

Practical and Transcendent Wisdom: Their Nature and Some Longitudinal Findings

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A self-report Adjective Check List (ACL) Practical Wisdom Scale (PWS) and external ratings of Transcendent Wisdom (TWR), based on subjects' examples of personally important wisdom, were used to study the personality correlates and life implications of two types of wisdom among participants in their 50s in a longitudinal study of women. High scorers on both the PWS and the TWR were cognitively complex, perceptive, insightful, and healthily self-directed. Only the PWS was associated with social initiative and leadership, empathy, and generativity. Only the TWR correlated with openness to experience, intuition, and creativity. ACL data from young adulthood were used to show that both the women and their spouses increased on the PWS from early to mature adulthood. For women, we demonstrated how occupation (psychotherapy) and traumatic life events (divorce) contributed to these age-related gains.

KEY WORDS: Wisdom; adult development; personality; longitudinal research.

INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen considerable attention to wisdom, attributable largely to a new concern with positive aspects of aging (Baltes, Smith, & Staudinger, 1992) and also to an ongoing interest in stages of cognitive development (Kitchener & Brenner, 1990; Labouvie-Vief, 1990). Much empirical research on wisdom has been "soft" (Birren & Fisher, 1990), but the main approaches include studies of implicit ideas or theories of wisdom (Clayton & Birren, 1980; Holliday & Chandler, 1986; Sternberg, 1986), studying the characteristics of people nominated as wise (Orwoll & Perlmutter, 1990), and laboratory research on wisdom-related performance (Baltes & Smith, 1990; Baltes, Staudinger, Maercker, & Smith, 1995). Though wisdom is widely thought to increase with experience, there have been only short-term longitu-

dinal studies of reflective judgment, conducted with adolescents or young adults (Kitchener, King, Wood, & Davison, 1989).

Wisdom has been studied primarily from the point of view of cognitive psychologists. However, wise people may be seen as possessing a character that pervades their behavior and interactions with others (Achenbaum & Orwoll, 1991), so that an approach that identifies distinguishing personality variables and dynamic developmental patterns associated with wisdom would seem to have a place (Orwoll & Perlmutter, 1990). Our study takes this approach.

Among the issues disputed or variously conceptualized in the literature are three that will be addressed in this article: (a) the nature or main varieties of wisdom; (b) whether wisdom is appropriately studied in the very few or in everyone; and (c) how it is related to age and experience. With regard to the first issue, we distinguish two kinds of wisdom, practical and transcendent (below) and offer a measure of each. Second, to study wisdom, we use a college-educated sample, primarily white and socially advantaged but otherwise heterogeneous: the women of the Mills Longitudinal Study and their spouses.

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Third, we use longitudinal data from these subjects to study how wisdom is related to age and life experience.

Nature and Varieties of Wisdom

Wisdom is insight and knowledge about oneself and the world and good judgment in dealing with life problems (Grimm & Grimm, 1854/1984). Wisdom deals with matters that are uncertain and thus entails sensitivity to context, relativism, and paradox (Baltes & Smith, 1990; Labouvie-Vief, 1990). It reflects an integration of values, feelings, thoughts, and actions (Birren & Fisher, 1990). Because the ability to coordinate and integrate these various faculties at a high level is what ego development consists of, wisdom requires ego development. Of course, wisdom is not the same as ego development. For some purposes, one might regard wisdom as the quality of judgment associated with ego level. However, as Kramer (1990) has suggested, some individuals high in ego development may be more skillful in judgment than are others or they may be better at one kind of knowledge than others.

The idea that there are different kinds of wisdom is an ancient one (Assmann, 1994; Taranto, 1989). Philosophers and theologians have distinguished a social or practical knowledge from knowledge that might be called metaphysical, contemplative, spiritual, or, more recently, emancipatory (Holliday & Chandler, 1986, cf. Habermas, 1971) or transcendent (e.g., Assmann, 1994; Orwoll & Perlmutter, 1990). Within psychology, there are two emphases that correspond to a similar distinction between what we shall call practical and transcendent wisdom.

Practical wisdom is generally a concern of those theorists of life-span cognitive development who approach wisdom in terms of good judgment and expertise in the pragmatics of life (Baltes & Staudinger, 1993). Other theorists of adult development discuss similar skills. For Schaie (1977-1978), midlife is a time of social dominance and responsibility that results in an increased awareness of the complexity of life, better judgment and decision-making skills, and the opportunity to mentor others. All these characteristics of the executive function (Neugarten, 1969) are components of practical wisdom. Such ideas fit readily into an approach to wisdom as an aspect of personality development in adulthood.

