Humble Beginnings: Current Trends, State Perspectives, and Hallmarks of Humility

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Abstract

After decades of neglect, research in humility is finally turning a corner. Within the past few years, investigators have articulated two promising strategies to overcome methodological concerns – namely, using personality judgments and designing humility "stress tests" to elicit humility-relevant behavior. We also highlight an alternative perspective of humility that has not yet gained much attention: the investigation of humility as a state, which helps to understand what humility actually is, how it functions, and its variability within individuals over time. To improve the observation of humility-relevant behavior, we propose five intrapersonal and interpersonal hallmarks of humility that have strong theoretical support, can distinguish between humility's conceptual foils of narcissism and low self-esteem, and provide broad theoretical ties between ongoing research endeavors: A secure, accepting identity, freedom from distortion, openness to new information, other-focus, and egalitarian beliefs. Finally, to increase methodological rigor, we recommend using a combination of self-reports and other-reports and employing multiple raters with demonstrated inter-rater reliability in validation studies.

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Humility may be the most overlooked and underappreciated virtue. Alfred Lord Tennyson called it "the highest virtue, the mother of them all" and the founder of one of the most widely used character transformation programs embedded humility in each of his 12 steps (AA Services, 2002). After decades of stagnation as a topic in psychology, the scientific study of humility is finally turning a corner. Currently, to our knowledge, at least seven research groups now maintain active programs investigating humility, and their efforts are producing fruitful results. For example, researchers are examining humility in specific contexts, such as intellectual domains (Thrive Center for Human Development, 2013), leadership (Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2013), and relationships (Davis et al., 2011, 2012). Investigators in the area are also operationalizing humility in divergent ways – as an adaptive form of pride (Cheng, Weidman, & Tracy, 2013), a personality trait (Exline & Hill, 2012; LaBouff, Rowatt, Johnson, Tsang & McCullough Willerton, 2012; Landrum, 2011), a set of relationship skills (Davis et al., 2011), a leadership style (Owens et al., 2013), and a range of metacognitive abilities (Thrive Center for Human Development, 2013). In this paper, we survey recent methodological trends in the measurement of humility, discuss the value of approaching humility as a state, and propose five observable indicators (i.e., "hallmarks") of humility: a secure, accepting identity, freedom from distortion, openness to new information, other-focus, and egalitarian beliefs. These hallmarks may aid researchers as they operationalize or validate new measures of humility and provide broad theoretical ties between ongoing research endeavors.

Early approaches

The lack of empirical progress over the years was largely due to the absence of a coherent measurement strategy (see Davis, Worthington, & Hook, 2010, for a review). Previous approaches to assessing humility have included self-reports, self-other rating differentials, and implicit measures, and each strategy had its own pitfalls. Like other socially desirable traits, humility is suspect when self-reported, but most are trustworthy when identified by others. Similarly, social norms seem to frown on claiming humility for oneself but not attributing it to others. Efforts to develop stand-alone self-reports of humility never fully overcame the inherent paradox of endorsing one's own humility and had problems with reliability and validity (Tangney, 2000). Self-other rating differentials (i.e., one's assessment subtracted from those of others) also had theoretical issues: To attain measured humility, humble individuals (who show low self-focus and are relatively less competitive) must nonetheless provide numerically accurate self-assessments. Finally, implicit measures may yet sidestep social desirability concerns (Rowatt et al., 2006), but a lack of convincing validation studies left other researchers questioning what they were actually measuring (Davis et al., 2010; however, see also LaBouff et al., 2012).

Current directions

A few years ago, two complementary measurement strategies emerged as a way to overcome prior difficulties. First, several researchers began gravitating toward the use of personality judgments as a way to sidestep a majority of the methodological issues inherent in the article of humility (Davis et al., 2010, 2011; Kruse, Chancellor, & Lyubomirsky, 2013a; Kruse, Chancellor, Ruberton, & Lyubomirsky, 2013). These researchers are championing personality judgments of humility as the gold standard (i.e., the key criterion variable) to which all other potential self-report measures of humility should be compared (Davis et al., 2010, 2011), and their early findings appear to warrant cautious optimism (Davis et al., 2011, 2012).

