Honesty and Humility

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Abstract

Based on recent lexical studies across various languages, Honesty-Humility has been suggested as a sixth basic factor of personality. Specifically, according to the HEXACO Model of Personality, Honesty-Humility represents individual differences in active cooperativeness – operationalized via the facets sincerity, fairness, greed avoidance, and modesty. Herein, research corroborating Honesty-Humility as a basic personality factor is summarized and supplemented with an overview of the broad array of criteria this factor has been shown to influence. In addition, we briefly touch on aspects that are still understudied concerning Honesty-Humility, especially in terms of its biological basis, development, and broader societal consequences.

The personality factor named Honesty-Humility is defined as "the tendency to be fair and genuine in dealing with others, in the sense of cooperating with others even when one might exploit them without suffering retaliation" (Ashton and Lee, 2007: p. 156). Correspondingly, Honesty-Humility encompasses attributes such as being fair-minded, honest, modest, and sincere as opposed to being boastful, deceitful, greedy, and hypocritical (Ashton and Lee, 2008a). According to the HEXACO Model of Personality (Ashton and Lee, 2007), Honesty-Humility represents one of the (six) basic dimensions of personality, subsuming aspects of reciprocal altruism in terms of active cooperation. As such, Honesty-Humility has not only been considered an important construct for personality psychology, but also, more generally, for many socially important criteria (e.g., Ashton and Lee, 2008b; Dunlop et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2013). Herein, we describe the recovery of Honesty-Humility as a core personality factor, its theoretical and empirical background, various aspects it has been linked to, potential future directions, and (un)solved methodological issues.

Theoretical and Empirical Background

The recovery of Honesty-Humility as a basic personality factor can be traced to several recent lexical studies performed across different languages and cultures. The underlying reasoning behind lexical studies is that aspects of individual differences are communicated about, thereby becoming part of everyday language, and are thus ultimately included in dictionaries. In lexical studies, researchers present lists of personality-descriptive words (typically adjectives) drawn from dictionaries to participants who rate the extent to which they (or close acquaintances) possess these attributes. Data from large samples are then (factor) analyzed, resulting in a relatively small set of mostly unrelated factors that summarize a wide range of individual differences.

In recent years, findings from lexical studies across more than 10 languages – including Croatian, Dutch, English, Filipino, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Korean, Polish, and Turkish – have suggested that personality might best be described by six factors (e.g., Lee and Ashton, 2008), resulting in the HEXACO Model of Personality. Honesty-Humility is one of these six factors alongside Emotionality, eXtraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to experience. Note that findings from earlier lexical studies have often been considered support for the Five-Factor Model of Personality, and the remaining five factors of the HEXACO model are similar to these in content. At closer inspection, however, some of these earlier studies described a factor that can be interpreted as Honesty-Humility, though it was typically not considered a fully-fledged factor in its own right (for an overview, see Ashton and Lee, 2001). Also, early (English) lexical studies, which served as the primary basis for the original Five-Factor Model, were typically limited in terms of how many items (adjectives) could be considered, thus providing less precise factor solutions (cf e.g., Lee and Ashton, 2008).

Importantly, lexical studies merely provide a condensed descriptive simplification and grouping of personality-descriptive adjectives. As such, they do not inherently yield a theoretical account of basic personality. However, beyond the mere lexical findings, the HEXACO model (Ashton and Lee, 2007; Ashton et al., 2014) does encompass theoretical reasoning for why and how its six dimensions make up the core dimensions of personality. More precisely, drawing connections to evolutionary biology, Honesty-Humility, Agreeableness, and Emotionality are suggested to represent aspects of altruism, namely active reciprocal altruism (Honesty-Humility), reactive reciprocal altruism (Agreeableness), and kin altruism (Emotionality). The three other factors, in turn, are taken to represent engagement or endeavor with regard to socially related (Extraversion), task-related (Conscientiousness), and idea-related (Openness to experience) areas.

