. While meditation and mindfulness are indeed core aspects of most Buddhist practice, there has not been as much research into the understanding of another core pillar of Buddhism: attachment. In order to study this, Sahdra et al (2010) developed the nonattachment scale (NAS).

Nonattachment Research and the NAS

Sahdra et al. (2010) became interested in understanding how Buddhist views of non-attachment relates to Western concepts of psychological well-being. In order to study it psychometrically, their first step was to create a measurement tool. They relied on a variety of sources from classical Buddhist texts, contemporary Buddhist writings and modern scholars across Theravadin, Zen and Indo-Tibetan disciplines. These sources were consulted through in depth readings, in person conferencing, and interviews to

clarify the meaning and significance of attachment and rate the items the team had chosen for the scale. A pool of 135 items was submitted to the scholars who rated the validity of each item as indicators of attachment and nonattachment and these ratings were used to create the preliminary 72 item NAS (Non-Attachment Scale).

California University students (382) and American adults (511) completed the preliminary NAS as part of an online survey. The participants rated agreement with the items using a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (disagree strongly) to 6 (agree strongly). Of the participants, 78% had some college education or more and the median income category was \$40-50,000 annually. Factor Analysis further reduced the list to 30 items covering acceptance of the flow of life events, feelings of regret and relationship to impermanence. Test-retest reliability was established using intraclass correlation (ICC) based on 42 of the original participants. NAS scores are stable over one month. To test for construct validity, the researchers evaluated whether meditation and nonattachment were related. More nonattachment theoretically should be increased through meditative practices. NAS and weekly hours of meditation ($r = .25$, $p = .02$) as well as years of practice ($r = .23$, $p = .04$) were significantly associated. The 30 item NAS can be found in Appendix 2.

To investigate how nonattachment related to other psychological variables, NAS scores were compared to a multitude of well known measures of mental health and prosocial behavior including the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003) and Acceptance and Action Questionnaire–II (Bond et al., 2009) which measures psychological flexibility to the Materialism Scale (Richins & Dawson, 1992), Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS; Gratz & Roemer, 2004) and the Generosity Scale (Kasser, 2005). The NAS was inversely related to anxious attachment

and materialism while positively related to mindfulness, acceptance, nonreactivity and autonomous motivation. Additionally, the higher scores on the NAS were positively related to higher levels of agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience and extroversion but negatively related to neuroticism. The NAS also showed positive correlations to subjective well-being and negative relationships to anxiety, stress and depression. Lastly, the NAS is positively related to empathy and generosity (Sahdra et al., 2010).

While this laundry list of positive associations shows that non-attachment is a potentially useful construct to be developed, this work is a first step. The authors of the above study urge future researchers to test the ability of the NAS to make behavioral predictions and determine objective outcomes. In particular, although these studies show that non-attachment may reduce suffering or increase adaptive functioning, some limitations of this research are that all of these findings are correlational and rely entirely on the same self-report measure, for assessing non-attachment and also use self-report for all of the outcome variables. More research is needed to determine if the NAS can predict future outcomes.

Because mindfulness and meditation are the most well studied aspects of Buddhist praxis, research has emphasized how nonattachment is integrally related to these concepts. As Sahdra et al. (2016) point out, "Because nonattachment is a relatively new, less studied aspect of Buddhism, it is important to understand what it is and is not ". In a large representative population of Americans (N 7,884; 52% women; age, M 47.9, SD 16) the well studied five-facet mindfulness scale (FFMQ; Tran et al. 2013) was compared to the NAS showing that total nonattachment was positively related to all five

facets of mindfulness (Observing, describing, acting with awareness, nonjudging, nonreactivity), but also showed that nonattachment was empirically distinct from the practice of mindfulness itself.

It is likely that mindfulness is positively correlated to nonattachment because it improves one's ability to pay attention to mental states, actions, bodily sensations, and reactive habits. Because mindfulness allows for monitoring of the ebb and flow of thoughts and feelings without judging or reacting to them, it may be easier to separate the state and action from the Ego. This easeful witnessing and equanimous presence of mind can help decrease our attachment to and aversion of those states and actions more easily. Though it may make such an action easier, mindfulness is not necessarily a prerequisite. Nonattachment can be achieved through other paths beside mindfulness including Stoicism. One limitation noted in the study was that findings could not be generalized to non-western cultures or clinical samples.

Whitehead et al. (2019) sought to differentiate mindfulness from nonattachment by relating both states to common mental health measures. They found that nonattachment mediated the relationship between mindfulness and well being such that among those people higher in nonattachment, mindfulness predicted well-being but when nonattachment was lower, mindfulness was not related to well being. They also showed that nonattachment mediated the relationship between mindfulness and depression, anxiety and stress. The participants were 516 Australian university students that completed an online survey. The students ranged in age from 17 to 69 and income from 0-25000 to 2000,000+ but median age and income was 28 and \$50-75,000 respectively. By including a population of Australian adults, these findings expanded on previous

research by Ju and Lee (2015) showing the role of nonattachment in mediating well being among Korean adults.

Mindfulness has also been used as a mental health treatment for a wide range of conditions. Joss et al. (2020) investigated a Mindfulness-based intervention in young adults with a history of maltreatment while also examining if nonattachment had a unique impact on treatment. Forty-three participants were recruited and 18 were placed in a waitlist control group while 21 participated in a mindfulness intervention. Results showed that baseline NAS scores had a negative correlation with severity of PTSD symptoms, anxiety sensitivity and personal distress, consistent with Sahdra's (2010) initial work showing that NAS is inversely related to psychopathology. Second, the mindfulness intervention increased mindfulness and nonattachment scores. Importantly, it was the changes in nonattachment, but not mindfulness, that were associated with improvements in post-traumatic stress symptoms, anxiety sensitivity, personal distress and rejection sensitivity. Mindfulness score changes were only related to anxiety sensitivity (weakly) and the interpersonal reactivity. These findings are compelling in that they show..., but the sample was relatively small and lacked a waitlist control vs. an active control. Perhaps more significantly, this is one of the few studies that went beyond correlation, examining actual impacts of intervention on both mindfulness and non-attachment, demonstrating that mindfulness practice increases well-being in part because it increases non-attachment, highlighting that nonattachment may be one of the most important aspects of mindfulness based interventions relating to reactivity and intensity of affective states. Because non-attachment as measured by the NAS is a relatively new concept, it often falls under the umbrella of mindfulness. It may be the case that nonattachment,

rather than mindfulness, is the most efficacious part of mindfulness-based interventions. Due to this paucity of research related to nonattachment, there is simply not enough evidence to know if this is true or not. A recommended next step in research is a non-mindfulness approach to non-attachment.