Theorists of adult development within the psychoanalytic tradition or influenced by it treat wisdom as an aspect of a late stage in self-development (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Labouvie-Vief, 1990; Orwoll & Perlmutter, 1990). The development of the self is thought to require knowledge of unconscious influences and recognition of one's undesired characteristics. This kind of knowledge requires much attention to the self. However, wisdom is thought to be achieved in the process of *transcending* ego boundaries. Thus, for Jung (1935/1965), the process of individuation in the second half of life involves increasing inner awareness, integration of opposites, and a decentering of the ego, leading to depth of understanding of the meaning of life and the basic unity of the self with the universe. For Erikson, wisdom requires transcendence of "the limitations of [a person's] identity and his often tragic or bitterly tragicomic engagement in his one and only life cycle within the sequence of generations" (Erikson, 1968, p. 140). Kohut (1966) conceived of wisdom as requiring a healthy transformation of childhood narcissism, which entails the capacity to maintain ambitions and ideals that are stripped of grandiose and expansive fantasies and do not depend unduly on admiration or acclaim from others.

Attending to the unconscious involves an interest in symbols and their meanings. Because creativity also involves the construction or revision of symbol systems (Helson, Roberts, & Agronick, 1995), there is an important overlap between transcendent wisdom and creativity. Both require symbolic interests and qualities such as openness and intuition. However, creative individuals are not necessarily interested in self-development or transcendence. Some are and some are not. To receive recognition for the originality of one's product is a pervasive motivation among creative artists and scientists (Martindale, 1990), but not among those seeking wisdom through transcendence. For other discussions of creativity and wisdom, see Kohut (1977) and Sternberg (1988) among others.

Multidimensional models of wisdom, such as those of Baltes and his colleagues (e.g., Baltes, et al., 1992) or of Holliday and Chandler (1986), as well as general discussions of wisdom, tend to include facets or factors indicative of both the types we have discussed. For example, good interpersonal skills and understanding (Holliday & Chandler, 1986), expeditious use of information (Sternberg, 1986), and expertise in advice giving (Kramer, 1990) are all

characteristics of practical wisdom. Emancipatory interest (i.e., interest in self-understanding and the freedom of the self; Holliday & Chandler, 1986) and quest for meaning (Kramer, 1990) are descriptive of what we are calling transcendent wisdom.

The emphasis in wisdom research is on the unitary or synthetic character of wisdom. For example, in Orwoll’s model (e.g., Achenbaum & Orwoll, 1991), wisdom is thought to increase only with development in all of many areas of personality. So much development takes time and this is the reason that wisdom is more manifest in the old, they say, than in the young. In real life, however, we observe that individuals are often more developed in one line than another. Thus, as argued by Assmann (1994), the practical wisdom exemplified in the judgments of Solomon is far removed from the insight into the magic and mystery of the eternal order of things of Shakespeare’s Prospero.

Measuring Practical and Transcendent Wisdom in This Study

In planning a study of wise personality in our longitudinal sample, we of course had to work with available data. The definitions of wisdom from cognitive research were valuable guides but too restrictive or not quite appropriate for our purposes. Despite what we felt was an overemphasis on the unitary nature of wisdom, the personality model offering the simplest and closest fit for our ideas was that of Orwoll (see Achenbaum & Orwoll, 1991), which identifies intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal domains of wisdom, wisdom in each domain requiring affective, cognitive, and conative development. In terms of this model, we would like to argue that practical and transcendent wisdom should share evidence of intrapersonal development (including mature affective response, self-knowledge, and integrity), but that practical wisdom should be associated with interest and skill in the interpersonal domain (empathy, understanding, maturity in relationships), whereas transcendent wisdom should be associated with interest and skill in the transpersonal domain (self-transcendence, recognition of the limits of knowledge, and philosophical/spiritual commitments).

To measure transcendent wisdom, we used participants’ examples of wisdom that had been personally meaningful to them. Such offerings of wisdom,

freely produced in the subjects’ own words, could be coded for freedom from narrow self-concern, recognition of the limits and contextual nature of knowledge, and philosophical or spiritual insight. This, together with conceptual and expressive skills advantageous for the free response task, is what transcendent wisdom means in this study.

To measure practical wisdom, we developed a scale consisting of adjectives from the Adjective Check List (ACL; Gough & Heilbrun, 1983) that were chosen by judges to describe the wise person. We scored the subjects’ self-descriptions on the ACL for the number of adjectives that the judges had chosen as connoting wisdom. The ACL offers descriptors of what Achenbaum and Orwoll (1991) termed intrapersonal and especially interpersonal characteristics, that is, those manifested in everyday social life, observable by others, and confirmed in transactions with the environment. The adjectives selected by the judges (Table I) describe cognitive appraisal that is clear, open, complex, insightful, reality-oriented, benevolent, and not distorted by bias or impulsivity. This, together with the self-confidence implied in attributing these characteristics to oneself, is what practical wisdom means in our study.

Though the accurate attribution of wise characteristics to oneself would seem to be a good measure of practical wisdom, there are risks in self-report measures of socially desirable traits. We thought these risks would be reduced by the fact that the construct of wisdom was in no way made salient when our participants filled out the ACL. If they thought of themselves as fair-minded, insightful, etc., they could check these adjectives; if they did not, there were many other adjectives available for their self-descriptions.