Correspondingly, Honesty-Humility reflects a blend of characteristics, which contribute to (long-term) mutual cooperation as opposed to actively exploiting others. In this vein, Lee and Ashton (2004) operationalized Honesty-Humility as comprising the facets of Sincerity ("a tendency to be genuine in interpersonal relations"), Fairness ("a tendency to avoid fraud and corruption"), Greed Avoidance ("a tendency to be

uninterested in possessing lavish wealth, luxury goods, and signs of high social status"), and Modesty ("a tendency to be modest and unassuming," all p. 334). Unlike Agreeableness (comprising the facets Forgivingness, Gentleness, Flexibility, and Patience), Honesty-Humility refers to how people typically behave when they can actively shape cooperation (nonexploitation). Agreeableness, on the other hand, refers to how people react to (perceived) exploitation, that is, their tendency to forgive or retaliate.

Summarizing thus far, Honesty-Humility has been recovered as a basic dimension in several lexical studies across different languages, linked theoretically to established concepts from evolutionary biology, and proposed to play an important role for various social criteria – especially in the realm of behaviors reflecting active cooperation. Next, we provide an overview of research testing these conjectures, i.e., (1) that Honesty-Humility represents a core personality factor, and (2) that it accounts for cooperation in terms of active reciprocal altruism.

A Basic Personality Dimension Explaining Active Cooperation?

The claim that Honesty-Humility represents a core personality dimension has been examined in several investigations. In particular, its relation to established personality attributes – especially those typically thought to lie outside of the range captured by the Big Five – has been examined. For instance, Honesty-Humility has been consistently associated with constructs of the 'Dark Triad,' i.e., Machiavellianism (a personality construct capturing attributes such as being deceitful, ruthless, and self-centered), narcissism (a personality construct capturing attributes such as grandiosity, entitlement, and feeling superior to others), and psychopathy (a personality construct capturing attributes such as having a lack of empathy, a parasitic lifestyle, or high impulsivity). Quite irrespective of whether self- and/or observer-reports are relied on, correlations between Honesty-Humility and the Dark Triad constructs are typically between $r \approx -0.40$ and $r \approx -0.70$, and Honesty-Humility has been found to explain unique variance in the prediction of the Dark Triad constructs beyond the Big Five (Lee and Ashton, 2014; Lee et al., 2013). A similar pattern has emerged for relations between Honesty-Humility and other traits that are not fully accounted for within the Big Five space, for instance attributes of Paunonen's Supernumerary Personality Inventory (Lee et al., 2005) or egoism (De Vries et al., 2009). So, Honesty-Humility has been found to broadly and uniquely cover several aspects of the personality space, thus confirming the implication of lexical findings that it represents a basic dimension of personality.

Concerning the core theoretical notion that Honesty-Humility essentially relates to active reciprocal altruism, a series of critical tests can be highlighted. Specifically, Honesty-Humility was shown to predict dictator game giving (e.g., Hilbig and Zettler, 2009), contributions to public goods (Hilbig et al., 2012), choice of the cooperative option in prisoner dilemmas (Zettler et al., 2013), and the willingness to maximize joint outcomes (at some personal cost) in the framework of social value orientations (e.g., Hilbig et al., 2014). As such, Honesty-Humility predicted both self-reported and actual active

cooperation, typically yielding small- to medium-sized effects. Also, Honesty-Humility repeatedly accounted for incremental variance beyond the other basic factors (either in terms of the Five Factor or the HEXACO model) and was by far the strongest – and in several cases the only – predictor. In addition, recent investigations (e.g., Hilbig et al., 2013a) tested the theoretical distinction between Honesty-Humility (active cooperation) and Agreeableness (reactive cooperation) according to the HEXACO model, and found empirical support for the dissociation of these factors.

Honesty-Humility and Life Outcomes

Although Honesty-Humility was introduced relatively recently, it has been investigated with increasing frequency – spanning broad areas of interest. Herein, we will roughly sketch the most dominant of these research streams, namely sex-, money-, and power-related variables, deviant behavior and crime, as well as sociopolitical attitudes.

