



Holding specific views with humility: Conceptualization and measurement of specific intellectual humility[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Although significant progress has been made in the conceptualization and measurement of intellectual humility, little is known about intellectual humility with respect to specific opinions, beliefs, and positions. We offer a conceptualization of specific intellectual humility and present three studies that examine its key tenets. Study 1 developed the Specific Intellectual Humility Scale and showed that its psychometric properties are excellent and invariant across a range of specific views. Study 2 considered additional specific views, further establishing measurement invariance and providing evidence of convergent and discriminant validity. Study 3 broadened the range of specific views and revealed that intellectual humility with respect to a specific view is a complex function of dispositional intellectual humility, the extremity of the view, and the basis for the view. These findings demonstrate the value of investigating intellectual humility with respect to specific views and the usefulness of the Specific Intellectual Humility Scale.

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1. Introduction

Some people are generally inclined to view their opinions, beliefs, and positions as subject to further consideration—that is, they are intellectually humble. Yet, even those individuals are likely to have certain views that they are unwilling, or at least unlikely, to reconsider even when confronted with evidence that that they could be wrong. Conversely, intellectually arrogant people who typically are disinclined to reconsider their views may be willing to consider the possibility that they are wrong about certain topics or issues.

As a first step toward understanding the implications of intellectual humility for the adoption and change of specific opinions, beliefs, and positions, we describe the construct of *specific intellectual humility*, contrasting it conceptually and empirically with dispositional, or general, intellectual humility. The empirical work, which includes investigations of the relationships between specific intellectual humility and other constructs as well as comparisons of intellectual humility across topics and issues, makes use of a new measure of specific intellectual humility. We report findings from three studies focused on the development and validation of the Specific Intellectual Humility Scale.

1.1. Conceptualization

Elsewhere, we have articulated a definition of general intellectual humility and presented findings validating both the definition and a brief measure designed to operationally define it (Leary et al., submitted for publication). At the conceptual level, the distinction between general intellectual humility and related constructs such as dogmatism and openness is clear. Importantly, our empirical work indicates clear distinctions at the empirical level as well. Correlations with multiple measures and facets of openness are modest, as are correlations with measures of dogmatism. The construct is modestly positively correlated with epistemic curiosity and need for cognition, and modestly negatively correlated with intolerance of ambiguity and self-righteousness. Although these correlations are significant, they rarely exceed the mid-.30s in magnitude, providing empirical support for the conceptual distinction between general intellectual humility and other constructs related to the manner in which people hold opinions, express views, and consider positions other than their own.

Although general and specific intellectual humility differ in important ways, as we argue below, any definition of specific intellectual humility should follow from the definition of general intellectual humility. To that end, we define specific intellectual humility as *the recognition that a particular personal view may be fallible, accompanied by an appropriate attentiveness to limitations in the evidentiary basis of that view and to one's own limitations in obtaining and evaluating information relevant to it*. Thus, we retain the key components of fallibility, attentiveness to limitations in the bases of one's view, and one's ability to determine its veracity from the definition of general intellectual humility, but narrow the focus to a specific view held by the person. Our

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distinction between general and specific is comparable to the distinction between general self-efficacy (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) and self-efficacy with respect to specific tasks (e.g., Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998) or domains (e.g., Schunk & Pajares, 2002). It differs from distinctions between global and domain-specific variants of a construct (e.g., Marsh, 1990) in that specific intellectual humility is more than a lower-order variant of general intellectual humility as we will explain.

Whereas general intellectual humility is a characteristic of the person, specific intellectual humility likely reflects both that personal attribute and features of his or her view with respect to a specific domain, topic, or issue. Specifically, with respect to a given view, V , variability in specific intellectual humility is a function of general intellectual humility, characteristics of the person's view, and the basis for his or her view:

$$IH_V = f(\text{general IH}, V, \text{basis for } V).$$

These relations need not be linear or additive. For example, in prior work focused on religious views, we found a curvilinear relation between specific intellectual humility and one's view on religion. The more extreme respondents' position on religion, the lower their intellectual humility with reference to religion (Hopkin, Hoyle, & Toner, 2014). For reasons outlined below, this pattern might be weaker or stronger as a function of the basis for the view.