Table I. List of Adjectives Included in the Practical Wisdom Scale (PWS)

Indicative adjectives	Contraindicative adjectives
Clearthinking	Immature
Fairminded	Intolerant
Insightful	Reckless
Intelligent	Shallow
Interest wide	
Mature	
Realistic	
Reasonable	
Reflective	
Thoughtful	
Tolerant	
Understanding	
Wise	

Furthermore, our longitudinal archives provided measures of complex constructs appropriate to testing the construct validity of both the ACL and the Examples measures. In particular, we had rater-based measures of ego development (Loevinger, 1976), self-insight (Marrott, 1981), Kohut's concept of healthy self-orientation (Wink, 1992), Erikson's concept of generativity (Peterson & Klohnen, 1995), and the Occupational Creativity Scale (Helson, et al., 1995). Therefore, we offer measures in this article of what we propose as practical and transcendent wisdom.

The Relation of Wisdom to Age and Life Experience

If to be wise means to develop a deeper and richer understanding of the world as a result of learning from life experiences, then wisdom should increase with age, at least through middle age. The view that wisdom is a positive outcome of aging is held by most researchers in the field (e.g., Assmann, 1994; Birren & Fisher, 1990; Labouvie-Vief, 1990; Taranto, 1989), although few longitudinal data address the question. Ordinary people associate wisdom with experience (Sternberg, 1986) and those who are young attribute it to older people (Heckhausen, Dixon, & Baltes, 1989; Orwoll & Perlmutter, 1990). However, Orwoll and Perlmutter failed to find age-related differences in self-ratings of wisdom among individuals ranging in age from their 20s to their 90s. Baltes and his colleagues (Smith, Staudinger, & Baltes, 1994; Staudinger, Smith, & Baltes, 1992) also failed to find age-related differences in wisdom in their cross-sectional research.

The main support for the hypothesis that wisdom increases with age comes from research on post-formal or adult stages of cognitive development. Several cross-sectional or short-term longitudinal studies have found that openness to the experience of emotions (Labouvie-Vief, DeVoe, & Bulka, 1989), reflective judgment including the understanding that knowledge is contextual and personally constructed (Kitchener & Brenner, 1990), and dialectical thinking (Basseches, 1984) increase well into adulthood. All of these characteristics may be interpreted as aspects of wisdom.

Special experiential contexts, such as employment in settings that involve thinking about difficult personal and life problems, may facilitate the development of wisdom (Smith et al., 1994; Staudinger,

et al., 1992). For example, Baltes et al. (1995) reported that clinical psychologists scored as high on wisdom-related tasks as a group of eminent citizen-selected specifically for their wisdom. Both groups outscored professionals not involved in human services. Mentoring or being mentored may also facilitate wisdom (Baltes & Staudinger, 1993).

Some scholars conceptualize wisdom as the knowledge of human limitation and relate it to experiences of loss and disappointment (Taranto, 1989). These experiences may be regarded as a part of the general experience of aging (Karp, 1988; Taranto, 1989) or they may be confined to more circumscribed stressful or traumatic events (Birren & Fisher, 1990). For Kramer (1990), a vital component of becoming wise is the withdrawal of projections. The ability to differentiate the needs of self from those of others may be facilitated, she says, by encountering problems in relationships. Kohlberg (1981) argued that our fascination with tragedy as a genre of fiction is due to the fact that it deals with issues of moral development and transcendence. He quotes from Aeschylus' play *Agamemnon*: "Zeus, who guided men to think, has laid it down that wisdom comes along through suffering" (1981, p. 373). Of course, not everyone becomes wiser through suffering. For example, level of ego development may affect the use made of painful experience (Bursik, 1991).

Because both practical and transcendent wisdom tend to be conceptualized as characteristics that develop, we are interested in evidence of change over time in each of them. One might expect practical wisdom to be more influenced by life experiences, such as problems in relationships, and transcendent wisdom to be more influenced by inner processes. However, in the Mills Study, we have repeated measures only for our measure of practical wisdom, the ACL scale.

Agenda for This Research

Our first aim in this study was to examine the validity of the self-report ACL Practical Wisdom Scale (PWS) and the Ratings of Transcendent Wisdom (TWR) that are based on the examples of wisdom provided by the participants. The correlation between the two measures will be reported for both women and partners, but the data were sufficient to study concurrent and antecedent correlates of the measures only for the women. We expected a positive

correlation between the two measures because both should be correlated with intelligence, perceptiveness, insightfulness, and ego development. However, we expected the correlation to be modest, believing that the PWS, if it assesses practical wisdom, should be related to social confidence, understanding of others, and generative attitudes, whereas the TWR, if it assesses transcendent wisdom, should be more related to sensitivity to symbol patterns (intuition, openness, and creativity) and to a self-orientation (as opposed to other orientation) that is healthy (as opposed to primitively narcissistic).

Similarly, we thought that scores on the two kinds of wisdom at age 52 should be predicted by antecedent measures that would overlap in part but would also be different. Both types of wisdom should be predictable from measures of intelligence available from college records and perhaps from psychological perceptiveness as assessed by inventory scores at age 21. Since practical wisdom is thought to be more related to external experience and adjustment in society, we expected that it might be particularly high among individuals who as young adults showed interpersonal involvement and confidence. Since transcendent wisdom develops out of an inner orientation and is somewhat removed from conventional adjustment, it, more than practical wisdom, should be associated with early openness to new ideas or the restructuring of experience.

