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Theories of Wisdom and Aging

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CHAPTER 30

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What is wisdom and does it come with age as many people assume, or is it a relatively rare quality even among the older population? How do people develop wisdom throughout life and what might be its benefits in old age? Empirical evidence suggests that wisdom in old age is positively related to subjective well-being and less fear of death, even in the face of physical disability or the nearing of death (Ardelt, Landes, Gerlach, & Fox, 2013). In fact, it appears that wisdom is most beneficial for subjective well-being under conditions of adversity and stress, when external means to increase well-being are less available (Ardelt, 2005; Ardelt & Edwards, in press). Wisdom tends to provide a sense of mastery and meaning in life that sustains well-being even under adverse circumstances (Etezadi & Pushkar, 2013; Glück & Bluck, 2013).

In this chapter, we first provide a brief summary of explicit and implicit wisdom theories. After examining the relation between wisdom and age, we shed light on the contextual life-course approach to address the divergent trajectories of personal wisdom development, with focus on the importance of social support networks and role models. Last, we explore the associations among wisdom and culture, religion/spirituality, and well-being in old age.

■ THEORIES OF WISDOM

Numerous theories have been provided to define wisdom based either on the literature or personal narratives. For example, wisdom has been defined as

- Expert knowledge in the meaning and conduct of life (Baltes & Smith, 1990)
- Tacit knowledge to achieve a common good by balancing personal, interpersonal, and social interests (Sternberg, 1998)
- Understanding the deeper meaning of common knowledge (Kekes, 1983)
- Perceiving things as they really are by seeing through the illusion of wrong beliefs (McKee & Barber, 1999)
- The art of questioning (Arlin, 1990)

- The balance between knowing and doubting (Meacham, 1990)
- Expertise in dealing with the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of uncertainty (Brugman, 2000)
- The balance between emotion and detachment, action and inaction, and knowledge and doubt in dealing with life's vicissitudes (Birren & Fisher, 1990)
- The integration of cognitive reasoning with holistic, affective, and experiential knowing (Labouvie-Vief, 1990)
- The integration of cognitive, reflective, and affective/compassionate personality qualities (Ardelt, 1997; Clayton & Birren, 1980)
- The virtue that results from resolving the eighth psychosocial task of integrity versus despair in Erikson's (1982) stage model of psychosocial development
- Self-transcendence (Levenson, Jennings, Aldwin, & Shiraishi, 2005) or
- Daily decision making about, for instance, which school to apply to, which companies to work for, and which retirement fund to invest in (Hall, 2010)

Despite the various ways of defining wisdom, the central theme shared by the majority of wisdom literature is that wisdom is multidimensional and consists of cognitive, reflective, and benevolent components that are mutually interdependent and benefit the wise person, others, and society as a whole (Ferrari & Weststrate, 2013; Sternberg, 1990b; Sternberg & Jordan, 2005). In the following, we present evidence for these overarching themes and describe explicit or "expert" wisdom theories and implicit or "lay" wisdom theories in Western and Eastern cultures.

Explicit Wisdom Theories

Explicit wisdom theories have been developed by "experts" in the field with the goal of obtaining a gold standard for the utopian concept of wisdom (Baltes & Smith, 1990; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). This orientation attempts to explicate the essential features of wisdom as an ideal endpoint of human development (Baltes & Kunzmann, 2004).

Among the Western approaches to wisdom, the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm, led by the late Paul Baltes since the early 90s, is probably the most prominent explicit wisdom model to date. Specifically, Baltes et al. define wisdom as an expert knowledge system in life planning, life management, and life review, related to the meaning and conduct of life (Baltes & Smith, 1990, 2008; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Baltes, Staudinger, Maercker, & Smith, 1995; Dittmann-Kohli & Baltes, 1990; Smith & Baltes, 1990; Smith, Staudinger, & Baltes, 1994). It is assessed as a performance measure by asking research participants to think aloud about ill-structured hypothetical life problems that have no easy solution (e.g., "A 15-year-old girl wants to go get married right away. What could one/she consider and do?"). Transcribed answers are rated on five criteria and then averaged: (a) rich factual knowledge about human nature and the life course; (b) rich procedural knowledge about ways of dealing with life problems; (c) life-span contextualism, that is, an awareness of the many contexts of life, including social relations; (d)

value relativism and tolerance, that is, acknowledging individual, social, and cultural differences in values and life priorities, and (e) knowledge about handling uncertainty, including the limits of one's own knowledge and the knowledge of the world at large (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000).

The Berlin Wisdom Paradigm attempts to assess general wisdom-related knowledge that is independent of individuals rather than personal wisdom. Another measure of general wisdom-related knowledge is the reflective judgment interview (RJI). According to Kitchener and Brenner (1990, p. 226), high scoring responses to ill-structured problems related to the dilemmas of knowing in historical, scientific, religious, and everyday context "reflect a recognition of the limits of personal knowledge, an acknowledgment of the general uncertainty that characterizes human knowing, and a humility about one's own judgments in the face of such limitations."