Sahdra et al. (2015) also investigated how nonattachment is distinct from empathy. Being prosocial is most often thought of as voluntary behavior aimed at improving the well-being of those around you and in society overall. It can be expressed through caring, comforting, sharing, donating (ie., “generosity”) and more. Sahdra et al. (2015) aimed to determine whether nonattachment and empathy were independently predictive of prosocial behaviors. More than 1800 teenagers (median age 15.5) took part in the study in which participants submitted nominations of prosociality and liking toward other participants. The results indicated that both empathy and nonattachment independently predicted prosocial behaviors in participants. An additional important finding was that when self-esteem and liking measures were added to these models, most of the empathy effect disappeared. This may suggest that the effect could be attributable to these control variables instead of to empathy. However, nonattachment “Continued to explain substantial variance in prosocial nominations” (Sahdra et al., 2015). One major limitation of the study was that it was cross-sectional so causality between prosocial behavior and nonattachment could not be determined, only that they were correlated.

In another example with great clinical importance, Lamis et al. (2014) examined whether mindfulness and nonattachment were related to suicide ruminations. 522 university aged students completed online surveys and correlations were examined. The findings suggest that depressive symptoms were negatively related to both mindfulness

and nonattachment and that suicide ruminations were negatively correlated with both mindfulness and non attachment. It should be noted though that nonattachment showed a much stronger inverse relationship with suicidal rumination than did mindfulness. Because limited research has been done on the topic, it is not known why this is, but the researchers believe further exploration is warranted. These findings nevertheless suggest that fostering and developing nonattachment may be helpful in the treatment of depression and suicidal thinking.

Despite meditation being an ancient, common practice associated with Buddhist praxis, an increasing number of studies have given validity to its effect on well-being and psychological development. Montero-Marin et al. (2016) wanted to explore the effects of a 1-month Vipassana retreat to measure outcomes of meditation and the practice of non-attachment on well-being. Participants practiced daily mindfulness meditation and focused attention exercises combined with silence and vegetarian dietary restrictions. A convenience sample of 19 experienced meditators took part in a controlled, non-randomized pre-post intervention trial. The results indicate that after a 1-month Vipassana meditation retreat compared to controls, retreat participants showed increases in nonattachment, mindfulness, cooperation, in addition to other positive traits. More uniquely, nonattachment had a mediating impact on well being by increasing decentering, non-reactivity and awareness. Thus, consistent with Buddhist teachings, increases in nonattachment may facilitate improved effectiveness of meditation and perhaps are helpful for meditators to break through ceilings often attributed to non-intensive meditation practices. Limitations included the use of convenience sampling and a relatively small sample size.

Over the past 40 years, the study of Buddhism and its many practices have become mainstream from its impact on meditation and mindfulness to vegetarianism and even fasting. Mindfulness and meditation have become the two most studied aspects of Buddhist thought, but researchers are increasingly finding nonattachment to be an equally important variable to consider in psychological well-being, as it is related to everything from decreased anxiety and depression to increases in wellbeing, decreased suicide rumination and prosocial behavior. And yet, isn't the goal of Buddhist practice not just mental health, but enlightenment? Does Nonattachment do more than promote mental health and alleviate bad mental health outcomes? Can cultivation of nonattachment take us beyond well being to the highest levels of life satisfaction and human potential?

Although the question of enlightenment may be beyond the scope of this paper, any movement toward such a state is worth understanding. Many aspects of human potential are indeed being measured and studied. Whitehead et al. (2020) recently investigated the relationship between nonattachment and three advanced psychological development indicators: wisdom, self-actualization and self-transcendence. 348 undergraduate psychology students participated in a correlational survey study which found that nonattachment was positively correlated with all measures of optimal psychological development. The researchers believe that this may imply that, as people move toward wisdom and grow in self actualization, they stop trying to control experience and become less fixated on life turning out any particular way. Whitehead et al. (2020) also concluded that nonattachment appears to be an ideal mental state for optimal psychological outcomes and more consequentially, that one's degree of

nonattachment may help determine why they reach such levels of development while others don't.

Of particular importance to the current study, by establishing a positive relationship between nonattachment and several measurements of advanced psychological development, Whitehead et al. encouraged further research into the methods by which we can foster said states. If nonattachment is a core component of advanced psychological development, then it may be worthwhile to explore how nonattachment can be encouraged and taught so as to increase it on a societal level.

Study Aim & Hypothesis

“I know that most men, including those at ease with problems of the greatest complexity, can seldom accept even the simplest and most obvious truth if it be such as would oblige them to admit the falsity of conclusions which they have delighted in explaining to colleagues, which they have proudly taught to others, and which they have woven, thread by thread, into the fabric of their lives” —Leo Tolstoy

The following study aims to take the findings of Whitehead et al. (2020) a step further: If nonattachment promotes higher levels of psychological development as suggested, understanding it in more detail could be helpful in the development of models supporting both human and societal flourishing. In particular, nonattachment as it relates to the Quiet Ego and rising political polarization are of interest to the researcher. While the prevention and alleviation of emotional suffering is always a goal of psychological research, understanding how humankind can thrive, grow and reduce conflict is equally

important for the purpose of this paper. Taking the research into account, it seems nonattachment could be a pathway toward achieving that goal. Therefore, this study will measure how nonattachment relates to the Quiet Ego and why this may reduce individual and societal conflict.

In Andy Norman's recently released book *Mental Immunity: infectious ideas, Mind-parasites and the search for a better way to think*, he aims to understand the polarization, biased thinking and tribalism of the current age and create a framework to help solve these societal maladies. He believes that when individuals begin to refuse beneficial solutions in service of preserving identity-defining beliefs, the norms of dialogue, problem solving and learning that are so crucial to our civilization become damaged. As an example, Norman created the concept of the Houseguest Heuristic. Just like furniture handed down from deceased relatives or perhaps garnered abroad on meaningful trips, one can begin to treat beliefs held sacred or tightly bound to identity. Once this connection or regard for these beliefs become deep enough, those who challenge them transform from partners in conversation or debate to unwelcome guests (Norman & Pinker, 2021). In this environment, a challenge to closely held beliefs or world views can quickly feel like existential threats. When this denial of growth-promoting behavior and thought becomes habitual, thinking becomes untethered to the objective considerations that would otherwise anchor it in reality, thus damaging a culture's ability to progress and thrive as a whole. This can lead to conflict, dangerous ideologies and polarization (Norman & Pinker, 2021). When individuals begin to experience the world as a binary, it feels as if everything is at stake. It is no longer a

debate about an individual issue like taxation or abortion, but rather the end of Western civilization or the planet itself (Sykes, 2016).