The second aim of the study was to show the extent of change in wisdom from early to middle adulthood. Of our two measures, only the PWS was available from participants at more than one age. If gains in practical wisdom are associated with age, then both women and their partners should increase on the PWS.

The third aim was to study factors related to an increase in practical wisdom (among women only). We compared psychotherapists with other women to try to replicate previous findings (Baltes et al., 1995; Staudinger et al., 1992) that involvement in an occupation that requires thinking about life problems and human dilemmas facilitates the development of wisdom.⁴ To test Kramer's (1990) suggestion that problems in relationships may be conducive to wisdom, we also compared wisdom in women who had experienced divorce with those who had not.

⁴In our study, being a psychotherapist was the only occupation that met the Berlin group's (Staudinger et al., 1992) criteria for a profession that is potentially conducive to the development of wisdom.

METHOD

Participants

In 1958 and again in 1960, a representative two-thirds of the senior class ($N = 141$) at Mills College in Oakland, California, participated in a study of personality characteristics and plans for the future among college women (Helson, 1967). The sample was contacted again, primarily by mail, at what were labeled the age-27, age-43, and age-52 times of testing. The women's male partners were invited to participate in the age-27 and age-52 assessments, when they were on the average 31 and 56 years of age. At age 52, 78% of the women were in the paid labor force, 77% had children, 68% were currently married, 42% had been divorced, and 34% had degrees beyond their Bachelor's. The occupations of the Mills women were diverse, but many were teachers, artists of various kinds, clinical psychologists, entrepreneurs, and administrators.

The participants in this study consisted of 94 women and 44 men who both completed the ACL and provided scorable examples of wisdom during the age-52 assessment. Some analyses were restricted to somewhat smaller groups, such as 77 women or 21 couples who provided both measures of wisdom at age 52 and also the ACL measure in young adulthood. These 77 women did not differ significantly in personality or life style from the remaining women of the study. For comparison of the 21 couples with other women and men, see Wink and Helson (1993).

Measures of Wisdom

The Practical Wisdom Scale (PWS)

The Adjective Check List (ACL; Gough & Heilbrun, 1983) consists of 300 adjectives that may be used to describe oneself, others, or a prototype or construct. In the development of the wisdom scale, the first step was to ask a panel of nine personality psychologists, both those already having their doctorates and graduate students, four male and five female, at the Institute of Personality and Social Research (IPSR) to select adjectives from the ACL that were indicative and contraindicative of wisdom. The nominators were asked to use their ideas of a common understanding of the characteristics of wisdom in selecting adjectives.

A first provisional scale consisted of 18 indicative and 4 contraindicative adjectives on which at least six of the nine judges agreed. Then the provisional scale was correlated with all of the 300 ACL adjectives in a sample of 280 Bay Area male and female residents and college students studied at IPSR. (See Wink & Gough, 1990, for a description of the sample.) In a series of iterations, new items showing strong correlations with the scale were added and those with weak correlations were eliminated. As shown in Table I, the final scale consisted of 14 indicative and 4 contraindicative items. The wisdom scores consisted of the number of indicative items from the revised wisdom scale that each individual had checked in their ACL self-description minus the number of contraindicative items. The scale had an alpha reliability of .75 for the 140 females and .78 for the 140 males.

Both the Mills women and their partners had provided self-descriptions on the ACL in young adulthood and mature middle age, the women at ages 27 and 52 and the men at ages 31 and 56. The alpha reliabilities of the wisdom scale in young adulthood were .79 for women and .81 for men and, in mature middle age, they were .76 and .74, respectively. The correlations between scores in young adulthood and midlife were .41 for women and .40 for men, clearly significant but also suggesting some change in rank orders of scores over time.

Transcendent Wisdom Ratings

During the age-52 follow-up, the women and their partners were asked to respond to the following open-ended question: "Many people hope to become wiser as they grow older. Would you give an example of wisdom you have acquired and how you came by it?"

A panel of four judges, consisting of two individuals with doctorates and two graduate students (one male, three females) in personality psychology, used a 5-point scale to rate the responses to this question. Two training sessions were held. To receive a rating of 5, the statement needed to be abstract (transcending the personal), insightful (not obvious), and to express key aspects of wisdom, such as a recognition of the complexity and limits of knowledge, an integration of thought and affect, and philosophical/spiritual depth. A rating of 4 was given to statements that expressed some of these key aspects but

had less clear transcendent features. A rating of 3 was given to statements describing some aspects of wisdom such as the need for tolerance, reflectiveness, or self-reliance, often in a restricted personal context. It was sometimes given to statements describing a philosophical point of view that seemed superficial or not the subject's own. A rating of 2 indicated stunted growth or a superficial, despairing, or cynical attitude, and a rating of 1 was confined to statements marked by extreme lack of self-transcendence or even of self development (self-centeredness, bitterness, or a clear inability to deal with the question).

Individuals scoring 1 or 2 would fit Erikson's constructs of stagnation and despair or Kohut's failure to overcome childhood narcissism. The information about how the individual had come by the wisdom was sometimes helpful in evaluating depth versus superficiality.