Whereas general wisdom-related knowledge refers to life insight that is usually activated through advice giving and support of others, personal wisdom refers to self-insight and is activated in coping behavior and life management situations (Staudinger, 2013). To assess personal wisdom, Staudinger et al. (Mickler & Staudinger, 2008; Staudinger, Dörner, & Mickler, 2005) developed a wisdom measure that asks participants about their behavior, strengths, and weaknesses as a friend and then rate the transcribed responses on five self-related criteria modeled after the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm: (a) rich self-knowledge; (b) rich procedural knowledge about personal growth and self-regulation, including emotions regulation and the development and maintenance of close social relationships; (c) knowledge about the causes of one's emotions and behavior and the nature of interdependence; (d) self-relativism, which requires reflection, self-reflection, and the acceptance of self and others, and (e) tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty.

Sternberg's (1998) balance theory of wisdom is another prominent explicit wisdom theory. According to Sternberg (1990a, 1998), sagacity is the most distinguishing dimension between wisdom and intelligence. A person who possesses sagacity, developed through self-reflection and learning from others, displays concern for others, considers advice, and understands people by listening and observing. Sagacity helps people to know themselves and to grow further in wisdom by having the courage to admit making mistakes and the motivation to correct the mistakes. Sagacity, thus, forms the tacit knowledge that balances intrapersonal, interpersonal, and extrapersonal interests. As Sternberg (1998, p. 354) remarked, "Wisdom is involved when practical intelligence is applied to maximizing not just one's own or someone else's self-interest, but rather a balance of various self-interests (intrapersonal) with the interests of others (interpersonal) and of other aspects of the context in which one lives (extrapersonal), such as one's city or country or environment or even God." Although the balance theory of wisdom is theoretically promising, it lacks an approach to measure wisdom.

Most wisdom literature concurs that advanced cognitive development is necessary but not sufficient for wisdom to arise. For example, Pascual-Leone (1990) argued that wisdom requires a dialectical integration of cognition, reflection, affect, and personality, combining the authority of reason with a harmonious view of the world. A dialectical integration of

personality weakens self-centered characteristics and strengthens other-centeredness and prosocial behavior. Kramer (1990) equally emphasized the importance of the integration of cognition, affect, and reflection as a highly developed form of functioning that is central to wisdom.

Ancient Eastern wisdom definitions have also stressed the integration of cognitive, reflective, affective, and prosocial characteristics as essential elements of wisdom. For example, in the Bhagavad Gita, a Hindu text that was written between 500 and 200 BCE (Zaehner, 1969), the domains of wisdom as identified by Jeste and Vahia (2008) include knowledge of life, emotional regulation, control over desires, decisiveness, love of God, duty and work, self-contentedness, yoga or integration of personality, compassion or sacrifice, and insight or humility. The teachings of the Buddha (born between 563 and 463 BCE) highlight that striving for equanimity, (self-)insight, and compassion are most important in the development of wisdom (Hart, 1987; Ñanamoli, 2001). In ancient China, Lao-Tzu (born between 600 and 300 BCE) taught that the development of intuition, self-knowledge and compassion led to wisdom, whereas Confucius (551–479 BCE) favored learning and reflecting on the learned material in combination with compassion and personal morality as the pathway to wisdom (Birren & Svensson, 2005; Riegel, 2006).

Although the most prominent Western approaches to wisdom tend to emphasize cognition and analytic abilities, the Eastern approaches view wisdom more holistically as comprising the whole person, including behavioral conduct in the form of morality and compassion toward others. Yet, some Western explicit theories, such as those by Pascual-Leone (1990) and Kramer (1990), also describe wisdom in more holistic terms as an integration of cognition, reflection, affect, and a less self-centered personality. Takahashi and Overton (2005) argued that wisdom definitions should transcend cultural egocentrism and incorporate wisdom descriptions that are culturally inclusive and broad. Hence, their explicit wisdom model consists of the integration of an analytical mode (consisting of knowledge and abstract reasoning abilities) and a synthetic mode (comprising reflective understanding, emotional empathy, and emotional regulation) to combine the dominant explicit wisdom theories in the West and East (Takahashi & Overton, 2002). After reviewing the world's philosophical, religious, and psychological wisdom traditions, Curnow (1999) came to the conclusion that the core features of wisdom consist of self-knowledge, detachment, self-integration, and self-transcendence. Levenson et al. (2005) viewed those core features as developmental stages that are recursive and reinforce each other in their theory of wisdom as self-transcendence. According to this theory, wisdom is a mode of being rather than knowing or doing (Levenson & Aldwin, 2013). It encompasses the whole person. As Moody (1986, p. 142) remarked, "One can *have* theoretical knowledge without any corresponding transformation of one's personal being. But one cannot 'have' wisdom without *being* wise" (emphasis in the original). This implies that it might be possible to have general wisdom-related knowledge, but personal wisdom requires a transformation of one's personality in the form of decreased self-centeredness and increased self-transcendence and other-centeredness. Personal wisdom entails a paradigm shift that enables people to not just know more about life but also to

perceive the world differently as they grow wiser.