The Quiet-Ego Scale (Wayment et al., 2015) measures traits that mirror Norman's framework. Individuals with a more Quiet Ego have increased positive-negative balance (more objective self evaluation), decreased defensiveness, openness to change and growth as well as increased compassion toward self and others. In a time where reification of tribal instincts is on the rise, an understanding of how non-attachment can lead to a more Quiet Ego may help researchers and educators more effectively address the polarization and increased conflict seen in today's present reality. It is expected that nonattachment will be positively related to Quiet-Ego and one of the goals of the researcher is to show that the fostering of both these mental states may help reduce the rampant tribalism and increase Norman's Mental Immunity in the process. This will be accomplished by first establishing the relationship between nonattachment and the Quiet Ego followed by a robust evaluation of the psychology surrounding tribalism and how both may be related.

Study Significance

Identity is what gets the blood boiling, what makes people do unspeakable things to their neighbors. It is the fuel used by agitators to set whole countries on fire.

– Ian Buruma

Polarization

Westfall et al. (2015) says that polarization is at dangerous levels and increasing numbers of people say that discussing politics is more stressful than it used to be (Green, 2021). As if this were not bad enough, more and more Americans don't want their children marrying opposing party members (Iyengar et al., 2012). Combine this with changing views on how disputes should be settled, and the picture becomes even bleaker. In 2017, only 8% of Democrats and Republicans thought violence to advance political goals was okay. By 2020, those numbers had risen to 33% and 36% respectively (Diamond et al, 2020)

Even foreign powers bent on disrupting the democratic process here in the US see this problem as an opportunity for them. After Donald Trumps election in 2016, many on the left saw signs of collusion between Trump and nefarious Russian agents or co-conspirators. These rumors ended up proving false, but Russia did attempt to influence the election. The IRA (Internet Research Agency), a Kremlin cyber-espionage agency, used social media platforms to sow discord. The IRA did this by focusing on identity-related Instagram accounts on both side of the ideological spectrum from those that focused on black culture and LGBTQ+ issues to Christian and gun rights groups. Through releasing controversial news stories and interacting with the accounts regularly, the IRA aimed to create conflict and division (Martineau, 2018).

This researcher finds this data to be ample evidence that the United States has a political and cultural problem. So how can this research assist in solving that problem? What aspects of modern psychology weave through the polarization we see. And could nonattachment, by fostering a more Quiet Ego, contribute to the alleviation of these

societal ailments? Answers to these questions require an exploration of the psychology around in-groups, identity protective cognition and much more.

The Psychology of Polarization

John Hopkins Associate research professor Lilliana Mason, in her book *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* says that parties have begun a process of social sorting in which feelings of attachment to psychologically important group identities such as race, class and religion are causing more ideological homogeneity within parties that furthers partisanship. She argues that this could have considerable implications for the future feasibility of American politics. (Mason, 2018, p.40)

As evidence, she provides myriad studies including those by Sampasivam et al (2016) that found increases in cortisol when group identity membership was threatened, and Ahler and Sood (2018) who showed that Americans, to an often outsized level, see themselves in a partisan conflict with another homogenous group of “others”. This shouldn’t be a surprise. Kahan et al. (2011) explains that when people begin to think in an identity-protective manner, they will find the facts that mesh with their ideological or cultural affinity groups’ viewpoints even if they don’t represent the best available science. Further, the views themselves begin to represent membership in said social, cultural an ideological group so a belief out of sync can begin to signal a person as disloyal or untrustworthy and compromise their status in the group and relationships with others in the group (Kahan et al., 2011). At its extremes, this strong attachment to beliefs can lead to violent ends. Jonathan Rauch tells the story of Ludwig Boltzmann, a physicist who was so offended and insulted by attacks on his theories that he committed suicide (Rauch,1993). In short, as people become more attached to their opinions and viewpoints,

and identify themselves so fully with them, they are more likely to miss or ignore the best evidence available in order to protect their identity and avoid the social costs of expressing a view out of sync with those included in their ideological in-group. This explains some of the increasing tribalism and polarization. But if basic biases and self-protective psychological processes lead to these societal ills, are we not doomed?

A Possible Solution: The Quiet Ego

“We are not nouns, we are verbs. I am not a thing - an actor, a writer - I am a person who does things - I write, I act - and I never know what I'm going to do next. I think you can be imprisoned if you think of yourself as a noun.”

-Stephen Frye

It is the negative, polarizing tendencies of the previous section that a Noisy Ego exhibits. The Noisy Ego devotes its resources to constructing a self by identifying with ideas, norms or roles and then defending that self-construction as a separate entity disconnected from others who represent a threat to that identity. This would thus seem to validate any arising conflict around which one's sense of self is at stake and necessitate preserving that separation and its related attachment formations at all costs. In this way, the Noisy Ego hinders growth by focusing on immediate needs over long-term self-interest and immediate social status or material interests over long term personal growth (Wayment et al., 2015). The Quiet Ego, on the other hand, understands that the self is indeed a construction that can provide purpose and connection but also spawns destructive impulses and even illusions about role permanence and static states (Bauer & Wayment, 2008). This wariness and a deeper understanding of the separate self limited

by its own attachments leads to those who exhibit a Quiet Ego developing an inclusive identity which increases cooperative tendencies and, more importantly to this research, a decreased likelihood of self-protective stances towards others, particularly when one begins to identify with a larger group (Wayment et al., 2015). While this may not ensure a true understanding of another's view, this development of perspective seeking allows one to shift attention from the self onto others which increases one's ability to understand the conditions under which this view may have developed. In other words, one's view expands to a more inclusive outlook and recognizes that other views may have a place at the table despite the differences they may hold.

The Quiet Ego also focuses on organismic concerns seeing the individual as a self-identity that changes, develops, and improves over time helping to release one from a static interpretation of self. This allows one to consider self and other through the meaning of their actions and most importantly, through their developments as opposed to status or current state (Wayment et al., 2015). In other words, the ego, or self, is seen more as process than a static state (Bauer & Wayment, 2008).

Because this formation (or "maturation") of self acknowledges the impermanent nature of self and Ego, the Quiet Ego promotes growth through the frame of reference of metacognitive awareness, or mindfulness. This growth seeking attitude means the ego recognizes the self, is less defensive toward others and steadily notices the connection between self and others allowing for more compassion and connection with a larger and more meaningful psychosocial world (Bauer & Wayment, 2008). The ability to see others as a work in progress often opens the way for understanding and compassion. Indeed, nonreaction to others' defensive self is one of the most effective ways to lessen it in the

collective community, but this is only able to be accomplished if the defensive actions of a noisy ego can be seen as such. Only once the dysfunctional action of others can be taken less personally and more as a representation of the collective tendencies of a noisy ego can this occur (Tolle, 2005). When one thinks of conflict, tribalism, and polarization as a problem worth solving, it appears that nonattachment and the fostering of a Quiet Ego may contribute to that solution by loosening the innate and often conditioned maladaptive psychological systems at play through which a polarizing tribalism steeped in self-attachment and ego-preservation only serve to separate people in a way that leads to conflict. Often, the challenge is finding out how putting this into practice in the real world is possible. Do we have any precedent in modern Psychology and Therapy that adds credence to these findings?