Of the 138 women and partners whose examples were rated for wisdom, 2% received an average score of 5, 21% received a score of 4, 53% received a score of 3, 22% received a score of 2, and 2% received a score of 1. In Table II, we provide illustrative examples of wisdom assigned the most common scores of 4, 3, and 2.

The mean alpha coefficient of reliability for the 80 women whose narratives were rated for wisdom by all four judges was .82. A further 14 women were rated by three judges. The mean alpha for the entire sample of 94 women rated by the three judges was .81. The mean alpha was .86 for 44 partners rated by four judges.

Personality Measures

Sentence Completion Test (SCT)

At the age-43 time of testing, ego development (Loevinger, 1976) was assessed using Form II-68 of the SCT. This well-known projective test requires the subjects to complete 36 sentence stems that are then scored for level of ego development according to a scoring manual (Loevinger & Wessler, 1970; Loevinger, Wessler, & Redmore, 1979). Individuals with high scores are characterized by cognitive complexity, self-chosen long-term motives, and respect for individual autonomy and mutuality in interpersonal relations. In the Mills sample, the SCT for 90 women was scored reliably by two trained raters. A reliability coefficient of .87 was obtained between the total Pro-

Table II Examples of Responses Used to Rate Transcendent Wisdom

Question: Many people hope to become wiser as they grow older. Would you give an example of a bit of wisdom you have acquired and how you came by it?

Response rated high (5):

My younger colleagues tend to be highly critical, questioning of policies established by a government, by a boss. That is the way it should be when you are younger; often such criticism is on the mark. But the older you get, the more you have to assume you can overcome the odds, be optimistic you can implement a change or a policy. Otherwise you are a leader with a self-fulfilling prophecy of doom and failure.

Responses rated high (4):

What seems to be in the way can become the way. I learned this by living with a physical disability, as well as through entering into many kinds of loss and constriction.

No "bits" of wisdom! An enlarged view of the world makes me more wise. I see long-term consequences and complex ramifications of actions. I also have a strong developmental perspective which puts things in place.

Responses given moderate ratings (3):

People think of one no more than what one thinks of oneself. I first learned this in my career when I presented myself modestly and was paid accordingly!

Don't jump to conclusions about people. Have been wrong enough in the past to be much more patient now.

Responses rated low (2):

In a no-win situation, don't do anything. You still won't win but there probably won't be too much of a mess.

While in business I was appalled at the "sue happy" attitude of employees and would not put myself in that vulnerable position again.

Response rated low (1):

Get what you can: nobody is going to give you anything.

tocol Ratings assigned by the two raters independently (Picano, 1984). The SCT has been used in several previous studies (Helson & Roberts, 1994; Helson & Wink, 1987; Picano, 1984). We expected both measures of wisdom to be related to ego development

California Psychological Inventory (CPI)

The CPI (Gough, 1987) is a widely used personality inventory consisting of 20 folk concept scales, which map broadly onto the domains of social poise and assurance, impulse control, and openness and complexity of experience. For the purpose of this study, we were particularly interested in the Psychological Mindedness scale, which assesses perceptiveness in relation to self and others and was expected to relate to both measures of wisdom. In addition, we expected that practical wisdom would be correlated with measures of social poise and assurance, of which the Dominance and Empathy scales are perhaps the most relevant. The Dominance scale assesses confidence, prosocial initiative, and goal

orientation. The Empathy scale assesses the ability to use an understanding of others as a social resource. We expected that transcendent wisdom would be related to measures of openness and complexity, especially the Flexibility scale, which measures a liking for variety and openness to new ways of thinking or behaving (Gough, 1992). In the Mills sample, test-retest reliabilities for the Psychological Mindedness, Dominance, Empathy, and Flexibility scales, evaluated on a sample of 78 women who took the CPI at age 43 and age 52, were .64, .78, .70, and .60, respectively.

California Q-Set and Its Prototypes

Extensive open-ended questionnaire responses provided by the Mills women at age 43 enabled a panel of three to five observers to describe 105 women by means of the California Q-Set (CAQ; Block, 1978), a deck of 100 items about personality functioning that are sorted according to a nine-step normal distribution. The mean interjudge correlation

for the CAQ ratings was .75. See Wink (1991) for details of the procedure.

The Q-sort provides a valuable way to obtain measures of complex psychological constructs. Groups of experts may be asked to use the Q-deck to describe prototypical exemplars of constructs and their sorts may be composited. Q-sort descriptions of individual subjects can then be correlated with the Q-sort description of the prototype, the correlation providing a score on the prototype. In this study, we used a prototype for Insight (Marrott, 1981), which we hoped would be correlated with both measures of wisdom as well as prototype scores for Generativity (Peterson & Klohnen, 1995) and Autonomy (healthy narcissism; Wink, 1992), which we expected to correlate with practical and transcendent wisdom, respectively. The Insight prototype reflects a psychodynamically based notion of self-understanding. The Generativity prototype measures a prosocial and caring attitude toward others or toward work. High scorers on the Autonomy prototype value intellectual and artistic pursuits and have wide interests, unconventional thoughts, and a high aspiration level.

