

Humble people are more likely to lend a helping hand, study finds

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Humble people are more likely to offer time to someone in need than arrogant people are, according to findings by Baylor University researchers published online in the *Journal of Positive Psychology*.

"The findings are surprising because in nearly 30 years of research on helping behavior, very few studies have shown any effect of personality variables on helping," said lead author Jordan LaBouff, Ph.D., a lecturer in psychology at the University of Maine, who collaborated on the research while a doctoral candidate at Baylor. "The only other [personality trait](#) that has shown any effect is [agreeableness](#), but we found that humility predicted helping over and above that."

In most cases, a person's decision to help someone in need is influenced by temporary personal or situational factors such as [time pressure](#), number of [bystanders](#), momentary feelings of [empathy](#) or a person's own distress, said Wade C. Rowatt, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology and [neuroscience](#) in Baylor's College of Arts & Sciences, who led the study and co-authored the article.

"The research indicates that humility is a positive quality with potential benefits," Rowatt said. "While several factors influence whether people will volunteer to help a fellow human in need, it appears that humble people, on average, are more helpful than individuals who are egotistical or conceited."

The research involved three studies of college students:

In Study 1, participants who reported themselves as humble also generally reported that they were helpful, even when other important personality factors, such as agreeableness, were statistically controlled. Because people can easily under-report or exaggerate their humility to create a desired impression, the subsequent studies used an implicit measure of humility.

In Study 2, students evaluated a recording they were told might be broadcast later on the campus radio station. The recording described a fellow student who had injured a leg and could not attend class regularly. Each participant was asked how many hours over the next three weeks they would be willing to meet with the injured student to provide aid. Humble persons offered more time to help than less humble ones.

In Study 3, both implicit and self-report measures of humility were used. Students were asked to associate as quickly as possible traits that applied to themselves. Among stimulus words in the humility association test were humble, modest, tolerant, down to earth, respectful and open-minded. Stimulus words in the arrogance portion included arrogant, immodest, egotistical and conceited. Again, humility was associated with amount of time offered to help a student in need, especially when pressure to help was low.

"Our discovery here is that the understudied trait of humility predicts helpfulness," Rowatt said. "Important next steps will be to figure out whether humility can be cultivated and if [humility](#) is beneficial in other contexts, such as scientific and medical advancements or leadership development."

More information: www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1186/17439760.2011.626787

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