Personality judgments themselves have a rich and rigorous methodological tradition – methods that gained strength in response to decades of situationalists' repeated challenges to trait psychology (Kenrick & Funder, 1988). According to Funder's (1995) Realistic Accuracy Model, accurate personality judgments arise as targets exhibit behavioral cues relevant to their personality traits, which are then detected and used by others. When predicting a wide variety of personality-relevant behavior, acquaintances' other-reports outperform targets' self-reports, and multiple informants beat single informants (Kolar, Funder, & Colvin, 1996). Personality judgments are even effective when they require raters to provide a high degree of psychological inference (Furr, Wagerman, & Funder, 2010). Using Funder's (1995) model of accurate assessment, for humility to be reliably recognized in others, it must produce humility-relevant behaviors that others can observe and utilize (Davis et al., 2010).

The second major promising research strategy is the identification and implementation of "stress tests" that serve as situational cues to elicit humility-relevant behavior. Researchers theorize that humility is most visible when it is challenged, when it goes against cultural norms, or when dispensing of it seems convenient or socially desirable (Davis et al., 2010). Situations that are theoretically relevant to the presence or lack of humility include vying for power in a group, interpersonal conflict, receiving praise, winning an award, allocating credit for accomplishments, receiving unfavorable feedback, discussing one's failures, taking ownership of one's hurtful behavior, apologizing to others, learning from others, and interacting with those of lower status (Collins, 2001; Davis et al., 2010, 2011; Kruse et al., 2013; Tangney, 2000).

Researchers can use these "stress tests" to validate self-report measures, elicit behavior for personality judgments, or use as other-rated writing prompts.

Together, the use of personality judgments and humility "stress tests" offers a straightforward measurement strategy that can boost the field's methodological rigor. (Additional recommendations are offered below.) Although not every research team employs both strategies, the knowledge gained by these approaches should prove beneficial for advancing research forward.

The value of state approaches

We also highlight an alternative perspective of humility that has not yet gained much traction: the investigation of humility as a state. Although humility exhibits characteristics of both a state and a trait (see Tangney, 2000), most, if not all, of the existing research programs on humility conceptualize it as only a trait (i.e., as dispositional humility). Of course, trait humility exists, and others identify particular individuals as humble precisely because they exhibit cross-situational consistency in their behavior. At the same time, people can also recall specific moments when they felt particularly humble (i.e., situational humility). When individuals talk about humbling experiences, they may describe events like witnessing the birth of a child, connecting with other people around common life problems, experiencing a divine moment, seeing a high-status friend perform a lowly act of service, or feeling unworthy in the presence of greatness.

Investigating humility as a state not only compliments trait-based approaches but also offers four key advantages. First, all components of humility may not be present at all times. For example, visiting Victoria Falls may remind tourists of their finiteness, but it may not engender other indicators of humility, such as egalitarianism or increased awareness of others. Using moments as the unit of analysis allows researchers to compare and contrast discrete experiences, which would ordinarily be lost when focusing only on the individual and collapsing observations across time. A state approach also highlights the role of momentary emotions in the experience of humility and illuminates how humility relates to emotions such as awe and gratitude.

Second, a state approach assumes variability in people's experiences and displays of humility-relevant behavior over time. Even when employing personality judgments, friends and family may disagree on a target's presence or lack of humility due to variability in the circumstances they share with the target, the duration of their relationship, or biases inherent in close relationships (Kenny & Acitelli, 2001). However, even strangers can agree on a target's momentary level of humility if all are shown the same 5-minute video clip in a humility-relevant situation (Borkenau & Liebler, 1995). In sum, by focusing measurement strategies on specific moments in time, a state approach minimizes the "noise" of variability and increases the likelihood of identifying important relationships among variables.