Overall, explicit wisdom theories have contributed to the research on adult human development by proposing ideal forms of human maturation and behaviors that few individuals can hope to attain in perfection. Yet, wisdom is not considered a binary quality but a continuum with people being closer or farther away from this ideal state (Ardelt, 2004b).

Implicit Wisdom Theories

Integrative features of wisdom have also been found in studies of how laypeople define the concept of wisdom. The rationale of implicit wisdom theories is that individuals know implicitly who and what is wise (Bluck & Glück, 2005).

For example, Clayton and Birren's (1980) seminal research presented participants of three age groups (31 young, 23 middle-aged, and 29 older adults) with the words "wise," "aged," and "myself" and a list of 12 wisdom-related adjectives, generated in an earlier study by a different set of research participants, and asked them to rate the similarity of all possible word pairs. A multidimensional scaling analysis of the similarities resulted in three wisdom dimensions, comprising cognition (knowledgeable, experienced, intelligent, pragmatic, and observant), reflection (introspective and intuitive), and affect/compassion (understanding, empathetic, peaceful, and gentle).

Similarly, Holliday and Chandler (1986) found that research participants' implicit wisdom theories included not only exceptional cognitive judgmental skills but also interpersonal skills and social unobtrusiveness. They first asked adults of three age groups (50 young, 50 middle-aged, and 50 old) to describe wisdom and then another group of 150 adults of the same age composition to rate the obtained wisdom characteristics on a scale from "almost never true of wise people" to "almost always true of wise people." The result of a principal component factor analysis indicated that wisdom was perceived as a mixture of (a) exceptional understanding of essences, contexts, and the self (e.g., learning from experience and seeing things in a larger context); (b) judgment and communication skills (e.g., the ability to understand and judge correctly in matters of daily living); (c) general competencies (e.g., intelligent and educated); (d) interpersonal skills (e.g., sensitive and sociable); and (e) social unobtrusiveness (discrete and nonjudgmental).

Sternberg's (1985) multidimensional scaling analysis based on descriptors of ideal intelligent, creative, and wise individuals collected from both college professors and laypersons showed that wise individuals were perceived to have analytical reasoning ability similar to intelligent individuals. Yet, wise persons were ascribed a certain sagacity that was not necessarily attributed to intelligent persons. In addition, wise individuals were characterized as having good judgment skills, perspicacity, and the ability to learn from ideas and the environment and to make expeditious use of information. This suggests that an open-minded attitude and reflective capacity run parallel with reasoning ability and sagacity for wise individuals to make clear, sensible, and fair judgments.

Although the approaches and measurements were different (and thus the list of wisdom

characteristics that was generated and subsequently rated was not identical in the studies), cognitive, reflective, and prosocial benevolent wisdom characteristics were dominant descriptors endorsed by most research participants. Bluck and Glück's (2005) review of five studies on implicit wisdom theories, including the three studies mentioned earlier, concluded that cognitive ability, insight, reflective attitude, concern for others, and real-world skills are considered important elements in Western lay theories of wisdom. However, Glück & Bluck's (2011) subsequent study and cluster analysis with an age-diverse sample revealed that two different groups of people exist with conceptually distinct implicit wisdom theories. Similar to the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm, the *cognitive conception* group endorsed primarily cognitive characteristics (knowledge, life experience, and cognitive complexity) and reflective characteristics (self-reflection and acceptance of others' values) as central to wisdom, whereas the *integrative conception* group additionally endorsed affective/compassionate characteristics, such as benevolence, empathy, love for humanity, and concern for others.

The integrative definition of wisdom more closely resembles Eastern implicit wisdom theories, which tend to emphasize the affective/compassionate component of wisdom as much as or even more than its cognitive component (Takahashi & Overton, 2005). In addition, modesty and unobtrusiveness seem to be important elements of Eastern implicit wisdom theories that are not necessarily found in Western implicit wisdom theories. For example, Taiwanese Chinese adults from various age groups described wisdom as a combination of competencies, knowledge, benevolence, compassion, openness, profundity, modesty, and unobtrusiveness (Yang, 2001). Similarly, Takahashi and Bordia (2000) found that Indian and Japanese undergraduate students tended to rate the word "wise" as most similar to "discreet," whereas American and Australian students tended to rate "wise" closer to "experienced" and "knowledgeable."

Wisdom Theories That Combine Implicit and Explicit Approaches

Some researchers have used implicit wisdom theories as the basis for their explicit wisdom model. For example, Yang's (2008) theory of wisdom as a real-life process emerged from her research on contemporary Eastern implicit wisdom theories (Yang, 2001). In the theory of wisdom as a real-life process, wisdom is understood as a process requiring the cognitive integration of sometimes contradictory ideas, interests, and personality, whereas the embodiment of wisdom occurs in everyday life through action that ultimately results in positive outcomes for oneself and others.