Based directly on links between Honesty-Humility and Machiavellianism, narcissism, and exploitativeness, Honesty-Humility has also been found to be negatively associated with selfish tendencies in a broader sense. For instance, a study by Lee et al. (2013; for similar results, see e.g., Ashton and Lee, 2008b) found that people low in Honesty-Humility showed more selfish tendencies concerning sex, money, and power. More precisely, across self- and peer-reports, Honesty-Humility was negatively related to a sex-related measure encompassing short-term mating orientation and behavior, a ludus love style, and the tendency for sexual quid pro quo. Also, Honesty-Humility accounted for a money-related measure capturing conspicuous consumption and materialism as well as for a power-related measure comprising a desire for power and social dominance orientation (i.e., the tendency to endorse social hierarchy and inequality). In the analyses, Honesty-Humility was typically the strongest predictor as compared to the other five factors of the HEXACO model, to the Big Five measured via corresponding inventories, or to composite measures of the Dark Triad constructs. Thus, extending the findings outlined above, Honesty-Humility appears to impact a broader set of selfish, egoistic, or self-centered tendencies and behaviors that are of societal interest.

Another fruitful research stream has linked Honesty-Humility to counterproductive activities, deviant behavior, and crime. Since low Honesty-Humility entails one's pull toward prestige, high social status, or luxury goods, a link between this trait and individuals' willingness to engage in criminal or deviant behavior (in order to reach these aims) is typically expected. Correspondingly, across different countries and across a variety of samples including students, employees, and community samples, individuals high in Honesty-Humility have been found to show less deviant or crime-related behavior subsuming fraud, theft, vandalism, alcohol, drug consumption etc. Results typically indicate medium to strong effects of Honesty-Humility, outperforming all remaining core dimensions of personality (e.g., Ashton and Lee, 2008a; Dunlop et al., 2012; Zettler and Hilbig, 2010). In a similar vein, Honesty-Humility often added incremental variance beyond variables such as self-control or integrity test scores, which have been

considered among the most important predictors of deviance-related criteria. It must be noted, however, that this line of research is consistently limited by a lack of actual behavior as the criterion and a strong reliance on *reported* behavior. Overcoming this limitation seems necessary before a final judgment on the influence of Honesty-Humility for crime-related behavior can be made, although the extant evidence is entirely theory-consistent.

Furthermore, a growing line of research has linked Honesty-Humility to social, ecological, economic, or political attitudes and behavior. For instance, Honesty-Humility has been found to be positively associated with proenvironmental attitudes and ecologically responsible behavior (Hilbig et al., 2013b). This is compatible with the notion that solving ecological issues typically requires cooperative action from an individual or group (e.g., the 2°C climate target, i.e., reducing carbon dioxide emissions to a level limiting global warming to 2°C) and/or forgoing personal luxury (e.g., refraining from heavy air conditioning). Concerning politics, Honesty-Humility has been repeatedly associated with low social dominance orientation (see above) and (in some countries) a more left-wing political orientation and corresponding voting behavior (e.g., Chirumbolo and Leone, 2010). The conceptual link at this point is arguably an unconditional cooperative orientation, also implying a preference for social equality. Relatedly, Pozzebon and Ashton (2009) found that Honesty-Humility was linked to values and corresponding behavior concerning benevolence (positively), hedonism (negatively), and power (negatively), and Lee et al. (2009) demonstrated that Honesty-Humility is the basic personality factor most strongly related to one of the two central dimensions of personal values, namely self-transcendence versus self-enhancement (whereas the other core personal value, Openness to change vs Conservation, is most strongly associated with Openness to experience). Besides such direct relations, the notion that Honesty-Humility relates to a central dimension of personal values is further supported by the finding that people overestimate the similarity between themselves and close acquaintances particularly in terms of Honesty-Humility and Openness to experience, but not on other basic factors. This could be taken to imply that people emphasize similarity in characteristics associated with Honesty-Humility and Openness to experience as these most strongly correspond to important values for one's identity (Lee et al., 2009). Overall, alongside Openness to experience, Honesty-Humility has been established as the basic personality factor associated most strongly with ecological, political, and morality-related values, attitudes, and behavior.