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)

Form F of the MBTI (Myers, 1962; Myers & McCauly, 1985) assesses Jungian typological dimensions. Our research used the continuous score of Intuition versus Sensation, available from the women at age 43. High scorers on this scale are described as perceiving possibilities, meanings, and relationships rather than immediate, real, solid facts of experience. The alpha reliability of this scale as reported in the MBTI Manual (Myers & McCauly, 1985) for a sample of 184 college women was .80. Though all wisdom involves intuition, practical wisdom needs also to keep "the facts" in mind, whereas transcendent wisdom requires considerable intuitive skills. We expected the Examples of Wisdom measure to show the stronger relationship to Intuition.

Cognitive Potential

Scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) were provided by the women in their applications to college. Because intelligence is emphasized in the literature as a characteristic of wise people (e.g., Stern-

berg, 1990), we predicted positive relationships between SAT scores and both measures of wisdom.

Questionnaire-Based Measures

Work Domain

The women's work histories at age 52 were scored reliably on a 5-point Occupational Creativity Scale (Helson, et al., 1995). The interrater reliability was .92. Also at age 52, the women's responses were scored yes or no to a question asking them whether they had enjoyed being a mentor. We expected occupational creativity to be related to transcendent wisdom and mentoring experience to be related to practical wisdom. To test the hypothesis that psychologists would increase in wisdom more than other women, we identified seven psychotherapists and one marriage and family counselor.

Measures Used for General Description

Finally, several measures were included for general descriptive purposes. Life satisfaction at age 52 was measured with a single-item 4-point scale ranging from Life at this time is *not so good* to *first-rate*. The index of marital satisfaction was a composite of ratings by the women of seven items dealing with issues such as understanding and enjoyment of partner, satisfaction with conflict resolution, and decisions about spending money. The alpha for this scale was .70. Status level in work was rated reliably on a 7-point scale, which is anchored at the low end by jobs requiring a minimum of skill or having little prestige and, at the high end, by work requiring talent and expertise and either responsibility for other adults or public recognition. The interrater reliability was .94 (Helson, Elliott, & Leigh, 1989; Roberts, in press).

Plan of Analysis

To examine the validity of the measures of wisdom, we first correlated the PWS and the TWR with each other for the 94 women and for their 44 male partners. For the women, we then correlated each of the measures with personality, ability, and life variables expected to be related to one or both kinds of wisdom at midlife. We also correlated each of the

wisdom scales with measures of personality and intelligence from young adulthood.

We used a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to study whether change was related to age among the women who had provided the ACL at both ages 27 and 52. We used 2 × 2 ANOVAs with gender as the between-subjects variable and time as the within-subject variable to study change on the PWS among 21 couples who completed the ACL in early and middle adulthood. To study the influence of occupation (psychotherapy) and negative life events (divorce) on wisdom, we used 2 × 2 ANOVAs and *t*-tests.

RESULTS

Relation Between the PWS and the TWR

On the grounds that the two measures of wisdom would be found to assess some common traits but to show differential sensitivity as well, we expected a positive but modest correlation between them. For women, the correlation between the PWS (age 52) and the TWR was $r(94) = .16$, n.s., and for

partners, it was significant at a trend level, $r(44) = .26$, $p < .10$.

Correlates of the PWS and the TWR

Correlates at Midlife

Table III shows correlates at midlife (ages 43 and 52) that were significant for both measures of wisdom, for one of the measures only, and for neither. Though the SCT and Q-sort prototypes were available only at age 43, other work has shown considerable consistency of personality over the period from ages 43 to 52 (Helson & Roberts, 1994).

Both measures of wisdom were correlated with ego level as assessed by the SCT, with the Insight and Autonomy (healthy self-orientation) prototype scores from the Q-sort, and with the CPI Psychological Mindedness scale. The PWS alone was significantly correlated with the Generativity prototype, enjoyment of being a mentor, and the CPI Dominance and Empathy scales. The TWR alone was related to the MBTI Intuition-Sensation scale, the Occupational Creativity scale, and the CPI Flexibil-

Table III. Correlations Between Measures of Wisdom and Predicted Variables^a

Variables	Wisdom measures		
	N	PWS	TWR
Variables related to both the PWS and the TWR			
Ego development (age 43)	77	.30 ^c	.22 ^b
Insight prototype (age 43)	89	.22 ^b	.44 ^d
Autonomy prototype (age 43)	89	.22 ^b	.26 ^c
CPI Psychological Mindedness	90	.24 ^b	.26 ^b
Variables related to the PWS only			
Generativity Prototype (age 43)	89	.23 ^b	.14
Enjoyed being a mentor	68	.31 ^c	-.11
CPI Dominance	90	.30 ^c	-.01
CPI Empathy	90	.21 ^b	.17
Variables related to the TWR only			
Intuition-Sensation scale (age 43)	83	.17	.40 ^d
Occupational Creativity scale	94	.15	.29 ^c
CPI Flexibility	90	-.10	.26 ^b
Variables not related to either the PWS or the TWR			
Status level in work	86	.12	.20
Life satisfaction	94	.16	.15
Marital satisfaction	65	.02	.00

^aUnless otherwise indicated, measures come from the age-52 follow-up. PWS = Practical Wisdom Scale; TWR = Transcendent Wisdom Ratings; ACL = Adjective Check List; CPI = California Psychological Inventory.