Nonattachment in Modern Application

It is worth noting that tenets of Buddhist thought and many of the aspects of Buddhist attachment discussed so far have already found their way into Western Psychology. In fact, arguably the most effective form of therapy to have ever been created, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), showcases the usefulness of nonattachment. Beck (1976) in writing about cognitive behavioral therapy, broke ranks from the Freudian tradition and other known psychoanalytic theorists that focused on unconscious thoughts, memories, and desires to put the patient back in the driver's seat.

Beck believed that encouraging patients to develop adaptive mind frames by thinking critically about perception versus and more effectively noticing and fixing misconceptions correcting misconceptions, and learning more adaptive attitudes (Beck, 1976). In short, cognitive therapists teach patients to use a lot of the same problem

solving skills they may apply to other aspects of their life to correct maladaptive mental patterns. Digging deeper into the foundation of Beck's creative therapy method, a reader comes upon what Beck calls a person's Domain. This Domain is a self-concept built up with anything the person has an investment in such as a sports team, friend, favorite hiking boots, brand of coffee, achievements, or status. This list is endless and can vary from trivial to momentous. By understanding a person's attachments (the domain), it is easier to understand and predict the emotional response to events. Things that strengthen the concepts in the domain tend to produce more positive emotions while those deemed as subtracting from it, could cause conflict or pain (Beck, 1976). The "Domain" that Beck discusses here, one could argue, is simply another word for the Ego as seen from a Buddhist perspective. As was mentioned earlier, to become attached to a belief, creed, or even possession is to make it who you are. Attachment changes the relationship to the object. Beck lists examples of how this can manifest in patients suffering from depression or anxiety to those prone to anger. A patient may become distraught or nervous at the prospect of losing an important possession or idea that feels threatened, or perhaps even the sense that an important symbol or institution is failing. It can extend to things seemingly out of the subject's sphere. For example, someone who believes that law and order, justice and stability are important can find themselves enraged hearing about a crime gone unpunished even if it happens on the other side of country (Beck, 1976). But why? Clearly a man living in Los Angeles is not directly impacted by a crime in South Carolina. In fact, the individual often admits they are not directly harmed. Beck posited that the offense or reaction comes from attack on the individual's domain which causes a reaction that is often comparable to one directly experienced (Beck, 1976).

Beck does not say that the reason is his attachment, but the use of the term is not necessary to see the parallels. Individuals desire to be right and so search for evidence to support their beliefs. Once this process begins, often the goal is no longer to search for truth but rather to hoard additional examples and evidence to support the already held belief. As the idea becomes a part of the domain mentioned by Beck, the individual is no longer defending the idea, but rather themselves. As the line between idea and domain blurs, the individual can come to believe that defense of the idea is the same as defense of self. On community levels, this leads to groups forming that begin to develop more polarized views (Bush, 2021). Of importance to this study, it has been found that people are more resistant to change views regarding politics than non-political topics (Kaplan, Gimbel & Harris, 2016). This suggests that political views may become part of a person's domain more readily.

There are three main strategies that can be used to remedy this maladaptive tendency and is often employed in therapy to help patients overcome everything from Anger and Depression to Addiction. Two of these strategies, distancing and decentering, interlace with nonattachment and The Quiet Ego. Just as a patient participating in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy distances self from habitual thoughts and loosens an exaggerated self-concept steeped in the attachment of being right allows for a more objective and healthier appraisal to emerge (Beck, 1976), so does a student of Buddhism learn to release attachments to thoughts, emotions, and possessions—in essence, abiding in a more wholesome experience of the Quiet Ego.

Significance Summary

Throughout human history, hierarchies, cultures, religions, and political systems have emerged, been tested, and often have crumbled under the weight of time and the truth of impermanence. Notions of nonattachment, however, whether from Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching or Marcus Aurelius' meditations, have survived. The main vessel through which this survival took place was Buddhist theory and praxis. Mindfulness and other aspects of Buddhist practice have found their way into common treatment methods such as Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, and many others. With the introduction of the nonattachment scale in 2010, more earnest research has begun yielding evidence of nonattachment's positive impact on mental health.

The research and evidence presented within this proposal aims to understand nonattachment's relationship to the Quiet Ego and how that may reduce polarization and societal tribalism leading to severe conflict and a breakdown of collaborative problem-solving in our modern world. The researcher has argued in the previous sections that much of the political polarization and rising tribalism seen today could be connected to certain mental frameworks and ways of being in the world that have been researched in depth including motivated reasoning, identity attachment and conflict over in-group / out-group defense strategies. The Quiet Ego seems to allow for understanding, perspective taking, inclusive identity development and an understanding of more mature, fluid states as opposed to unhelpful, static ones, thus reducing the zero-sum worldview that can lead to conflict. If there is a path toward reducing tribalism and political polarization to be

found in Buddhist theory, in particular through nonattachment, then a crucial first step is to understand the relationship between nonattachment and the Quiet Ego.

Chapter II

Method

The present study was an on-line correlational investigation into the relationship between nonattachment and the Quiet Ego from a sample of U.S. adults over the age of 25. Using an online questionnaire administered via Survey Planet and Amazon Mechanical Turk, participants completed questions that taken in whole composed the NAS (Nonattachment Scale) and The Quiet Ego scale. It was hypothesized that nonattachment would be positively correlated to The Quiet Ego.

Participants

100 adults older than 25 from the general population were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk after approval from the Committee on the Use of Human Subjects. The recruitment of participants occurred on December 11th, 2021. Participants were awarded three dollars for completion of the surveys and given 15 minutes to complete the task.

Amazon Turk automatically limits participants younger than 18 years of age, but participants aged 18-25 were also excluded. The reason for this was the predominance of college age students in previous research on nonattachment. Insight into a wider age range is useful in furthering understanding of nonattachment. An additional inclusion criterion was US residence.

When responses were collected, the dataset was updated to exclude participants who had too short response times or inconsistent response patterns. All participants completed the questionnaire, so no participants were removed for this reason. After cleaning, 12 participants were removed. The remaining participant pool was 88 total people.

Measures

Two primary measures were administered to participants in this study:

Nonattachment Scale

Nonattachment Scale (NAS, Sahdra et al., 2010). This measures the Buddhist conception of nonattachment which is a quietness of mind and acceptance of impermanence. It is a self-report measure that consists of 30 questions rated on a likert-type scale from 1-6 with 1 representing Strong Disagreement while 6 denotes Strong Agreement for each item (ex. I can enjoy the pleasures of life without feeling sad or frustrated when they end.). Scores range from 30 to 180 with higher scores reflecting higher levels of nonattachment. An intraclass correlation (ICC) of .869 indicated that 73.8% of variance of scores was due to nonattachment. This suggested NAS scores are stable over time and could be used for shorter longitudinal studies. The scale was created to translate the Buddhist concept of nonattachment into a modern psychological scale (Sahdra et al., 2010).