Beyond the research summarized herein, other investigations have successfully linked Honesty-Humility to a broad range of variables in the realm of personality disorder traits (e.g., Antagonism), risk taking and sensation seeking (e.g., ethical risk taking), religiousness, creativity, and other domains – a continuously updated list of published articles concerning the HEXACO model in general and Honesty-Humility in particular can be found at www.hexaco.org.

Interaction with Situations

Beyond such 'main effects' of Honesty-Humility on the Dark Triad constructs, crime, sociopolitical attitudes etc., several studies have also attempted to place Honesty-Humility into the broader framework of person–situation interaction. Indeed, apart from general notions contending that behavior will always result from an interplay between person and situation factors, the definition of Honesty-Humility itself explicitly entails a corresponding prediction: Ashton and Lee (2007) described Honesty-Humility as the tendency for fairness and cooperation "*even when* one might exploit [others] without suffering retaliation" (p. 156, emphasis added). In other words, people high in Honesty-Humility are expected to show cooperative behavior irrespective of whether or not the situation would allow them to exploit others. Those low in Honesty-Humility, by contrast, should, by implication, exploit others if and only if this is possible without running the risk of retaliation or other negative consequences. As a core methodological strength, Honesty-Humility is thus defined in a way that allows for experimental tests.

In one early straightforward test of the hypothesized person–situation interaction, Hilbig and Zettler (2009) asked participants to allocate goods (100 points) between themselves and another person in both the dictator and the ultimatum game. Importantly, in the dictator game the other person has no power over the offer, that is, she or he has to accept it (even if the 'offer' is zero, i.e., the dictator keeps everything). In the ultimatum game, on the other hand, the other person may reject the offer in which case neither of the participants receives any payoff at all. So, in the latter case, attempted exploitation (by the allocator) may be met with retaliation (by the recipient). Hilbig and Zettler (2009) found an interaction between Honesty-Humility and this situational manipulation (dictator vs ultimatum game) in line with the definition of Honesty-Humility: Those high in Honesty-Humility allocated a fair amount of goods to the recipient in both conditions, whereas those low in Honesty-Humility were selfish in the dictator game (in which they did not need to fear retaliation), but shifted toward a fair offer in the ultimatum game.

A similar pattern of interaction has been found with regard to two social dilemmas, namely, public goods and prisoner's dilemma. Concerning the public goods dilemma, Hilbig et al. (2012) manipulated the anonymity and presence versus absence of potential punishment for free-riding, and found that those high in Honesty-Humility, once again, contributed substantially to the pubic goods quite irrespective of this manipulation. Those low in Honesty-Humility, in turn, increased their contributions strategically only if potential punishment for free-riding was introduced. In the prisoner's dilemma, Zettler et al. (2013) manipulated the potential benefits (and risks) of choosing the noncooperative option. Again, it was found that those high in Honesty-Humility chose the cooperative option relatively irrespective of how attractive (and nonrisky) defection was, whereas those low in Honesty-Humility conditioned their decision on such incentives for defection (cooperating if and only if defection was not very tempting and rather risky).

Importantly, this interaction pattern has also been found in an applied setting. In a field study with employees, Zettler and Hilbig (2010) investigated whether Honesty-Humility interacted with the situational factor of organizational politics (in simple terms, whether the work environment is characterized by self-serving activities) in bringing about counterproductive work behavior. Indeed, the results suggested a similar pattern: Those high in Honesty-Humility showed relatively little

counterproductive work behavior, again quite irrespective of the level of organizational politics in their workplace. Those low in Honesty-Humility also refrained from counterproductive work behavior whenever the level of organizational politics was low, and, in turn, when the (subjective) probability for being sanctioned for self-serving behavior was rather high; however, under high levels of organizational politics they showed substantially more counterproductive work behavior.