Third, a state perspective assumes that humility can be facilitated and cultivated – a goal shared by both state and trait psychologists. Although state and trait approaches begin at opposite ends of the spectrum (i.e., top–down versus bottom–up), each approach informs the other. For example, chronic state humility may explain why certain individuals come to be seen as possessing trait humility and which practices may increase it. Trait humility may aid in the identification of individuals who are more likely to experience and enjoy humble moments.

Finally, a state approach is more likely than a trait approach to elucidate the role of general psychological processes. For example, although humans' capacity for self-awareness is a core psychological process that is necessary for many kinds of goal-directed behavior (Leary &

Guadagno, 2011), excessive self-focus is a hallmark of mental distress (Ingram, 1990; Leary, 2004). Hypo-egoic states (i.e., "unselving", forgetting the self, and quieting the self) have theoretical associations with many kinds of "selfless" experiences such as flow, meditation, compassion, empathy, generosity, and transcendence and as a whole are relatively unstudied (Leary & Guadagno, 2011). A state approach aids in the identification of humility's antecedents and may thus shed light on the specific mechanisms at work. In sum, a state approach helps to understand what humility actually *is* and how it functions, not just what positive outcomes it may produce.

What are the hallmarks of humility?

How is humility actually identified by raters? Behavioral observation relies on a coding system in which raters translate observed actions into numerical data (see Furr et al., 2009). Coding systems vary on whether chosen dimensions are more behavioral (e.g., eye blinks and head nods) or psychological (e.g., appears nervous, has an autocratic leadership style). Rigid behavioral coding can be problematic, as diverse psychological states (e.g., anger, boredom, and anxiety) can lead to the same outward behavior (e.g., leaving the room). Furthermore, raters can make reliable and consensual inferences about abstract psychological states that provide better utility than strict behavioral coding when investigating psychological constructs (Borkenau, Mauer, Riemann, Spinath, & Angleitner, 2004; Furr et al., 2009). Furthermore, Gottman, Markman, and Notarius (1977) recommended coding at a level of analysis slightly more molecular than the construct of interest (i.e., coding theoretically informed markers of the target construct).

Therefore, to improve the observation of humility-relevant behavior, we propose five *humility hallmarks*. Our working definition of a hallmark (i.e., marker or indicator) of humility falls between definitions of humility and modesty. We propose that humility hallmarks indicate (but not necessarily comprise) the "true" inner state of humility. An ideal hallmark also resists intentional deception or social desirability, resides extremely close to the inner state, and co-occurs with it often enough to serve as a reliable indicator of the "real thing".

Modesty is a culturally bound style of expressing moderate estimations – even underestimations – of one's skills and abilities (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Sedikides, Gregg, & Hart, 2007; Tangney, 2000). Hallmarks of humility may also have behavioral overtones that overlap with cultural norms (e.g., treating others as equals), and cultural insiders may have an edge in their interpretation. However, we hypothesize that hallmarks of humility are relatively more generalized and cross-cultural, whereas norms (such as those for modesty) represent specific, concrete social rules. For example, an observer may note the target's modest behaviors, such as dressing conservatively (e.g., Thomas, 1899) and refusing to "name-drop" one's influential friends (Bohra & Pandey, 1984), but whether such behaviors indicate the presence of humility, however, require raters to make a broader judgment. In addition, we theorize that a hallmark could actually conflict with a cultural norm. For example, a humble donor who is wealthy may violate a norm of anonymity out of a sincere, other-focused desire to inspire more charitable giving (e.g., Warren Buffett), while another may keep charitable activities private out of a desire to avoid excessive and unwanted attention (e.g., Chuck Feeney). Although specific behaviors and choices may vary, both could be motivated by the same stable self-image and sincere interest in the welfare of others.