In an attempt to create a culturally inclusive wisdom theory, Ardelt (1997, 2003, 2004b) developed the Three-Dimensional Wisdom Model based on Clayton and Birren's (1980) pioneering research on implicit wisdom theories. The model integrates the cognitive, reflective, and affective/compassionate dimensions of wisdom. The *cognitive wisdom dimension* entails a desire to know the truth and encompasses a deep and thorough

understanding of life, particularly regarding issues that relate to one's own person and one's relationship with others, as well as knowledge and acceptance of the positive and negative aspects of human nature, of the inherent limits of knowledge, and of life's unpredictability and uncertainty. The *reflective wisdom dimension* refers to the ability to perceive phenomena and events from multiple perspectives, including one's own self, which requires self-examination, self-awareness, and self-insight and the ability to see through illusion (McKee & Barber, 1999) to overcome subjectivity and projections. Rather than blaming other people and circumstances for their own faults and failures (Bradley, 1978; Green & Gross, 1979; Riess, Rosenfeld, Melburg, & Tedeschi, 1981; Sherwood, 1981), wise people are able to accept reality as it is, which tends to reduce self-centeredness and contribute to a greater understanding of life and others. A more thorough understanding of life and the human condition combined with a reduction in self-centeredness tends to generate sympathetic and compassionate love for others and the motivation to foster others' well-being, which are characteristics of the *compassionate wisdom dimension* (Achenbaum & Orwoll, 1991; Clayton & Birren, 1980; Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990; Holliday & Chandler, 1986; Kramer, 1990; Levitt, 1999; Orwoll & Achenbaum, 1993; Pascual-Leone, 1990). The Three-Dimensional Wisdom Model has the advantages of being relatively parsimonious and also able to encompass both implicit and explicit wisdom theories from the West and the East (Curnow, 1999; Sternberg, 1990b; Sternberg & Jordan, 2005; Takahashi & Bordia, 2000).

■ PSYCHOSOCIAL CORRELATES OF WISDOM IN OLD AGE AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

How is wisdom related to age, the social context, culture, religion or spirituality, and well-being? To some extent, the answers to this question depend on the definition and measurement of wisdom, which, as delineated earlier, vary widely. Still, some general trends are observable.

Wisdom and Age

Does wisdom increase with age? Theoretically, wisdom is considered a lifelong human developmental process, exemplified by Kekes' (1983, p. 286) statement that "one can be old and foolish, but a wise man is likely to be old, simply because such growth takes time." Erikson (1982) identified wisdom as the virtue that arises after the successful mastery of the eighth psychosocial development task of *ego integrity versus despair* in old age. Older adults who can accept the life they have lived, including missed opportunities and failures in the past, can achieve ego integrity that will help them to accept the physical, mental, and social challenges during the later years and the finitude of life. Hence, Erikson (1964, p. 133) defined wisdom as "informed and detached concern with life itself in the face of death itself," which requires a balance between active involvement in life and the acceptance of aging-related

declines and the nearing of death without despairing over physical, mental, and social losses.

Although Erikson outlined a lifelong developmental path toward wisdom, Staudinger's (1999) earlier work and Sternberg's (2005) review of the literature on the relationship between age and wisdom describe various theoretical trajectories of wisdom development with age. It is possible that wisdom (a) continues to increase across the life span; (b) remains stable from early adulthood into old age; or (c) decreases with age after an initial increase in youth and young adulthood. In fact, it is likely that the development of wisdom varies for different people. Some people might grow in wisdom throughout life, while others remain stable after reaching a certain wisdom level or even decline with age (Sternberg, 2005). This suggests that multiple life-course factors, such as the promotion of wisdom in the family and the larger society, in combination with certain personality qualities might influence the trajectory of wisdom development.

Empirical evidence from cross-sectional data shows that mean levels of wisdom-related knowledge tend to increase with age throughout adolescence and young adulthood up to the age of about 24 years, then remain relatively stable, until they appear to decline after the age of 80 years (Baltes et al., 1995; Pasupathi, Staudinger, & Baltes, 2001; Staudinger, 1999). However, age was weakly and positively related to wisdom-related knowledge among individuals between the ages of 20 and 87 years who scored above the median level on moral reasoning (Pasupathi & Staudinger, 2001), which suggests that wisdom-related knowledge might increase with age if people are motivated to engage in positive personality development (Staudinger & Kunzmann, 2005).

A longitudinal study that used the RJI to assess wisdom as recognizing and understanding the limits and uncertainty of human knowledge found that RJI scores increased, on average, from age 16 to 20 years and from age 20 to 24 years. At age 28 years, many of the highly educated study participants already scored at or near the top of the RJI scale, but for those lower on the scale, RJI scores tended to increase further from age 28 to 32 years (Kitchener & Brenner, 1990; Kitchener, King, Wood, & Davison, 1989). Longitudinal research by Wink and Helson (1997) revealed that practical wisdom (measured by self-reported cognitive, reflective, and mature adjectives from the Adjective Check List) tended to increase between the ages of 27 and 52 years, particularly for clinical psychologists, indicating that wisdom might increase until at least middle age.