The magnitude of the relation between general intellectual humility and intellectual humility with respect to a specific view should vary as a function of the specificity of the view. At the broadest level are *domains*, which encompass a number of topics and issues related to those topics. Examples of domains are politics, religion, and education. The breadth of domains suggests that intellectual humility with respect to them should be moderately to strongly correlated with general intellectual humility. *Topics* are more specific than domains, reflecting particular concerns within domains. For example, government surveillance of citizens and voter identification are topics within the political domain. Although, in the abstract, topics usually are nested within a single domain, for some individuals they might be nested in a second or third domain. For example, the topic of core curriculum logically fits within the education domain but, for some individuals, reflects political or religious positions. Due to increased specificity of topics compared to the breadth of domains, intellectual humility for most topics should be no more than moderately correlated with general intellectual humility. Finally, at the most specific level are *issues*, which are particular concerns related to a topic. For instance, issues related to the topic of government surveillance of citizens are tracking of phone records and behavioral scanning of airline passengers. Given the various motives and experiences that contribute to an individual's position on a particular issue, we might expect weak correlations between general intellectual humility and intellectual humility with respect to issues. To test such hypotheses, a measure of specific intellectual humility is needed that allows for meaningful and equivalent measurement across these levels of specificity. Such a measure also allows us to examine ways in which the features of people's specific views relate to the degree to which they hold those views with humility.

One such feature is the basis or source of one's view with respect to a domain, topic, or issue. The potential bases of opinions, beliefs, and positions are many, and it is unlikely that any particular view has a single basis. Moreover, there is no clear work on which to draw for a list of potentially relevant bases for views in the broad sense. The best empirical evidence relevant to bases of views concerns attitudes, which originate from a range of sources including direct experience (Fazio & Zanna, 1981), persuasive appeals (Lodish et al., 1995), classical conditioning (Walther, 2002), and genetics (Olson, Venon, Harris, & Jang, 2001). These bases likely influence specific views, but others related specifically to knowledge and understanding with respect to views such as common sense, anecdotal evidence, and careful reasoning

might apply as well. We consider different bases of views as they relate to different domains, topics, and issues in Study 3.

1.2. Measurement

Historically a topic of study by philosophers and theologians interested in the intellectual virtues (e.g. Gregg & Mahadevan, 2014, Roberts & Wood, 2003), intellectual humility has recently begun to draw attention from behavioral scientists (e.g. Hopkin et al., 2014, McElroy et al., 2014). Early work in this nascent literature has focused primarily on measurement, resulting in several measures of general intellectual humility (Krumrei-Mancuso & Rouse, 2016; Leary et al., submitted for publication; McElroy et al., 2014; cf. Meagher, Leman, Bias, Latendresse, & Rowatt, 2015), each offering a different perspective on the construct. Although these measures have held up well to psychometric scrutiny and provide a solid foundation for empirical research on intellectual humility at a general level, none offers insight into the degree to which an individual holds a *particular* opinion, belief, or position with humility. A measure of specific intellectual humility would complement measures of general intellectual humility by allowing for investigations of the implications of intellectual humility or arrogance for specific views. It might also improve prediction of specific actions and reactions (e.g., response to a statement that raises question about one's position on a specific issue) by allowing for specificity matching of predictor and outcome (Hoyle & Leary, 2009).

The lone published study of specific intellectual humility made use of an ad hoc measure focused on the religion domain (Hopkin et al., 2014). The measure was not based on an explicit measure of the construct, focusing instead on the ways in which intellectual humility in the religious domain should manifest in cognition and behavior. Factor-analysis derived subscales included awareness of the fallibility of beliefs, discretion in asserting beliefs, comfort keeping beliefs private, and respect for others' beliefs. Only the first factor corresponds to our conceptualization of the construct and, importantly, the measure used by Hopkin et al. is not adaptable for use in research on other domains, topics, or issues. Nonetheless, the findings highlight the value of focusing on intellectual humility at the specific level, showing that people high in intellectual humility regarding their religious beliefs react less strongly to others' opinions about religious beliefs and that people at either extreme on religious beliefs are less intellectually humble regarding those beliefs.

1.3. Present research

Given the potential value of a validated measure of specific intellectual humility for investigations focused on specific opinions, beliefs, and positions, we aimed to develop and validate a self-report measure of the construct. Because data on specific views often are collected in surveys that do not allow for lengthy measures, our goal was a relatively brief measure. We also aimed to develop a measure that, while reflecting the three components of our conceptualization, generates a single specific intellectual humility score for a given view. The most significant challenge was the development of items that could be adapted for any domain, topic, or issue both in terms of item wording and measurement equivalence. Motivated by these aims, we conducted three studies to develop and validate the Specific Intellectual Humility Scale.

2. Study 1

Our initial efforts focused on the generation of candidate items from which a small set could, through rigorous psychometric analyses, be identified as a candidate measure of the specific intellectual humility construct. In addition to typical psychometric analyses such as factor analysis and reliability analysis, we evaluated measurement equivalence across domains and topics using confirmatory factor analysis.

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