Methodological Issues

The most widely used measures to assess Honesty-Humility are the corresponding scales from the different versions of the HEXACO Personality Inventory-Revised (HEXACO-PI-R, Ashton and Lee, 2009; Lee and Ashton, 2004, 2006). More precisely, three versions of the HEXACO-PI-R exist, namely one version (HEXACO-60) assessing Honesty-Humility with 10 items, one version (HEXACO-100) assessing Honesty-Humility with 16 items, and one version (HEXACO-200) assessing Honesty-Humility with 32 items. The HEXACO-PI-R is available in different languages as a self- and, in several cases, an observer-report form – including Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian, Serbian, Spanish, and Turkish. Sample items for Honesty-Humility are "I wouldn't pretend to like someone just to get that person to do favors for me" (belonging to the sincerity facet), "I would never accept a bribe, even if it were very large" (belonging to the fairness facet), "Having a lot of money is not especially important to me" (belonging to the greed avoidance facet), or "I am an ordinary person who is no better than others" (belonging to the modesty facet).

Although all three versions have been found to yield good psychometric properties in general, they entail the usual trade-off between precision on the facet level and brevity. Specifically, in the HEXACO-60, each facet is represented by two or three items only. Therefore, facet scores will typically not yield satisfactory reliability. In the HEXACO-100, each facet is represented by four items, resulting in the possibility to obtain facet scores with acceptable reliability (the internal consistency estimates typically are between $\alpha \approx 0.60$ and $\alpha \approx 0.85$). In the HEXACO-200, finally, each facet is represented by eight items providing relatively robust facet-level information (internal consistency estimates typically are between $\alpha \approx 0.75$ and $\alpha \approx 0.90$).

Besides the HEXACO-PI-R, other measures assessing Honesty-Humility (or essentially identical constructs) have also been introduced, including the Questionnaire Big Six Scales (QB6; Thalmayer et al., 2011), scales derived from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP; Ashton et al., 2007), or a relatively brief measure (consisting of 24 items) of the HEXACO factors (Brief HEXACO Inventory, BHI, De Vries, 2013). These notwithstanding, most research concerning Honesty-Humility has been conducted with versions of the HEXACO-PI-R. On the one hand, this fact facilitates comparisons between research findings and fosters general conclusions about the validity of Honesty-Humility as represented by the HEXACO-PI-R (which arguably is most directly tied with the HEXACO model). On the other hand, it could also be considered a drawback because findings might

be limited to some unknown specifics of the HEXACO-PI-R. So, future research might profit from an increased use of alternative questionnaires assessing Honesty-Humility.

Also, the currently available measures are constructed for adults in particular, both in terms of wording and/or the context referred to (e.g., bribes, taxes, or the work life). As such, none allow for assessing the six HEXACO factors of (younger) children. Thus, results on the importance of Honesty-Humility are limited to adults, so far, and it could be a fruitful future direction to extend this knowledge to children and adolescents. In addition, there is a continued need for evidence based on methods other than questionnaires, e.g., direct observation of behavior, implicit attitude measures, or physiological variables to provide a broader understanding of Honesty-Humility and its nature and consequences.

A crucial aspect in the assessment of Honesty-Humility is its relation to response biases such as socially desirable responding. Indeed, given that Honesty-Humility encompasses attributes such as being sincere, honest, and loyal versus deceitful, boastful, and hypocritical (Ashton and Lee, 2008a; Lee and Ashton, 2004, 2006), Honesty-Humility can be considered a socially desirable characteristic in itself. So, one might argue that individuals scoring high in Honesty-Humility are not actually more sincere, honest, or the like but rather exhibit a stronger tendency to claim possessing such attributes – at least, when self-reports of Honesty-Humility are used. Although research on the link between Honesty-Humility and socially desirable responding is limited, so far, some conclusions can be pointed out: First off, an increasing number of findings has suggested that self- and observer-reports of Honesty-Humility are typically correlated just as strongly as self- and observer-reports of other traits, namely between $r \approx 0.50$ and $r \approx 0.60$ (e.g., Dunlop et al., 2012; Lee and Ashton, 2006). This hints that Honesty-Humility is, at best, as much affected by socially desirable responding as the other basic factors. Perhaps more importantly, a positive link between Honesty-Humility and truthful responding has been found based on observation of actual behavior (Hershfield et al., 2012). This could not be the case if (many) individuals actually low in Honesty-Humility strongly biased their answers upward and thus scored high on the scale. Likewise, this could not be the case if (many) individuals actually high in Honesty-Humility biased their answers downward due to their modesty. Similarly, those low in self-reported Honesty-Humility have been shown to be more likely to commit moral transgressions but concurrently less likely to be upfront about their wrongdoings as compared to those high in Honesty-Humility (Hilbig et al., in press). So, overall, it seems justified to conclude that (self-)reports of Honesty-Humility are valid and no more strongly affected by socially desirable responding than other factors. Nonetheless, still more fine-grained research aiming to tease apart Honesty-Humility and socially desirable responding is needed to ultimately test concerns about biases when assessing Honesty-Humility.