Wisdom, measured by the 39-item Three-Dimensional Wisdom Scale (3D-WS) as the integration of cognitive, reflective, and affective/compassionate personality qualities based on the Three-Dimensional Wisdom Model (Ardelt, 2003) or by Webster's (2003, 2007) 40-item noncognitive Self-Assessed Wisdom Scale (SAWS) as the combination of critical life experiences, reflectiveness/reminiscence, emotional regulation, openness to experience, and humor, has shown a curvilinear relationship with age in cross-sectional research, with the highest mean level scores at midlife rather than early adulthood (Bergsma & Ardelt, 2012; Webster, Westerhof, & Bohlmeijer, 2014). Yet, another study found that older college-educated adults had significantly higher mean-level scores on the 3D-WS than current undergraduate college students, whereas older adults without a college degree tended to score significantly

lower on the 3D-WS than younger or older college-educated adults (Ardelt, 2010). Again, this suggests that wisdom might grow with age only among those individuals who have the opportunity, support, and motivation to pursue its development. Longitudinal studies have also documented that socioeconomic status, psychological mindedness, and openness to experience in early adulthood have a positive association with later life wisdom (Ardelt, 1998; Wink & Dillon, 2003; Wink & Helson, 1997), supporting the idea that favorable social conditions and certain personality dispositions can facilitate wisdom development.

It appears that the most important "building blocks" for wisdom emerge during adolescence and young adulthood (Richardson & Pasupathi, 2005). To better understand the relation between wisdom and age, it is critical to investigate how the seeds of wisdom were planted upfront, from whom individuals seek guidance, and to what extent older adults act as life consultants and wisdom mentors over the life course (Edmondson, 2012). Jordan (2005) argued that, although the factors that might lead to gains in wisdom with age in adolescence and young adulthood are well studied, such as the development of cognition, moral reasoning, and personality, there is a dearth of research on factors that might limit the growth of wisdom over the life span or even lead to a decline in wisdom during the later years.

Social Contexts and Wisdom Nominees

What are some of the factors that might promote or prevent growth in wisdom with age? Wisdom is a socially developed construct (Staudinger & Baltes, 1996), because a person cannot gain wisdom without the direct or indirect teachings of others (Jordan, 2005). The development of wisdom and wise decision making is fostered by the presence of and in consultation with other wise individuals (Edmondson, 2012, 2013). Close intergenerational relations and friendships, for instance, may provide wisdom-conducive experiences and a conversational context (Edmondson, 2013) that allows for the exploration of limits and doubts involved in knowing (Kramer, 1990; Meacham, 1990). Moreover, Erikson's (1963) psychosocial stage theory of human development professes that the successful mastery of childhood developmental tasks depends on how and to what extent family members— especially, parents or grandparents—provide quality care, trust, comfort, security, belongingness, and guidance. Therefore, family members can be wisdom role models for young children with long-lasting positive effects on the offspring's acquisition of wisdom. In contrast, the absence of kin support during the formative years might make the development of wisdom more challenging.

In addition, wisdom can be learned by growing up in a cultural setting where social interactions with older generations play central roles to generate and facilitate wisdom-related knowledge, experiences, and personality qualities over time. This implies that the development of wisdom is influenced not only by a certain personality makeup, such as openness to experiences and the motivation to gain deeper insight into the meaning and purpose of life and to engage in personality growth (Staudinger & Kunzmann, 2005), but also by having a wisdom role model from whom to seek advice in dealing with life's vicissitudes (Edmondson, 2012,

2013). Because wisdom is learned and expressed through social interactions, Edmondson (2012) argued that a person-centered research paradigm that focuses only on individuals' degree of wisdom cannot be considered optimal. Instead, given the social-interactive nature of wisdom, researchers need to study how wisdom is enacted in the social context through prosocial behaviors and compassionate concern for others, such as teaching, sharing, nurturing, encouraging, helping, and giving. This means that the acquisition of wisdom is likely to be facilitated by long-lasting personal relationships between apprentice and wisdom mentor (Staudinger & Baltes, 1996). One of the social deterrents to wisdom development of the young and wisdom maintenance of the old might be the isolation of older people. Modern society's tendency to isolate their elders decreases the chances for social interactions and thus for passing on wisdom to younger generations.