The humility hallmarks we propose below meet two other criteria. First, a complete lack of the hallmark should disqualify one from possessing humility. Each marker is necessary, but not sufficient, to indicate "true" humility. In other words, although humility can be

measured on a continuum, we have difficulty imagining that any individual would be seen as humble while being markedly low on any one of the hallmarks.

Second, a hallmark should discriminate humility from its conceptual foils of hubristic pride (i.e., narcissism and arrogance) and self-hatred (i.e., depression and low self-esteem). For example, high self-esteem by itself cannot be a marker of humility as it fails to discriminate between the well-adjusted and the narcissistic. For each hallmark, we briefly discuss theoretical and empirical evidence that supports its importance and discriminant validity.

Conceptualizations of humility straddle two broad domains – emphasizing personal or relational qualities. Theorists' definition of humility as "accurate self-knowledge" is an example of a primarily personal definition (Allport, 1937; Richards, 1992). Others emphasize humility's role in relating to others (Davis et al., 2010; Tangney, 2000). The five indicators of humility proposed here relate to both of these broad domains. Specifically, we propose that humble people exhibit a secure, accepting identity, freedom from distortion, openness to new information, other-focus, and egalitarian beliefs. We then survey the theoretical evidence supporting each hallmark's link to humility, and how each hallmark aids in discriminating between adaptive and maladaptive self-regard. We also discuss prior empirical findings on the function and outcomes of each hallmark (where such evidence exists) and other psychological constructs that are conceptually similar.

Personal Hallmarks

Secure, accepting identity

Having humility means one has a calm, accepting self-concept that is not hypersensitive to ego threats (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Tangney, 2000). Sizable bodies of literature on self-esteem, narcissism, and other self-relevant constructs support the proposition that individuals with stable identities flourish. Although psychologists disagree on remedies, most consider low self-esteem – especially of the chronic variety – to be undesirable and maladaptive (see DuBois & Tevendale, 1999, for a review). Individuals with low self-esteem show stronger negative reactions to failure than do high self-esteem individuals (Brown & Dutton, 1995). Low self-esteem correlates with more delinquency and more of a tendency to externalize problems (Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt & Caspi, 2005). In children, some studies find links between low self-esteem and aggression (Cole, Chan, & Lytton, 1989; McCarthy & Hoge, 1984; for alternative interpretations, however, see Baumeister, Bushman, & Campbell, 2000; Bushman et al., 2009).

One's self-esteem stability may be as important as its overall level (Kernis, 2005; Kernis, Cornell, Chien-Ru, Berry, & Harlow, 1993). In a daily diary article, college students with more variability in self-esteem reported the highest levels of anger and hostility (Kernis, 2005). In another article, variability in self-esteem predicted vulnerability to depression after negative life events (Tennen & Affleck, 1993). Instability and hypersensitivity to ego threats is a classic correlate of narcissism (Rhodewalt, Madrian, & Cheney, 1998; Stucke & Sporer, 2002). Narcissists also demonstrate greater reactivity to failure experiences than do non-narcissists (Zeigler-Hill, Myers, & Clark, 2010). Narcissists exhibit competitiveness in repeated efforts to bolster themselves and react with anger (McCann & Biaggio, 1989), hostility (Hart & Joubert, 1996), and aggression when their ego is threatened (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998).

At the opposite end of the spectrum, ego stability is reflected in a wide variety of self-oriented psychological constructs and theories, including hypo-egoic states, self-affirmation theory, self-construal abstractness, self-concept clarity, and self-compassion. A hypo-egoic state,

for example, consists of relatively little ego investment, as well as moment–to–moment thoughts that are more specific than global, and therefore less threatening (Leary & Guadagno, 2011).

Self-construal abstractness (SCA) is the degree to which individuals' self-relevant beliefs express flexibility and abstractness, rather than specificity and concreteness (Updegraff, Emanuel, Suh, & Gallagher, 2010). Because abstract self-relevant thoughts do not depend on particular outcomes, one's self-esteem can remain relatively intact through the daily vicissitudes of life. Research reveals that SCA is positively correlated with well-being and life satisfaction (Updegraff & Suh, 2007), and in daily diary articles, SCA buffers against negative life events (Updegraff et al., 2010).