^b $p < .05$, two-tailed.

^c $p < .01$, two-tailed.

^d $p < .001$, two-tailed.

ity scale. Neither measure of wisdom was related to status level in work or to life or marital satisfaction.

Correlates in Young Adulthood

We correlated the PWS and the TWR at age 52 with scores on the SAT and with scores on four conceptually relevant CPI scales at age 21: Dominance, Empathy, Flexibility, and Psychological Mindedness. Perhaps because of the restriction of range in the sample, SAT Verbal and Mathematical scores were not significantly correlated with either measure of wisdom, $r(94) = -.07, .10,$ and $.07, .12$ for the PWS and the TWR, respectively.

Among personality scales, the results were largely as expected. The PWS was correlated significantly with Dominance, $r(92) = .28,$ and Empathy, $r(92) = .23.$ The TWR was correlated significantly with Flexibility, $r(92) = .26,$ Psychological Mindedness, $r(92) = .26,$ and Empathy $r(92) = .21.$ (All p values were significant at the .05 level.)

Age-Related Changes in Wisdom

Because the data did not allow us to study whether there was a change in transcendent wisdom, we report in this section analyses of change over time for the PWS only. To keep the number of subjects throughout this and the next section constant, we have restricted our analyses to 21 couples or to the 77 women who at age 52 provided an example of wisdom and who filled out the ACL in both young adulthood and mature middle age.

The first analysis used a one-way ANOVA to analyze change in wisdom among women from age 27 to age 52. The group of 77 women increased significantly in wisdom from early ($M = 9.23, SD = 3.51$) to mature middle adulthood ($M = 11.26, SD = 2.76$), $F(1,76) = 27.17, p < .001$ ($\eta^2 = .26$). We next performed a 2×2 ANOVA with gender as the between-subjects variable and time as the within subject factor for the 21 matched partners who completed the PWS in early and mature middle adulthood. There was a significant effect of time, $F(1,40) = 10.82, p < .01$ ($\eta^2 = .21$), but no significant effect of gender or interaction, $F(1, 40) = .00$ and $1.15,$ respectively. This suggests that both the men and women tended to increase in wisdom over time.

The Relation of Experience to Wisdom

Being a Psychotherapist

To test the relation between wisdom and being a psychotherapist, we first compared the scores on our two measures of wisdom of eight psychotherapists and the remaining 69 women. At age 52, the psychotherapists scored higher than the rest of the sample on both the TWR, $t(75) = 3.42, p = .001,$ and the PWS, $t(75) = 3.44, p < .001.$ To rule out the possibility that high scores on wisdom were related to graduate education rather than to being a psychotherapist, we next compared women who had advanced degrees ($n = 32$) with women who did not ($n = 44$). At age 52, the two groups did not differ significantly on either the TWR, $t(74) = 1.87,$ or the PWS, $t(74) = .01.$

Next, to test the hypothesis that the increase in wisdom was related to experience as a clinical psychologist, we compared scores on the PWS at ages 27 and 52 for the psychotherapists and the other women (see Fig. 1). A 2×2 ANOVA with occupation as the between-subjects variable and time as the within subject variable produced a significant effect of time, $F(1, 75) = 25.24, p < .001$ ($\eta^2 = .25$), and a significant interaction between group and time $F(1, 75) = 4.94, p < .05$ ($\eta^2 = .06$). The main effect of group was not significant, $F(1, 75) = .18.$ Thus, psychotherapists increased in wisdom more than other women.

Being Divorced

To explore the connection between wisdom and experiences of relational loss or disappointment, we compared women who experienced a divorce ($n = 33$) with those who had not ($n = 44$). At age 52, the women who had divorced scored significantly higher on the PWS than the remaining Mills participants, $t(75) = 3.18, p < .01.$ The two groups did not differ on the PWS at age 27, $t(75) = 1.14, n.s.$

We next performed a 2×2 ANOVA with presence or absence of divorce as the between-subjects factor and time as the within subject factor. Both the main effect of time and, unexpectedly, also that of group were significant, $F(1, 75) = 28.32, p < .001$ ($\eta^2 = .27$) and $F(1, 75) = 5.09, p < .05$ ($\eta^2 = .06$), respectively (see Fig. 2). Contrary to our hypothesis, there was no significant interaction between time and

