The Psychological Structure of Humility

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What is Humility?

• Humility has long been touted as an emotion that is central to modesty, prosociality, and gracefulness
• Yet, humility has received little empirical research attention (Tangney, 2000; see Davis et al., 2013; Exline & Geyer, 2004; Kesebir, 2014; Kruse et al., 2014; Gregg et al., 2008)
• Diverse and conflicting conceptualizations exist:
   • Accurate self-knowledge (e.g., Peterson & Seligman, 2004)
   • A desire not to brag (e.g., Sedikides et al., 2008)
   • Appreciation of others (e.g., Tangney, 2000)
   • Feelings of worthlessness (e.g., Elison & Harter, 2007; Klein, 1991)
• No prior research has addressed the question: What exactly is humility?
• Present research goal: Conduct a systematic, bottom-up investigation of the psychological structure of humility, and develop and validate reliable scales for future assessment purposes

Method

• Study 1: 192 undergraduate participants rated the extent to which they generally feel this way for 54 humility-related words (1= "not at all"; 5 = "extremely")
   • Words were taken from a pilot study in which 87 participants generated words and phrases that described their humility experiences
   • Participants self-reported related emotional dispositions and personality traits:
      • Guilt and Shame (Test of Self-Conscious Affect; Tangney & Dearing, 2002); Authentic and Hubristic Pride (Tracy & Robins, 2007); Behavioral Modesty (Gregg et al., 2008); Self-Esteem (Rosenberg, 1965); Narcissism (Narcissistic Personality Inventory; Raskin & Terry, 1988); Prestige (Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich, 2010); Subjective Power (Sense of Power Scale; Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2010); Submissiveness (Adolescent Submissive Behavior Scale; Irons & Gilbert, 2005); Big Five Personality Traits (Big Five Inventory; John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008)
• Study 2: 267 undergraduate participants wrote about a past humility experience and rated the extent to which 54 humility-related words characterized their experience (1= "not at all"; 5 = "extremely")
   • Narratives coded for:
      • Behavioral tendencies and self-perceptions
      • Success versus failure

Two Factors of Humility: Appreciative and Self-Abasing

Item	Study 1: Trait Humility		Study 2: State Humility	
	Appreciative Humility	Self-Abasing Humility	Appreciative Humility	Self-Abasing Humility
Kind *	.66		.80	
Generous *	.65	.17	.82	
Considerate *	.64	.17	.67	
Graceful *	.63	.10	.76	
Compassionate *	.63	.20	.66	
Understanding *	.55	.19	.75	
Unimportant ^	-.29	.65		.79
Meek ^	.15	.62	.20	.58
Shameful ^	-.13	.60	-.19	.71
Submissive ^		.57	.12	.64
Small ^	-.12	.57		.77
Worthless ^	-.29	.55		.67

Note:
*= Appreciative Humility final scale item
^= Self-Abasing Humility final scale item
The two factors were correlated -.09 in Study 1 and -.16 in Study 2
Loadings < |.10| are omitted; loadings > |.30| are bolded

Appreciative and Self-Abasing Humility: Correlates and Consequences

Study 1: Trait Humility		
Emotional Dispositions	Appreciative Humility	Self-Abasing Humility
Guilt-free Shame	-.23*	.46*
Shame-free Guilt	.25*	-.13
Authentic Pride	.72*	-.33*
Hubristic Pride	.01	.30*
Modesty	.51*	.60*
Personality Traits	Appreciative Humility	Self-Abasing Humility
Self-Esteem	.51* (.40*)	-.61* (-.48*)
Narcissism	.33* (.10)	-.40* (-.13)
Prestige	.61*	-.32*
Subjective Power	.34*	-.46*
Submissiveness	-.24*	.59*
Extraversion	.30*	-.60*
Agreeableness	.43*	-.18*
Conscientiousness	.25*	-.24*
Openness	.27*	-.22*
Neuroticism	-.37*	.40*

Study 2: State Humility		
Behavioral Tendencies	Appreciative Humility	Self-Abasing Humility
Express gratitude or appreciation	.18*	-.12
Seek interpersonal connection	.21*	-.06
Help others	.18*	-.03
Hide	-.30*	.24*
Be alone	-.27*	.24*
Self Perceptions	Appreciative Humility	Self-Abasing Humility
Intelligent	.16*	-.29*
Achieving	.27*	-.44*
Moral	.25*	-.28*
Important and significant	.26*	-.53*
Powerful and in control	.37*	-.43*
Ignorant and unwise	-.18*	.37*

Note: * $p < .05$
Correlations with shame and guilt are controlling for guilt and shame, respectively (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Values in parentheses associated with self-esteem are part correlations controlling for narcissism, and values in parentheses associated with narcissism are part correlations controlling for self-esteem

Do the Two Humility Factors Follow Success or Failure?

Appreciative humility is more intense following success ($t = 2.60$, $p < .05$, $d = .43$), whereas self-abasing humility is more intense following failure ($t = 5.24$, $p < .001$, $d = .80$).

Conclusions

• Humility is characterized by two factors: Appreciative humility and Self-Abasing humility
   • These factors emerge at trait and state level, and are relatively orthogonal
• Appreciative humility is characterized by consideration and kindness toward others, appreciation of one's own and others' positive qualities, and gracefulness in the face of success
• Self-abasing humility is characterized by feelings of meekness and submissiveness, a sense of unimportance in the grand scheme of the world, and a desire to withdraw and be alone
• We developed and validated a set of reliable, six-item scales to measure each humility factor
• We replicated the two-factor structure of humility in three additional studies:
   • Study 3 used cluster analyses of semantic similarity ratings made among humility-related words (n = 140)
   • Study 4 used confirmatory factor analysis to replicate the two factor structure of state humility experiences (n = 386)
   • Study 5 used confirmatory factor analysis to replicate the two-factor structure of trait humility (n = 270)
   • Studies 4 & 5 also replicated the pattern of causes and correlates of each humility factor, and demonstrated reliability of the scales: α's = 87 (appreciative humility) and 83 (self-abasing humility)