Another related concept, self-concept clarity (SCC) is the degree to which self-relevant beliefs are clearly defined, internally consistent, and stable (Campbell et al., 1996). High SCC means knowing yourself with certainty, and SCC is also positively correlated with self-esteem. A confused and fuzzy self-concept is associated with more concern about the evaluations of others and a tendency to ruminate about oneself (Campbell et al., 1996). In articles of aggression, individuals who were narcissistic and had low SCC were more likely to feel negative emotions and display aggression after failure (Stucke & Sporer, 2002).

Another highly relevant operationalization of stable self-regard is self-compassion, which is a Buddhist-inspired construct characterized by an accepting self-concept, relatively less concern with social comparisons and self-evaluation, and a focus on embracing the present here and now (Neff & Vonk, 2009). In this conceptualization, one can be aware of one's weaknesses and deficiencies, but these thoughts do not cause excessive distress because they are seen in the light of humanity's shared struggles and imperfections. Self-compassion is associated with more consistent levels of self-esteem over time and higher well-being, life satisfaction, emotional intelligence, and feelings of connectedness (Neely, Schallert, Mohammed, Roberts, & Chen, 2009; Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007; Neff & Vonk, 2009). Self-compassion helps buffer against negative life events, both real and imagined, as well as reducing negative emotions following ambiguous feedback (Leary, Tate, Adams, Allen, & Hancock, 2007). In another article, when participants faced an ego threat, practicing self-compassion reduced their anxiety (Neff, Kirkpatrick, et al., 2007).

In sum, we argue that a stable and accepting self-concept is a key indicator of humility and helps distinguish it from narcissism and depression. Although this aspect of humility has not been examined in many research articles, various ego-related constructs conceptually resemble humility and may explain how it develops.

Freedom from distortion

A second proposed marker of humility is an ability to accurately manage self-relevant information (Tangney, 2000). Humble people can perceive themselves and others clearly, without the need to exaggerate information in either a self-enhancing or self-debasing direction (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Tangney, 2000). Humble people can reflect and consider both their strengths and weaknesses and accept responsibility for their mistakes (Tangney, 2000). They are cognizant of their limitations – what they can do and what they can know (Templeton, 1998). As a contrast, narcissists tend to make gross, positive distortions, inflating their accomplishments, overlooking flaws, and blaming others for failures, whereas de-pressed individuals overemphasize negative information or manufacture it from ambiguous data.

As evidence for the relationship between humility and honest admission of weaknesses and imperfections, the Honesty–Humility subscale of the HEXACO Personality Inventory (Lee & Ashton, 2004) has been found to predict overt integrity in workplace domains, as

measured by honest admissions of specific kinds of prior indiscretions (Lee, Ashton, Morrison, Cordery, & Dunlop, 2008). High Honesty–Humility has also been associated with less self-enhancement in an international sample (Lee, Ashton, Ogunfowora, Bourdage, & Shin, 2010). Individuals high in self-compassion took more personal responsibility for past negative life events and while recalling them, reported less distress and lower negative affect (Leary et al., 2007).

Psychological research abounds with evidence of widespread distortion of self-relevant information. Even among well-adjusted individuals, self-enhancement is common (Sedikides & Gregg, 2008). For example, many people believe they are better than average even after evidence to the contrary (e.g., persisting in the belief, one is a better driver after an accident requiring hospitalization) or that they control events that occur randomly (Sedikides & Gregg, 2008; Weinstein, 1980). Many individuals display self-serving biases, such as taking credit for accomplishments but blaming others for failures (Harvey & Weary, 1984; Snyder, Stephan, & Rosenfield, 1976) or making causal attributions to position themselves in the best possible light.