The Quiet Ego Scale

The Quiet-Ego scale (Wayment et al., 2015) It is a self-report measure consisting of 14 statements rated on a 5-point likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Scores range from 14 to 70 with higher scores indicating higher level of Quiet-Ego. The Quiet Ego scale has four main components. The first, Detached Awareness, draws from the Mindful Attention and Awareness Scale (Brown and Ryan, 2003). The second, Inclusive Identity, draws from the Allo-Inclusive Identity Scale (Leary et al., 2008). The third, Perspective Taking, draws from the David Interpersonal Reactivity Scale, Perspective Taking Subscale (Davis, 1983). Last, Growth, draws from the Ryff's Personal growth Subscale of the Well-Being Scale (Ryff, 1989). See Table 2 for more detail. The goal of the scale was to create a measurement tool that best represented a view of self in which a more compassionate and less defensive self-identity emerges. The Quiet Ego as measured by QES scores have been shown to have positive associations with constructs that relate to humility, self-compassion, and greater self-determination (Wayment et al., 2015).

Procedure

Participants were told that they were participating in a study that “examines how two different states of mind are related to one another.” This description was left purposefully vague as to not influence participants answers. Participants were told that the only requirements were to complete the entire survey and answer honestly. In addition, it was made clear that participation was voluntary. They were given 15 minutes to complete the surveys and were compensated \$3 for their time. Participants were anonymous to the researcher and the results of the study were kept on a password

protected laptop. In addition to survey questions relating to the Quiet Ego Scale and the NAS (Nonattachment scale), participants were asked demographic questions including: gender, age, income, education level, ethnicity and relationship status.

Data Collection

Participants in this study were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk. Amazon Mechanical Turk is a new, cheap method to quickly get data from a wide and diverse sample. With this said, it is shown to be as reliable as more traditional methods (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). Amazon Mechanical Turk allows participants to be compensated for completing Human Intelligence Tasks (HIT). The program allows researchers to exclude participants using certain criteria including location or age, but if the Mechanical Turk worker fits the criteria, they may accept a HIT and complete. The HIT created for this study was a Survey Planet administered survey that included both the Nonattachment Scale (NAS) and Quiet Ego questions as well as basic demographic info. Each participant has a unique Amazon Mechanical Turk worker ID, the system protects worker identities by prohibiting collection of personally identifiable information. As such, participants remained anonymous.

Data Cleaning

After data was collected, all responses were downloaded to a password protected laptop. All participants completed the questionnaire. However, 12 participants finished the survey in less than half the average completion time. Less than a 3 minute completion time for a survey including 51 questions was deemed too short to read and answer the questions effectively.

Data Analysis

All questionnaires (Quiet Ego, NAS) were completed as instructed by original authors. Microsoft Excel Descriptive Statistics and Anova Two Factor Tool was used to calculate all comparative statistics including means, Pearson's Correlation and Cronbach's Alpha.

Chapter III

Results

The current study examined nonattachment in relation to The Quiet Ego. The final sample this study was 88 participants. Of the 88 participants, more than two thirds of the participants (69%, $n = 60$) were under 35 years of age and only 4.5% ($n = 4$) over the age of 45. Participant gender was male leaning with 52 (59)% male, 34 (39%) female and 2 (2%) other. About half had college degrees (52%, $n = 46$) with the majority of the remaining participants having lower than college level education levels (38%, $n = 33$). Sixty percent of the participants were white ($n = 53$), 13.6% Asian / Pacific Islander ($n = 12$), 9.1% African American / Black ($n = 8$), 9.1% Mixed Ancestry ($n = 8$), 5.7% Hispanic ($n = 5$), and 2.3% Middle Eastern ($n = 2$). Almost 95% of participants made less than \$100,000 and only nine participants held post-graduate degrees. Further demographic information can be found in Table 1.

For each measure, there was no noticeable difference in scores between male and female participants. See Figure 1 and Figure 2 for comparisons. To test the hypothesis that nonattachment is positively related to a quieter Ego, the participants' scores on the NAS and Quiet Ego Scale were measured. Both measures suggested good internal consistency with Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$ (NAS) and $\alpha = .81$ (Quiet Ego Scale). Pearson's r correlation was used to determine if there is a linear relationship in addition to the strength and direction of that relationship. Findings were as hypothesized with a more Quiet Ego being positively related to higher levels of nonattachment ($r = .568$, $p < .001$).

Table 1*Demographic characteristics of all participants*

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	52	59.1%
Female	34	38.6%
Other	2	2.3%
Age at time of survey (Years)		
25-29	34	38.6%
30-34	26	29.5%
35-39	17	19.3%
40-45	7	8.0%
45+	4	4.5%
Highest Education level Completed		
Less than high school	4	4.5%
High school / GED	18	20.5%
2-year college degree	11	12.5%
4 year college degree	46	52.3%
Masters Degree	6	6.8%
Doctoral Degree	2	2.3%
Professional Degree (JD/MD)	1	1.1%
Race / Ethnicity		
African American / Black	8	9.1%
Middle Eastern	2	2.3%
Asian / Pacific Islander	12	13.6%
Hispanic	5	5.7%
Indigenous or Aboriginal	0	0.0%
White/Caucasion	53	60.2%
Mixed Ancestry	8	9.1%
Relationship Status		
Single never married	33	37.5%
Married	30	34.1%
Living with partner	10	11.4%
Divorced	13	14.8%
Seperated	1	1.1%
Widowed	1	1.1%
Annual Income		
0-\$25,000	34	38.6%
\$25,001-\$50,000	29	33.0%
\$50,001-\$75,000	20	22.7%
\$75,001-\$100,000	2	2.3%
\$100,001-\$125,000	2	2.3%
\$125,001-\$150,000	1	1.1%
\$150,001 +	0	0.0%

Figure 1.

