

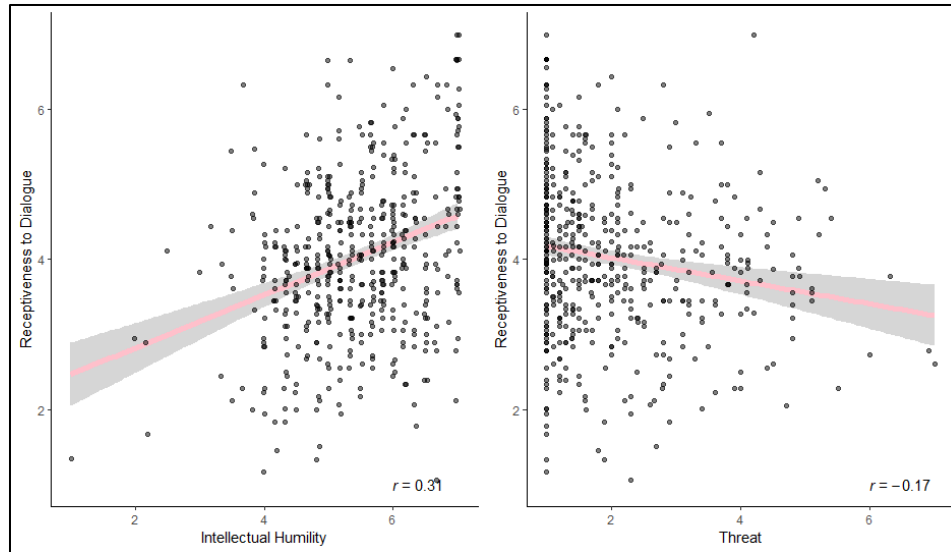
Intellectual Humility and Willingness to Engage in Discourse and Dialogue

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One effective way to reduce political hostility and polarization is for people to engage in respectful dialogue with those who hold divergent perspectives on political topics (Wojcieszak & Warner, 2020). Constructive dialogue is especially important in higher education settings where people are actively developing their political identities through interactions with peers (Strother et al., 2021). This might be particularly the case on campuses like the University of Pittsburgh, where there is diverse political opinion: approximately 30% of students from the five Pittsburgh campuses hail from rural areas of Pennsylvania that tend to be more conservative in political ideology than the larger cities (Pittwire, 2022). However, despite the importance of dialogue in higher education settings, people are often hesitant to engage in dialogue with others (Hackett et al., 2018), and dialogue around politics is often marked by closedmindedness and vitriol (e.g., Frimer et al., 2019). How can we foster constructive political dialogue on campus? We argue that intellectual humility (IH)—recognizing one’s intellectual fallibility—may offer one solution. IH predicts open-mindedness (Porter & Schumann, 2018) and greater willingness to interact with and have constructive dialogue with others about political issues (e.g., Koetke & Schumann, 2023; Sgambati & Ayduk, 2023). However, there is limited research aimed at developing interventions to enduringly increase IH and thereby foster a willingness to engage in constructive dialogue. One barrier to acknowledging one’s limitations is that it may be psychologically threatening. In the current research, we aimed to develop an intervention designed to increase IH by reducing this threat response and test the impact of this intervention on students’ willingness to engage in respectful dialogue at the University of Pittsburgh.

Study 1

In Study 1 we collected data from 500 U.S. participants from Prolific Academic who reported being in college. We asked participants to report their level of IH, feelings of threat, and their receptiveness to engaging in dialogue with people who hold opposing views. Whereas IH predicted greater receptiveness to opposing view, threat predicted less receptiveness.



Study 2

In Study 2 we aimed to build on Study 1 by targeting this psychological threat response to increase IH and receptivity to dialogue. We collected data from 181 University of Pittsburgh students. We randomly assigned participants to a threat reframing intervention (modelled off belonging interventions, Walton et al., 2017) or a control condition. In the threat reframing condition, participants read ostensible results from a survey of Pitt students on how they sometimes felt threatened encountering other views or discovering that their views might be wrong, but that the feeling of threat passed over time. Participants then read several fictitious quotations from prior students that affirmed this message. Finally, participants wrote about a time they had their beliefs challenged but learned to overcome the associated feelings of anxiety and threat. Participants in the control condition completed a matched intervention about a topic unrelated to dialogue. All participants then reported their feelings of threat, their level of IH, and their receptiveness to engaging in dialogue with opposing views.

Counter to our expectations, there was no impact of this intervention on feelings of threat or on receptiveness to dialogue. There was also a small backfire effect on reported IH, such that participants in the intervention condition reported lower levels of IH than those in the control.

We believe these unexpected results might have occurred because the reframing condition might have made salient the threat associated with encountering opposing views. Although the intervention was designed to help students reframe threat, it might have unintentionally caused students to focus on this threat and therefore temporarily express less IH.

Reflection and Next Directions

One of the challenges we faced in this line of work is effectively measuring threat. This is because people might not have conscious access to their feelings of threat to be able to accurately self-report on it. Another challenge we faced was in developing an intervention that effectively

increases IH, which is a challenge that IH scholars have been grappling with more broadly. Although unsuccessful, this line of work has contributed to our understanding of what does not work to enhance IH among college students.

Despite these difficulties, we will continue to try to increase IH and receptiveness to dialogue with follow up studies in the coming months. In particular, we aim to target a different kind of psychological pathway: norms of IH. In our prior work, we found evidence that liberals tend to report higher levels of IH than do conservatives (Koetke & Schumann, 2024). We theorized that this might be because IH and openness to dialogue might be more normative in liberal circles and might be modeled more consistently by prominent liberal politicians. In future work, we hope to test this possibility directly by presenting participants with examples of liberal and conservative politicians expressing IH and the importance of dialogue. We hypothesize that such a manipulation will increase perceptions that it is normative and positive to have IH and engage in constructive dialogue, thus increasing participants' own IH and receptiveness to engaging in dialogue with people who hold opposing political views.

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