In fact, research participants who were asked to nominate a person whom they perceived as wise were more likely to nominate someone who was older (50 years or above) and male, and the age of the wisdom nominee tended to increase with the age of the nominator (Ardelt, 2008a; Baltes et al., 1995; Denney, Dew, & Kroupa, 1995; Jason et al., 2001; Orwoll & Perlmutter, 1990). One study that examined people's general beliefs about characteristics of wisdom nominees revealed that 78% of the age-diverse respondents thought that wisdom was related to age, 16% to gender, and 68% to education (Perlmutter, Adams, Nyquist, & Kaplan, 1988). These findings indicate that people generally believe that wisdom is more prevalent in older and more educated people but not limited to one particular gender, although men tend to be nominated as wise more often than women. However, when asked to name the areas in which their wisdom nominees are particularly wise, female nominees dominate in interpersonal skill areas, whereas male nominees are prevalent in more cognitive skill areas, such as business or science (Denney et al., 1995). Indeed, a study that compared gender differences in 3D-WS scores among younger and older adults showed that women of both age groups tended to score higher on the compassionate wisdom dimension than men, but higher scores on the cognitive wisdom dimension for men compared to women were found only among the older age group, possibly reflecting changing and persistent cultural gender ideals and socialization practices (Ardelt, 2009). Whereas girls are still more likely than boys to be socialized to be nurturing and caring (Lytton & Romney, 1991), both genders are now encouraged to develop their cognitive capacities, as demonstrated by the more equal gender composition of university students, while in the past, intellectual endeavors were seen as more important for boys than for girls (Peter & Horn, 2005). However, the earlier study did not find significant gender differences in any of the three wisdom dimensions among the top 25% of 3D-WS scorers, indicating that relatively wise men and women tend to integrate the cognitive, reflective, and compassionate dimensions of wisdom (Ardelt, 2009).

Wisdom and Culture

Culture plays an important role in laypeople's understanding of wisdom and, therefore, might also affect the development of wisdom. In a culture where the self is expected to establish and

control a clear identity and to actively engage in developmental tasks, a wise person is more likely to be characterized as upward (self-promoting) and inbound (self-controlling) and by cognitive, strategic, and analytic qualities. By contrast, in a culture where the self is considered wise when it examines itself and finds harmony in relations and sagacity in decisions and advice giving, wisdom tends to be characterized as downward (modest, self-critical) and outbound (communal, altruistic) and by affective, reflective, and synthetic qualities (Takahashi & Overton, 2005).

Unfortunately, contemporary studies of wisdom have not paid a lot of attention to the influence of culture or subculture on the development of wisdom (Edmondson, 2012, 2013). More specifically, if the local subculture, consisting of family, friends, and community, promotes a self-centered understanding of wisdom, individuals might be susceptible to comprehend wisdom as a purely cognitive dimension, which asks for excellence and mastery of knowledge about human life but is devoid of caring minds for others (Edmondson, 2012, 2013). Hence, if mastering wisdom-related knowledge about the fundamental pragmatics of life (e.g., life planning, life management, and life review) is regarded by one's culture as a more important wisdom dimension than the compassionate and self-reflective dimensions of wisdom, developing egocentric and self-empowering characteristics are likely more rewarded than fostering modest, prosocial behaviors and attitudes. In such a self-motivating culture, a lack of concern for others can be overlooked, while developing practical, self-oriented characteristics can appear to be wise (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2005). In contrast, in a culture where the affective/compassionate domain is promoted for the sake of relational harmony and avoidance of social conflicts, growth in wisdom is more likely to be achieved through self-reflection and harmonious interpersonal relations (Takahashi & Overton, 2005; Tiberius, 2008). Yet, no matter in which culture a person grew up, a relatively wise individual comes to realize that there is no isolated self and that the self is mutually interdependent with others, which explains why wise decisions tend to be more harmonious than those that involve no concern for the welfare of others (Sternberg, 1998).

Wisdom, Religion, and Spirituality

One important (sub)culture that influences the development of wisdom is religion. Although many religious and spiritual traditions promote the development of wisdom (Walsh, 2014), certain forms of religion might repress aspirations for greater wisdom if beliefs are considered more important than the discovery of a deeper truth (Hall, 2010). For example, growing up in a religious culture that emphasizes love toward others might facilitate the development of the compassionate wisdom dimension, whereas being exposed to a religious culture that stresses unquestioning faith in the teachings of the Bible and the Church might impede growth in the cognitive and reflective wisdom dimensions. Baltes (2004, p. 56), for instance, argued that due to its commitment to a firm set of values, religion could be an "intellectual enemy" of wisdom, especially in the final stages of personal growth. He claimed that the development of wisdom is more likely to take place in diverse social contexts, in which generational and interpersonal

values about the conduct and meaning of life are more freely interchanged than in religious disciplines.

Although both religion and spirituality involve a search for the sacred, religion is often practiced in an institutional setting with a group of likeminded people, whereas the experience and practice of spirituality might be more idiosyncratic and individualistic (Hill et al., 2000). In a longitudinal study by Wink and Dillon (2002, 2003), spirituality (defined in terms of noninstitutionalized religion or nontradition-centered beliefs and practices) but not religiousness (institutionalized or tradition-centered religious beliefs and practices) in late middle adulthood (50s to early 60s) and late adulthood (late 60s to late 70s) was significantly related to cognitive/reflective wisdom in late adulthood. Yet, individuals who were religious in early adulthood (in their 30s) tended to be rated higher on spirituality and cognitive/reflective wisdom in late adulthood than those who were less religious during their earlier years of life. This suggests that an earlier interest in religion might lead individuals on a spiritual quest that results in greater wisdom in old age.