Between sex comparisons between mean QES Scores

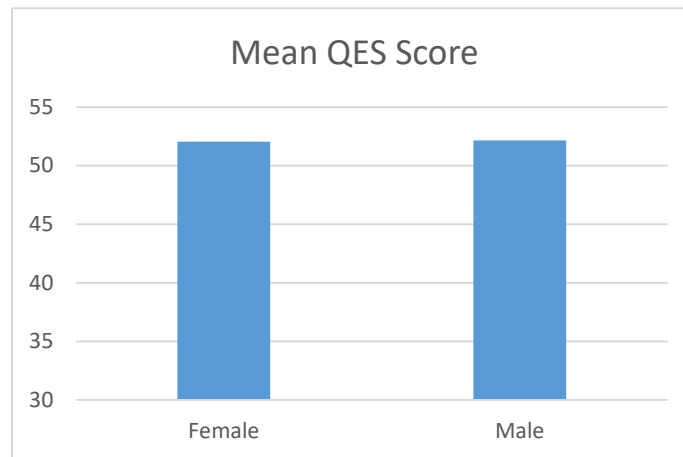
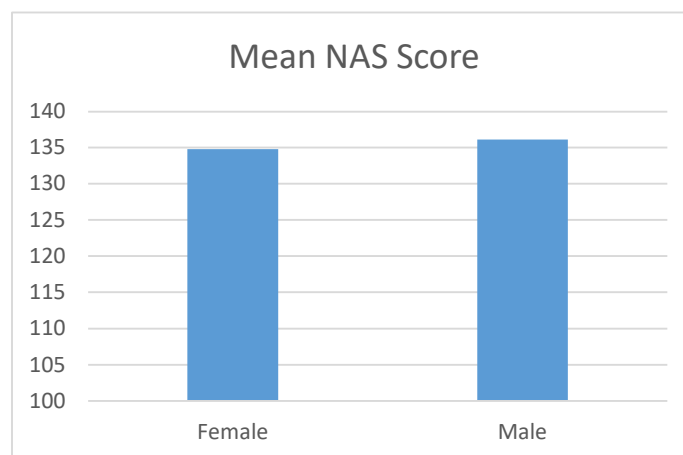


Figure 2.

Between sex comparisons between mean NAS Scores



Though the relationship between the NAS score and Quiet Ego score was the main goal of the study, it is interesting to take note of the relationship between NAS scores and the four facets of the Quiet Ego as well. As is noted in the measures section, the Quiet Ego is composed of four main facets: Detached Awareness, Inclusive Identity, Perspective Taking and Growth. Reference Table 2 for more detail.

Table 2

The Quiet Ego Scale Items

Subscale	Item
Detached awareness	I find myself doing things without paying much attention
	I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing
	I rush through activities without being really attentive to them (reverse)
Inclusive identity	The connection between you and all living things
	The connection between you and a stranger on a bus
	The connection between you and a person of another race
Perspective taking	Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place
	When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to put myself in his or her shoes for a while
	I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision
	I sometimes find it difficult to see things from another person's point of view (reverse)
Growth	For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth
	I have the sense that I have developed a lot as a person over time
	I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world
	When I think about it, I haven't really improved much as a person over the years (reverse)

An inclusive identity is a view in which one understands connectedness with others while perspective taking allows one to focus on issues beyond the self and better

understand how others could arrive at stances or worldviews. Detached awareness allows a present-moment focus while growth is the awareness of longer term goals and the change necessary to achieve them (Wayment et al., 2015).

The relationship of the NAS score of participants and the respective subscale scores can be found in Table 3 below. All four subscales had a positive relationship with NAS scores. While inclusive identity, perspective taking and growth all had correlations of between $r = .40$ and $r = .50$, detached awareness showed a slightly less strong relationship of only $r = .22$. This may suggest that the relationship between nonattachment and detached awareness which is considered similar to mindfulness (Brown and Ryan, 2003) is not as strong as the other three facets of The Quiet Ego. This is but one of many directions in which future research can lead. Shedding light on which of the four subscales of the Quiet Ego may or may not relate to nonattachment and political polarization could help determine the most effective interventions to remedy those problems.

Table 3

Correlation between The Quiet Ego subscale scores and NAS scores

Subscale	r	p
Detached awareness	0.23	$p < .001$
Inclusive identity	0.49	$p < .001$
Perspective taking	0.44	$p < .001$
Growth	0.48	$p < .001$

In conclusion, the results fell in line with the researcher's hypothesis. They also open up a wide array of possible future directions of research.

Chapter IV

Discussion

“It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do. To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts”

-Henry David Thoreau

The findings from this study demonstrated a positive relationship between nonattachment and the Quiet Ego. This does not suggest that nonattachment causes a more Quiet Ego but does give reason for more research. Further, It is the researcher’s belief that understanding impermanence and the changeability of individuals is crucial to human flourishing and may be a key to reducing polarization and societal tribalism leading to conflict. Whitehead et al. (2020) posits that nonattachment could reduce self-serving biases. It is clear that through mindful engagement in the world, one is better able to let go of a need for control. By releasing the heavy attachments to the self built over a long life in the form of roles or stances, one becomes less self-focused and more understanding. Whitehead et al. (2020) found that nonattachment seems to be related to several measure of advanced psychological development including self-transcendence, wisdom and self-actualization. The present study suggests that nonattachment is also related positively to The Quiet Ego. This suggests that not only do individuals with higher levels of nonattachment show signs of greater wisdom and live more self-

actualized lives, it seems that it may also allow them to construct a self-identity that could allow for loss tribal, more compassionate communities.

Buried within the data, there is additional evidence that further analysis of the Quiet Ego's relationship to a polarizing form of tribalism is worth exploring. For questions that focused on perspective taking, respondents that strongly agreed, had significantly higher Quiet Egos. This ability to understand where others may be coming from in their view formation is a crucial step necessary to combat the tribal tendencies common in humans. As such, it is important to see how The Quiet Ego can be nurtured, encouraged, and taught.

Table 4

Perspective taking and the Quiet Ego Score

Question	Average Quiet Ego score for respondents that Strongly Agreed	Average Quiet Ego Score
Q4 Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place	56	
Q8 When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to put myself in his or her shoes for a while	61	51
Q13 I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision	57	

These findings have implications for future research. Could it be true that the solution to the tribalism and identity politics of today is the mass quieting of egos in

societies across the world? Could activities that increase nonattachment be integrated into public schooling or included in more types of therapy? Research shows that nonattachment is correlated to levels of meditation so encouraging the already rapid spread in popularity of meditation and mindfulness exercises may help create societies with more Quiet Egos. Perhaps Yoga or breathing exercises could also be impactful. However, while nonattachment is often seen through a Buddhist lens and understood through the long history of Buddhist praxis, it can be cultivated in other ways beyond meditation or Buddhist methods (Sahdra et al, 2010) Further, mindfulness is often prioritized over nonattachment interventions even though mindfulness and nonattachment have been shown to have equally positive effects on several outcomes (Sahdra et al. 2016). Because there are individuals who don't find interventions couched in Buddhist philosophy rewarding, more should be done to understand the relationship between nonattachment from a Buddhist view and other well known traditions such as Stoicism.

Readers of both Buddhist and Stoic literature quickly notice similarities between the two. In particular, the notion on nonattachment can be seen in some the most notable Stoic texts. Stoics urge people to consider the how and why behind other's misdeeds and more famously, consider the space between an event and the impact or emotion tied to that event. A key teaching of Stoicism is that one has a choice about every emotion and reaction suggesting that these emotions and thoughts are not woven into the being of the subject, but are separate (Aurelius, 2002). More interdisciplinary cooperation between philosophy, psychology and religion could shed light on new, alternative ways to cultivate nonattachment and the Quiet Ego beyond Buddhism.