Future Directions

In light of the fact that Honesty-Humility has been established rather recently as a core personality dimension, it is unsurprising

that several issues will require additional attention in the next years. Here, we will suggest some potential future issues for the Honesty-Humility factor – clearly inspired by already existing preliminary hints or by corresponding research concerning other personality traits.

From an overarching perspective, research on Honesty-Humility could play a more important part in other disciplines, both within psychology and, more generally, in the social sciences. So far, most studies have been conducted through the lens of personality psychology and, though to lesser degree, with regard to ethical decisions and behavior, sociopolitical attitudes and behavior, and social-dilemma decision-making. By comparison, the Big Five are still the prime model of basic personality structure in other fields such as educational psychology, sport psychology, and clinical psychology. Nonetheless, the definition of Honesty-Humility and some of the extant empirical toe-holds indicate that this construct might also be crucial for important aspects within these fields. For instance, Honesty-Humility could predict bullying, long-term team success, or the success of interventions aiming to reduce aggressive or exploitative behavior. Thus, it seems a fruitful agenda to consider Honesty-Humility more thoroughly in other fields of psychology and beyond.

Other important aspects which are, as yet, clearly under-investigated concern the biological basis and development of Honesty-Humility. That is, the role of genetics (heredity) versus environmental influences (e.g., upbringing) for Honesty-Humility has not yet been investigated. On a related matter, the question of change over time and, if observable, its direction remains to be addressed. One might speculate, for instance, whether Honesty-Humility increases with age or whether particular contexts (e.g., one's social and/or work environment) actually influence individuals' levels of Honesty-Humility. Furthermore, research on (zero-acquaintance) personality judgments concerning Honesty-Humility is largely missing, that is, whether an individual's level in Honesty-Humility can, to some extent, be correctly inferred by strangers (as is the case for Extraversion, to name an example). Findings concerning these issues (i.e., genetics, development, and personality judgment) might further complement the existing notions on the evolutionary basis of the HEXACO model. From a methodological point of view, corresponding research would also imply a stronger reliance on different paradigms, study designs, and/or assessment methods (e.g., longitudinal investigations, twin and adoption studies).

Conclusions

Recently, Honesty-Humility has been recovered as a basic dimension of personality and research on this construct has been impressively fruitful. There is consistent support that Honesty-Humility reflects a core dimension of personality, that it uniquely predicts a broad range of behaviors which represent active cooperation, that it is related to criteria somewhat outside of the Big Five space, to deviant behavior, and/or to sociopolitical attitudes, and that it entails a specific pattern of person–situation interactions as implied by the HEXACO Model of Personality. These extant findings

notwithstanding, further investigations will be needed to establish more comprehensive knowledge on Honesty-Humility. Given the indisputable importance of Honesty-Humility for many aspects of broad societal relevance, a still deeper understanding of its determinants and development, its interplay with contextual factors, and its consequences may contribute to facing future challenges inherent in human interaction between individuals, dyads, groups, societies, and even cultures.

Acknowledgment

See also: Agreeableness; Big Five Factor Model, Theory and Structure; Conscientiousness; Cooperation and Competition; Dark Triad: The "Dark Side" of Human Personality; Factor Analysis and Latent Variable Models in Personality Psychology; Neuroticism; Openness to Experience; Personality Assessment, Faking and; Personality Assessment: Overview; Personality Assessment; Personality and Economics; Personality, Evolutionary Models of; Personality, Trait Models of; Political Psychology; Social Dilemmas, Psychology of; Social Dominance Orientation; Workplace Deviance.

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