Religion and spirituality are more likely to be associated with transcendent characteristics of wisdom than practical features. Practical wisdom, as exemplified by the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm, emphasizes wisdom-related knowledge in the pragmatics of daily living, advice, and action, whereas transcendent wisdom concerns mindfulness, intuitive insight, the transformation of consciousness, and detachment (Le, 2008; Levenson et al., 2005). A study with European American and Vietnamese American adults showed that the frequency of mystical experiences, such as a loss of sense of self and feelings of oneness, and belonging to a religious/spiritual community were associated with greater transcendent wisdom, assessed by ratings of self-knowledge, detachment, integration, and self-transcendence, but not more wisdom-related knowledge. However, religious and spiritual practices by themselves were unrelated to either form of wisdom (Le, 2008). In a study of older adults, wisdom, as measured by the 3D-WS, was also not associated with an intrinsic religious orientation (commitment to a religious/spiritual life) and even negatively related to an extrinsic religious orientation (using religion for self-enhancing purposes). Yet, those elders with the highest scores on the compassionate wisdom dimension and relatively high scores on the cognitive and reflective wisdom dimensions showed a strong intrinsic religious orientation, which they expressed through humility, gratitude, inner-centered guidance, and a commitment to love and help others (Ardelt, 2008b).

Overall, the findings suggest that religiosity might or might not lead to greater wisdom, although mystical experiences might foster the transformation of consciousness, insight, and detachment that characterizes self-transcendent wisdom. Although relatively wise older adults tend to be spiritual or exhibit an intrinsic religious orientation, deeply religious older adults are not necessarily wise. Moreover, relatively wise older adults are less likely than others to use their religion to achieve self-enhancing goals, such as improving one's standing in the community or to find friends and companionship. The religiosity of relatively wise persons appears to be committed to a higher purpose and intertwined with the wisdom path of specific religious traditions (Walsh, 2014).

Wisdom and Well-Being in Old Age

Wisdom is often described as an ideal endpoint of human development (Staudinger & Glück, 2011), both in secular as well as religious and spiritual terms, which implies that wisdom should lead to optimal living and aging well. Many researchers believe that wise people know "the art of living," which is a life that is good for self, others, and society as a whole (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2005; Hart, 1987; Kekes, 1995; Kramer, 2000; Kunzmann & Baltes, 2005; Kupperman, 2005; Sternberg, 1998). Moreover, the development of wisdom might also be intrinsically rewarding and joyful as it decreases the preoccupation with self-centered problems and leads to a greater connectedness with others and nature and a desire to help and avoid harm (Ardelt, 2008b; Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2005; Levenson & Aldwin, 2013). For example, Kunzmann and Baltes (2003) found that wisdom-related knowledge was positively related to "other-enhancing" values (i.e., values relating to the well-being of others, societal engagement, and ecological protection) and self-development values (i.e., orientation toward self-actualization and insight into life in general) but negatively associated with hedonistic values (e.g., materialistic and sensual). This finding corroborates the idea that "wisdom involves a joint orientation toward the personal and the common good and includes a spiritual orientation that extends beyond one's own physical states" (Kunzmann & Baltes, 2003, p. 1115).

Yet some researchers have argued that self-reflection and the ability to see reality clearly without a self-enhancing and positively biased life view might invoke negative emotions, because one recognizes how far away one is from the ideal state of wisdom, and, therefore, not necessarily enhance well-being (Mickler & Staudinger, 2008; Staudinger et al., 2005; Staudinger & Glück, 2011). Indeed, the empirical evidence has been mixed, depending on the composition of the sample and the operationalization of wisdom and well-being.

In older adult samples of mixed educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, wisdom, assessed as analytic and synthetic wisdom modes (Takahashi & Overton, 2002) and an integration of cognitive, reflective, and compassionate wisdom dimensions (Ardelt, 2003; Bergsma & Ardelt, 2012; Le, 2011), was positively associated with subjective well-being, even after controlling for physical health, socioeconomic status, financial situation, physical environment, and social involvement (Ardelt, 1997). In addition, the 3D-WS was positively correlated with purpose in life, mastery, and less fear of death (Ardelt, 2003). In fact, it appears that a greater sense of mastery, control, and meaning in life is one possible pathway that at least partially explains the relation between wisdom and subjective well-being in old age (Ardelt & Edwards, in press; Etezadi & Pushkar, 2013).