In addition to focused studies and practices, nonattachment can be cultivated in daily life. Since Sahdra et al (2010) found that materialism and nonattachment were inversely related, perhaps donating goods, adopting a more minimalist lifestyle and focusing less on material achievement could cultivate more Quiet Egos. Many cultural critics have noticed the emergence of the helicopter parent and safetyism in the raising of children. Contrary to the notion that protecting children from the hardships of life will promote better mental health, recent research suggests that hardship and suffering may be one of the ways to cultivate nonattachment (Whitehead, Bate and Bradley, 2018). The researcher does not suggest delivering suffering upon children, but allowing children and young adults the freedom to make mistakes and learn from them could help them learn nonattachment. Indeed, suffering often comes from the loss of dear beliefs, friends and possessions. Lastly, more time in nature where things are constantly changing could impart the lesson of impermanence possibly leading to less attachment and more Quiet Egos.

The concept of nonattachment is now used in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), and other clinical approaches mentioned above, what other psychological interventions could be developed to increase a sense of connectedness amongst community members and reduce conflict in America going forward? In addition, collaboration between political science and psychology faculty to better understand what key aspects of human nature contribute to social tribalism is needed. Scott Barry Kaufman Phd. Believes that along with math, reading and sex education students should learn how to develop the four characteristics of the Quiet Ego as it could lead to a more peaceful society (Kaufman, 2018)

Research Limitations

Despite finding a positive correlational relationship between the NAS and QES as predicted in the hypothesis, there are limitations to the present research. Due to financial limitations, only 88 participants were included in the study. This is a small segment of the US population. As with most study's done in the United States, the higher average income and status as a more developed country could allow citizens to focus more on mental health while potential participants in less developed countries may not have the resources to do the same. Much of the research conducted on the NAS has taken place in Australia as the creators of the scale reside there. While adding input from participants in the USA is beneficial in one hand, it also reflects a particular cultural context. Additional studies in more varied cultural settings would make future research more fruitful.

In addition, the demographic statistics show that higher income individuals are not well represented in the study. In addition, only 4.5% ($n = 4$) of respondents were over the age of 45. Like much of the research done on nonattachment, this study uses self-reported data. In addition, the study examines the correlation between different scores that shed light on general relationships between measurement concepts but not determining causation for the hypothesis. Future studies should examine if the NAS can predict outcomes in experimental or longitudinal studies. While this does move participants beyond the college student demographic so often used in research around nonattachment, it will limit the sample to participants who have access to the internet and who earn additional income through short-term gig work.

Conclusion

The Individual has always had to struggle to keep from being overwhelmed by the tribe.
If you try it, you will be lonely often, and sometimes frightened. But no price is too high
to pay for the privilege of owning yourself

– Rudyard Kipling

Derek Parfit created a scenario. In it, a question was posed to readers. Imagine a colony on Mars and a machine that can transport a person there. The person steps in, clicks the button and every single molecule of the body is replicated, and a new person wakes up in a portal located on Mars in exactly the same form as when the original button was pushed. It is the most basic form of science fiction that often leaves readers asking for a twist. There is. In Parson's scenario, while the new, exact replica appears on mars, the original person remains on earth. Both people are free to live separate lives (Parfit, 1987) At what point does the person transported to Mars become a *different person*? It is a philosophical question that requires a thesis of its own. What may be important to the current study is how one answers that question.

Bargh (2017) likely would have imagined the person becomes a new, different person rather quickly. He explains that an identical infant placed in a series of different countries and settings would produce entirely different people speaking different languages and operating within different cultural norms even though the baby began at the same genetic and biological started place. This is intuitive, but still rather remarkable. There are certain aspects of every person that cannot be changed. One might be more prone to high cholesterol or have a higher likelihood of the Sickle Cell trait. In addition, each person is born into a culture like water is to a fish. In America, for example, many

believe the Protestant Work Ethic contributes to America's high average work hours (Bargh, 2017). But how much say does one have about the water they swim in?

Aristotle believed that anything one can choose to do, one can also choose not to do so the answer could be quite a lot. Jiddu Krishnamurti believed that most people walked through life like zombies being conditioned into static states determined by their surroundings. This inattention leads to bondage because understanding the choice one has about releasing the conditioning allows one to truly see the world for what it is. All things in the past fall away and one can be reborn anew (Krishnamurti, 2010). According to these ancient thinkers, the new Mars bound replica seems to have almost perfect freedom to be a new person. This concept of change, growth and impermanence seems to open the door to joy, love and freedom. Perhaps, the replica is still the same height and gender, but do they not have freedom to change the style, opinions or worldviews accumulated over a lifetime on earth. This is an understanding of change and growth which can lead to a deeper understanding of impermanence. What is the opposing view?

Jean Paul Sartre described an anti-Semite as a static person that sees their traits as fixed and leads to a false belief in possession of unearned culture and accomplishment (In addition to their racist views toward the Jewish people). The French anti-Semite, for example believes that a Jew could not understand the writing of Racine in French. No matter the Jew being more educated than this Frenchman nor the fact that the Jew can speak French with more accurate grammar. The French anti-Semite has spoken French for 1000 years while the Jew only a couple decades (Sartre, 1970). Today, the view held by Sartre's invented anti-Semite is seen for its ignorance, but on closer inspection, cultural inheritances and static states that are not controversial or backward fall apart

upon rather light inspection as well. Chocolate is associated with Switzerland and Potatoes with Ireland and yet both are from Mexico (Harari, 2014). The choice to apply labels to others or assign to oneself is easy but brings with it psychological effects. This identification process allows or requires a portion of one's identity come from the thoughts and opinions of others, particularly those within one's identity group (Appiah, 2010). But, for many, it is easier to accept these minor slights or sacrifices than to embark on the momentous quest of becoming a person.

When a person discovers that becoming an individual is hard, it is much easier to search for something larger that can be appropriated even if the connection is as tenuous as a shared skin color or religion. The French anti-Semite believes that what is French is an inheritance whereas others must earn it. Seeing others as unchanging representatives of larger ill-defined groups leads to conflict and segregation and at its worse, violence but while Sartre described the problem of the anti-Semite, he also described a possible solution. Later, he explained that trying to understand oneself through group identity was an act of bad faith and that one must instead aim for one's transcendence (Weberman, 2011). In fact, he went as far as saying that there was no reality but action and that a man was nothing more than a sum of his actions (Sartres, 1970). If Freud was right in believing that one of the hardest challenges in life was understanding that a person can be uniquely one's own, then understanding this transcendence could be one of its most important discoveries. Understanding this transcendence allows for change and new insights into impermanence which is the foundation of the Buddhist view of nonattachment.