Although general self-enhancement is common, it has drawbacks, even among normal individuals. For example, a longitudinal paper examining the accuracy of self and other perception revealed that positive distortion (i.e., the self is seen more positively by self than others) is associated with poorer social skills and psychological maladjustment both 5 years earlier and later (Colvin, Block, & Funder, 1995; however, see Taylor & Brown, 1988, for an alternative perspective).

Some individuals display an excessive amount of self-enhancement that can be maladaptive. For example, hallmarks of narcissism include grandiosity and gross distortion of reality (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Gabriel, Critelli, & Ee, 1994; Gosling, John, Craik, & Robins, 1998). In an article of interpersonal sensitivity, most people overestimated their own ability, but narcissists more so than others (Ames & Kammrath, 2004). Furthermore, in an investigation of self-perception biases (John & Robbins, 1994), approximately half of the sample was reasonably accurate in their judgments. About 35% of participants, however, demonstrated unrealistically positive biases. Indeed, the effect of narcissism on positive distortion was far stronger than the general self-enhancement bias.

More evidence for this hallmark comes from research linking negative distortion to depression. For example, clinicians and researchers identify excessively and unrealistically negative thoughts about the self, the future, and the world as markers of depression (Alloy et al., 1999; American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1987). In children, depressive symptoms predict a negative bias when judging peer acceptance (Kistner, David-Ferdon, Repper, & Joiner, 2006).

Openness to new information

Humble people remain open to discovering new insights about themselves and the world (Tangney, 2000). The humble are teachable (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Tangney, 2000; Templeton, 1998), and they seek the truth, even when it may be personally embarrassing or unflattering. Humility may aid in various kinds of intellectual pursuits and have conscious metacognitive undertones (e.g., awareness of the fallibility of one's knowledge; Thrive Center for Human Development, 2013).

A humble state may make one more open to otherwise ego-threatening information. A fortified ego arising from the practice of self-affirmation (i.e., affirming one's most important personal values) has been shown to diminish overly partisan thinking (Cohen, Aronson, &

Steele, 2000), heightening the ability to analyze issues according to their merits (Correll, Spencer, & Zanna, 2004). Furthermore, high self-compassion is associated with less need for cognitive closure and more reflective wisdom, curiosity, initiative, and exploration (Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007; Neff & Vonk, 2009). Conversely, unstable self-esteem in children is associated with less curiosity and interest in school activities and less interest in challenging activities (Waschull & Kernis, 1996).

To the degree to which humility moderates negative feelings, humble people should be better able to receive negative feedback and grow from it. A positive mood, for example, allows deeper processing of negative self-relevant information (Reed & Aspinwall, 1998). Humility, by removing self-concerns from the equation, may lead to superior academic outcomes. In research on learning, for example, taking a "deep" approach (i.e., seeking to fully understand the material) that is driven by intrinsic motivation is associated with better academic performance than taking a "surface" approach (i.e., rote memorization of facts) that may be motivated by a fear of failure (Diseth, 2003). Worrying about the implications of negative outcomes leads to stress and anxiety, both of which can interfere with learning and recall (de Quervain, Roozendaal, Nitsch, McGaugh, & Hock, 2000; Vedhara, Hyde, Gilchrist, Tytherleigh, & Plummer, 2000). Also, stress can interfere with the decision making and performance, especially on difficult tasks requiring a high degree of concentration (Steele, 1997; Stone, 2002).

Humility may enhance the ability to learn from others who are different or to analyze alternative viewpoints. For example, high self-enhancement is linked to more in-group favoritism and social categorization, two domains that relate to prejudice (Stangor & Thompson, 2002). Narcissists have difficulty learning from others whom they judge as less intelligent than themselves, and they do not readily acknowledge being in a state of ignorance (Beck, Freeman, & Davis, 2006) or may simply be uninterested in any activity that does not offer opportunities to impress others (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002).

Relational Hallmarks

Other-focus

A fourth marker of humility is a lack of self-focus and increased awareness of and appreciation for others (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Tangney, 2000). C. S. Lewis defines humility as "not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less". Humble individuals' freedom from the need to bolster their own ego allows them to be genuinely happy when others excel.