Yet, in samples of highly educated White older adults, wisdom, measured as practical and transcendent wisdom (Wink & Helson, 1997), expertise in uncertainty (Brugman, 2000), and personal wisdom-related knowledge (Mickler & Staudinger, 2008), was unrelated to subjective well-being. It is possible that wisdom has a greater impact on subjective well-being in old age when life conditions are detrimental to a general sense of well-being. Most studies that did not find a positive association between wisdom and well-being included highly

educated individuals of relatively privileged White adults who are more likely to be healthy (Martin, Schoeni, Freedman, & Andreski, 2007; Minkler, Fuller-Thomson, & Guralnik, 2006) and tend to have more options to enhance well-being than minorities and adults from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Koster et al., 2006). Wisdom might be a psychosocial developmental resource that becomes most relevant during times of hardships and when extrinsic means to improve well-being, such as socializing, traveling, and consuming, are no longer possible. For example, the association between the 3D-WS and subjective well-being was significantly stronger in a sample of older nursing home residents and hospice patients than in a sample of relatively healthy older adults after controlling for subjective health, socioeconomic status, social involvement, age, gender, race, and marital status. Although nursing home residents and hospice patients tended to report lower well-being scores than relatively healthy older adults, the difference in average well-being scores disappeared among those participants with relatively high wisdom scores (Ardelt & Edwards, in press). Wise older adults seem to know how best to deal with hardship by using active rather than passive coping strategies and applying the life lessons they have learned in the past (Ardelt, 2005; Glück & Bluck, 2013). They also might engage in selection, optimization, and compensation (SOC) by selecting goals that are still possible, such as spending time in the company of dear family members and friends, to optimize well-being and compensate for health-related losses (Baltes & Freund, 2003).

In sum, knowing how to live a life that is good not only for oneself, but also for others and for the whole society helps wise individuals to feel in control of their lives, to perceive their lives as meaningful, and to feel satisfied and content even when faced with weakening physical, mental, and social capabilities (Ardelt, 2011).

■ CONCLUSION

Although a generally accepted theory of wisdom does not exist, explicit and implicit theories of wisdom might broadly be divided into two approaches. The first approach, exemplified by the explicit Berlin Wisdom Paradigm and the cognitive implicit wisdom theory, views wisdom in primarily cognitive and reflective terms, as expert knowledge about the conduct and meaning of life (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). In this approach, wisdom is described as general knowledge that can be found in texts and is independent of individuals. In fact, individuals are considered only weak carriers of wisdom-related knowledge. The second approach, illustrated by the Three-Dimensional Wisdom Model and the integrative implicit wisdom theory, describes wisdom as a quality of persons who have integrated the cognitive, reflective, and benevolent characteristics of wisdom (Ardelt, 2004a, 2004b). Although most implicit and explicit wisdom theories of the East follow the integrative approach, the cognitive approach is favored by some of the Western explicit wisdom theories.

Although approaches to define and assess wisdom vary, empirical evidence supports the general agreement that wisdom does not automatically increase with age. The development of wisdom across the life course, however, is more likely for individuals who are open to new

experiences, committed to psychosocial growth, and supported by wisdom role models and a secular and religious/spiritual culture that promotes wisdom-related qualities, such as the search for truth, a deeper understanding of life, the ability to engage in reflection, self-reflection, and self-examination, sympathetic and compassionate concern for others, and prosocial behaviors. Growing wiser is indeed a lifelong process insofar as planting the seeds of wisdom at an earlier stage of life can facilitate sagacity during the later years (Edmondson, 2013; Richardson & Pasupathi, 2005). For instance, the presence and absence of mentorship and guidance during the formative years can affect people's acquisition of wisdom decades later (Staudinger & Baltes, 1996). The rewards of wisdom in old age appear to be greater subjective well-being, particularly if life circumstances are less than optimal.

The social conditions for the development of wisdom have so far been largely ignored in research of human development (Jordan, 2005; Staudinger & Baltes, 1996; Sternberg, 2005). Jordan (2005, p. 181) claimed that what was missing in the psychology-dominant study of wisdom was an inquiry into "wisdom's trajectory … if certain environmental factors and challenges were absent or abated." Sternberg (2005) also noted a tendency to ignore the variations in individuals' paths toward wisdom across the life course, which might depend on culture, gender, and personality, resulting in interpersonal variances in manifestations of wisdom qualities.

Hence, a sociological approach to the study of wisdom is needed to comprehend the antecedents and consequences of wisdom more completely. Although individuals possess varying degrees of freedom to choose their paths, a phenomenon known as "human agency," these choices are not made in a social vacuum. As Elder (1994) and Dannefer (2003) noted, all life choices are contingent on the opportunities and constraints of social structures in which individuals are embedded over the life course. More specifically, Dannefer and Settersten (2010, p. 3) argued that human development and aging cannot be understood at either the individual or the societal level, "without paying attention to the cumulated life practices and experiences of aging individuals." The life-course perspective can help clarify generally applicable conditions and factors that contribute to the development of wisdom by investigating how wisdom is initially acquired, who helps in the development of wisdom over the life course, and how wisdom progresses toward successful aging. If we know the seeds and nutrients of wisdom, we can pinpoint resources necessary for the development of wisdom and thus develop ways to promote and teach wisdom in education (Ferrari & Potworowski, 2008), counseling (Ponterotto, 2010), and leadership (Pauleen & Küpers, 2013).

The theory of lifelong psychosocial growth in wisdom claims that people can still grow wiser with age even if they suffer disease, pain, and loss. Learning to value the lived wisdom of our elders might guide the younger generations to lead flourishing and meaningful lives while making wise decisions that improve the lives of the individual, others, and the whole society (Kupperman, 2005).

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