In the Buddhist tradition there is a concept, Anatta, which suggests that the self is always changing. It is often translated as “non-self” communicating the notion that what appears to be an enduring, inherent, conceptual and static sense of self is itself impermanent. Indeed, people change. Megan Phelps-Roper was a member of the infamous Westboro Baptist church. She was described in an article in *The Independent* as a Westboro Baptist Church member who yelled anti-Jewish and anti-gay slogans at funerals. What is easy to miss in the article is that this was the state until the previous year (Walker, 2013). She left the church. Even a member of one of the extreme fundamentalist churches in America was able to change her deeply held beliefs and at the cost of her family, her belief system and her community.

Maajid Usman Nawaz was born to a Pakistani British family, joined the Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir, and was subsequently arrested in Egypt and imprisoned for five years. During this time before his incarceration, he watched a member of his organization stab an enemy to death, whereas during his time in jail he began reading about human rights and was introduced to the organization Amnesty International. After conversations with this group, they welcomed him as a “prisoner of conscience” and helped in his rejection of his previous extremism. In 2007, he co-founded Quilliam which is a think tank tasked with counter-extremism by challenging Islamist ideology and promoting a new, secular Islam. So, a man who once watched a member of his organization stab an enemy to death—a man who was imprisoned in Egypt for politically motivated Islamist activities—now runs an organization that fights extremism and hosts a radio show that combats the worst elements of his faith while challenging the same in other faiths.

Daryl Davis, an African-American blues musician met a member of the Ku Klux Klan while on tour and it changed the course of his life. He dedicated a significant portion of his life to seeking and converting KKK members, hanging their white robes and hoods in his closet as prizes of his success. To date, he has convinced more than 200 members of the KKK to leave. In addition, he gives lectures to end racism and produced an award winning documentary “Accidental Courtesy.” Yet again, here are 200 people whose worldviews were totally shaken, re-arranged, discarded and replaced with a more inclusive, mature and wholistic view of others free from polarizing and conflict catalyzing attachments. This was only possible because Daryl Davis knew that it was possible. He understands how impermanence may impact the changeability of individuals for more wholesome ends.

Likely unbeknownst to the Megan, Maajid and Daryl, what they did required a certain level of nonattachment. In the case of Megan and Maajid, if they were unable to loosen their attachment to their identities as Westboro Baptist Church members or Islamist group members, they both would likely still be members of those respective groups. For Daryl, perhaps more difficult and profoundly, he was able to see others in the same way. He did not view the members of the KKK as static, irredeemable bigots. He saw them as human beings that had been taught a series of profoundly mistaken views about their fellow man. The easy path is that of static perception. To establish one's ingroup as good and those with opposing views as bad or evil is the easiest and most basic human tendency. The Uncertainty Reduction Hypothesis states that human beings feel uncertain and aim to reduce that uncertainty by aligning with larger group memberships. Once this is accomplished, the individual learns the beliefs of the group

and begins to understand who is and is not part of the group. Finally, the individual gains a form of validation and collective membership which erases that uncertainty and insecurity (Abrams & Hogg, 2001).

But while attaching oneself to a group identity may reduce uncertainty in an individual seeking a sense of self, it can often cause a reaction in others as well. Poletta & Jasper (2001) show that opposing identities often are frightened into counter organization by the growing strength of an identity movement. Whether for better or worse, it is found that the movement in response is often more effective or powerful than the original group which implies an escalation that can lead to violence and intractable societal conflict. There seem to be endless partisans available to tell you how the blue or red team will destroy America. If only these “deplorables” would disappear, we could usher in the utopia we’ve designed. If only these coastal elites would disappear, we could live in freedom. This was one of the original fears of the American founders. In fact, George Washington, was concerned that if the nation divided into too distinct of parties, the goals of the party would no longer serve the nation, but produce factionalism that would tear the country apart (Mason, 2018). Clearly, this is not the path forward.

A person likely won’t find Darryl Davis falling into either of those buckets. Research and study around fostering more individuals like Daryl Davis and less partisan approaches to solving societal problems through acute polarization and the tribal mentality is a worthy goal. As preliminary research suggests, cultivating non-attachment in the Buddhist sense and a Quiet Ego can lead to a more inclusive, wholistic society that can reclaim the ideals of our democracy and return us to a value of problem-solving through healthy discourse, compassion and collaboration around the principles we hold to

be common truths among us. This research is just one step in a much longer process and project toward that aim.

Appendix A.

The Quiet Ego Scale

All items were assessed on a 5-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

* Reverse-coded item

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 B.

The Nonattachment Scale (NAS)

1 = Disagree Strongly, 2 = Disagree Moderately, 3 = Disagree Slightly, 4 = Agree Slightly, 5 = Agree Moderately, and 6 = Agree Strongly

1. I can accept the flow of events in my life without hanging onto them or pushing them away.
2. I can let go of regrets and feelings of dissatisfaction about the past.
3. I find I can be calm and/or happy even if things are not going my way.
4. I have a hard time appreciating others' successes when they outperform me.
5. I can remain open to what life offers me regardless of whether it seems desirable or undesirable at a particular time.
6. I can enjoy pleasant experiences without needing them to last forever.
7. I view the problems that enter my life as things/issues to work on rather than reasons for becoming disheartened or demoralized.
8. I can enjoy my possessions without being upset when they are damaged or destroyed.
9. The amount of money I have is not important to my sense of who I am.
10. I do not go out of my way to cover up or deny my negative qualities or mistakes.
11. I accept my flaws.
12. I can enjoy my family and friends without feeling I need to hang on to them.
13. If things aren't turning out the way I want, I get upset.
14. I can enjoy the pleasures of life without feeling sad or frustrated when they end.
15. I can take joy in others' achievements without feeling envious.
16. I find I can be happy almost regardless of what is going on in my life.
17. Instead of avoiding or denying life's difficulties, I face up to them.
18. I am open to reflecting on my past mistakes and failings.
19. I do not get "hung up" on wanting an "ideal" or "perfect" life.
20. I am comfortable being an ordinary, less than perfect human being.
21. I can remain open to thoughts and feelings that come into my mind, even if they are negative or painful.
22. I can see my own problems and shortcomings without trying to blame them on someone or something outside myself.
23. When pleasant experiences end, I am fine moving on to what comes next.
24. I am often preoccupied by threats or fears.
25. I am not possessive of the people I love.
26. I do not have to hang on to the people I love at all costs; I can let them go if they wish to go.
27. I do not feel I need to escape or avoid bad experiences in my life.
28. I can admit my shortcomings without shame or embarrassment.

- 29. I experience and acknowledge grief following significant losses, but do not become overwhelmed, devastated, or incapable of meeting life's other demands.
- 30. I am not possessive of the things I own.

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