As Leary and Guadagno (2011) hypothesize, humble states indicate less self-awareness, as well as self-relevant thoughts that unite rather than divide from others. Humility is related to a number of positive social outcomes, which relate to empathy or sympathy. For example, Honesty–Humility scores have been shown to be a significant predictor of a job performance in caregiving roles with challenging clients (Johnson, Rowatt, & Petrini, 2011) to correlate with various measures of forgiveness (Shepherd & Belicki, 2008). Humility is positively correlated with helpfulness even after controlling for agreeableness (LaBouff et al., 2012) and predicts both self-reported and behavioral generosity (Exline & Hill, 2012). Finally, other-focused emotions, such as gratitude, can facilitate humility in the moment, and in a daily diary article, today's gratitude predicted tomorrow's humility over and above today's humility (Kruse et al., 2013).

By contrast, excessive self-focus is a hallmark of mental distress and disorder (Ingram, 1990; Musson & Alloy, 1988; Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008). Depressed individuals ruminate on their failures and mistakes and see themselves as inferior (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008; Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987). Rumination about the self, which is associated with

depression, has been shown to be maladaptive and to impair interpersonal problem solving and social relationships (e.g., Lyubomirsky & Tkach, 2004; Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008), as well as perspective taking (Joireman, Parrott, & Hammersla, 2002).

Likewise, the ability to attend to others and forget oneself differentiates the humble from the narcissistic. Narcissists have difficulties with many aspects of maintaining healthy relationships and exhibit less empathy, caring, and commitment (Campbell, 1999; Campbell, Foster, & Finkel, 2002; Watson, Grisham, Trotter, & Biderman, 1984; Watson & Morris, 1991). Narcissists focus on their own needs and tend to be instrumentalists in relationships, using others as disposable commodities for their own purposes. Bragging, a common trait of narcissists, is widely disliked by others (Godfrey, Jones, & Lord 1986; Leary, Bednarski, Hammon, & Duncan, 1997), and narcissists find expressing gratitude as difficult (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001). The exploitative/entitlement dimension of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory is associated with less social responsibility and more interpersonal duress (Watson & Morris, 1991). Although narcissistic interpersonal styles show some short-term benefits (such as impressing others), these benefits erode the longer the social interaction continues (Paulhus, 1998).

Egalitarian beliefs

Samuel Johnson warned that "he that overvalues himself will undervalue others". A fifth hallmark of humility is seeing others as having the same intrinsic value and importance as oneself (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Tangney, 2000). Although empathy is considered an emotion (Batson, Fultz, & Schoenrade, 1987), egalitarianism is primarily cognitive – focusing on one's beliefs about oneself, others, and the larger world.

Individuals high in Honesty–Humility treat competitors more fairly when sharing resources in an economic game, even when circumstances permit them to take more (Hilbig & Zettler, 2009). Altogether, two of the four subscales in Honesty–Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to experience, Honesty–Humility directly relate to one's adherence to egalitarianism. Approval of inequalities among social groups in status, wealth, and power is associated with low Honesty–Humility (Lee et al., 2010).

A sense of superiority is another classic hallmark of narcissism (Baumeister et al., 2000). Narcissists perceive themselves as better than other people in agentic domains, such as intelligence and extraversion (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002), seek to dominate others (Emmons, 1984), exploit others in economic games (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004), and forgive less (Sandage, Worthington, Hight, & Berry, 2000).

Future directions

Although these hallmarks of humility can aid researchers in gathering reliable personality ratings, poor designs can still keep noble research efforts from being as successful or as persuasive as they could otherwise be. Accordingly, we offer two recommendations to add further methodological rigor to the articles on humility. First, investigators should strive to avoid common method biases among humility measures, antecedents, and outcomes. Although psychology has historically leaned heavily on self-reports (Baumeister, Vohs, & Funder, 2007), researchers studying humility in particular must exercise caution, doing so until such self-reported measures have been validated with credible criterion variables. For the same reasons, relying exclusively on other-reports is equally problematic (e.g., Davis et al., 2011, 2012, Article 1). At

least initially, a new measure of humility is best validated with a combination of self-reports and other-reports. A recent exemplar of using self-reports and other-reports is a laboratory paper of small groups that compared self-reports with other-rated humility and other-rated humility with self-reports of attachment style and neuroticism (Davis et al., 2012, Article 2). More of these kinds of studies will help establish that researchers are indeed measuring the phenomena they intend to measure and not an artifact of common methods.

Second, we recommend the use of multiple informants to demonstrate that observers are actually agreeing. Although most individuals have favorable views of humility (Exline & Geyer, 2004), they may hold one of at least two widely divergent opinions on what it actually is (see Tangney, 2000, for a review). The Oxford English Dictionary presents a "low" view of humility: having or exhibiting a low view of oneself (Tangney, 2000). However, a "high" view of humility, which is described by writers, theologians, and philosophers, holds that it is the forgetting of oneself (among other aspects). Of these two competing definitions, the high version of humility is the psychological construct that researchers least understand and offers the most potential mental health benefits. Conversely, the low kind of humility is likely subsumed by extant research on depression and low self-esteem and should have undesirable outcomes.

Participants' differing conceptions (and misconceptions) of humility might not be apparent if researchers employ one rater per target. For example, in one article, participants asked to remember a "humbling" experience recalled two distinctly different types of situations (e.g., stargazing versus an embarrassing failure), and these differences appeared to mediate their willingness to forgive (Exline, 2008; Exline & Zell, 2008). As this article suggests, without explicit guidance, individuals may conflate humbling and humiliating experiences, which are conceptually distinct. Humiliation involves actual or perceived feelings of devaluation, shame, or rejection by others (e.g., Baumeister, Wotman, & Stillwell, 1993) and conceptually relates to social rejection (Williams, Forgas, & von Hippel, 2005). A single rater making judgments based on his or her own idiosyncratic perception of humility can nonetheless demonstrate high internal reliability (i.e., self-consistency). However, with multiple raters, idiosyncratic or incorrect views manifest themselves as poor inter-rater reliability. Confounded high and low conceptions of humility should also produce weak correlations with criterion variables and could thus stymie research efforts.

Practically, boosting inter-rater reliability might involve using theoretically derived components of humility in coding systems (as we have suggested above) and minimizing the actual use of the word humility (e.g., Kruse, Chancellor, & Lyubomirsky, 2013b). At least two current measuring strategies employ the term humility in the actual item text as participants make self or other evaluations (Davis et al., 2011; Rowatt et al., 2006). We strongly recommend delineating the relevant components of humility and having raters make their decisions based *only* on these identified components. Alternatively, raters can be trained to employ a particular coding strategy where terms are clearly defined, and examples are provided; and raters can be pre-screened for accuracy. Both of these recommendations are likely to aid investigators in their endeavors and increase their likelihood of success.

Conclusion

Never before have researchers been closer to making substantial progress in the scientific paper of humility. We believe the research strategies identified here will continue to be fruitful over the next decade. Also, we hope that our methodological recommendations can increase the likelihood of identifying humility's antecedents and outcomes. Although humility is a "quiet virtue", its potential to confer numerous intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits suggests that it should not be ignored.

Short Biographies

Joseph Chancellor (BA from Hardin-Simmons, MA from Pepperdine) is a doctoral candidate at the University of California, Riverside. His research interests include intentional activities that promote happiness and the benefits of developing character, such as generosity and humility.

Sonja Lyubomirsky (AB from Harvard, PhD from Stanford) is a Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Riverside and an author of *The How of Happiness* and *The Myths of Happiness*. She investigates why some people are happier than others, the benefits of happiness, and how to sustainably increase happiness.

Endnotes

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