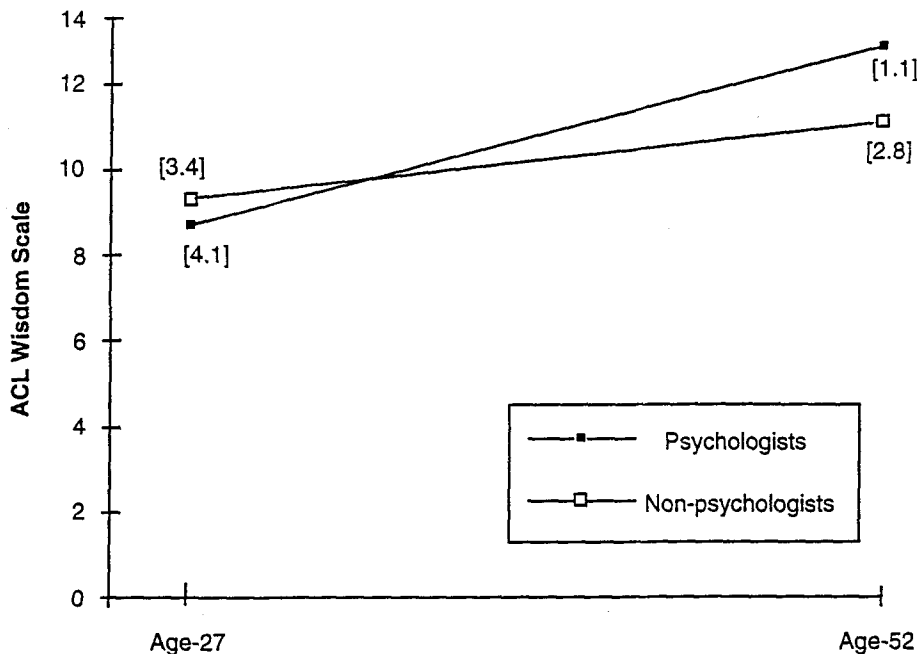


Fig. 1. Age-related change on the Practical Wisdom Scale associated with being a psychologist. Numbers of subjects = 8 for psychologists and 69 for not-psychologists. Standard deviations are enclosed in brackets. ACL = Adjective Check List.

divorce, $F(1, 75) = .119$, n.s.: Already at age 27, the women who experienced divorce scored somewhat higher in wisdom than the rest of the sample.

DISCUSSION

Wisdom is a complex, multifaceted construct that is difficult to study empirically. Findings on wisdom are necessarily structured by initial assumptions concerning the nature of wisdom, who is capable of being wise, and what are the appropriate ways of measuring the construct. In this study, we approached wisdom as an aspect of personality development in adulthood. We assumed that it could be studied profitably in a group of middle-aged, college-educated women and their partners and that it was useful to make distinctions between kinds of wisdom. We undertook to measure practical wisdom with a self-report adjective checklist scale (PWS) and transcendent wisdom with ratings of responses to an open-ended question asking for an example of wisdom (TWR).

Using Orwoll's personality model of wisdom, we thought that, if high scorers on the PWS and the

TWR are indeed wise, then they should have in common certain key characteristics indicative of advanced development in the intrapersonal domain. As hypothesized, both our measures were significantly correlated at midlife with the SCT (ego development), the CAQ Insight prototype, and the Psychological Mindedness scale of the CPI. They were also correlated with the CAQ Autonomy scale, although we expected this association to be significant for the TWR only. Jointly, these results suggest that high scorers on both measures tend to be cognitively complex and morally serious, insightful, perceptive, and objective. We believe that the above findings provide support for the claim that both the PWS and the TWR are measures of wisdom.

Though they shared some key correlates, the PWS and the TWR were, at best, only modestly related to each other in the samples of both women and their partners. This means that rating oneself as insightful, clear-thinking, reflective, and tolerant was not significantly related to having one's example of wisdom judged as showing transcendence of ego boundaries, integration of thought and affect, awareness of limitations, or an understanding of the paradoxical nature of knowledge. We believe that our two

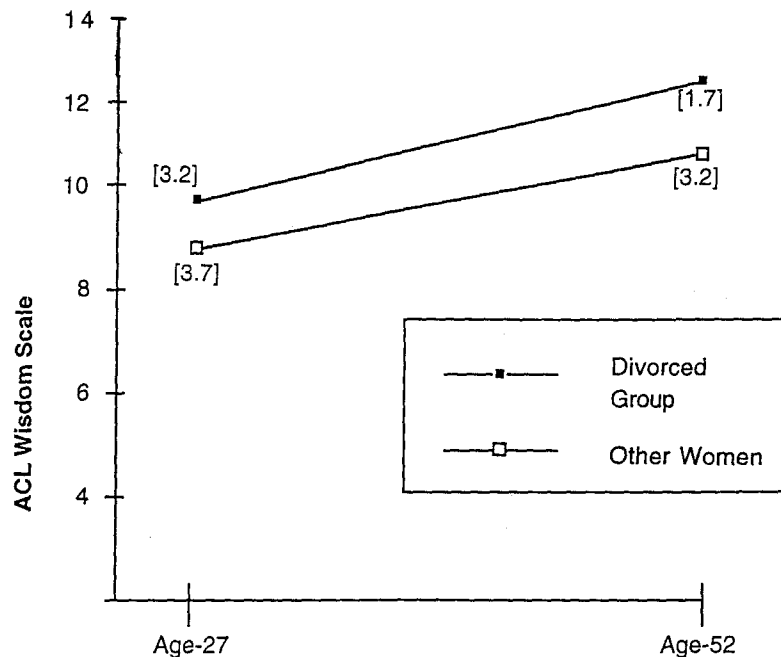


Fig. 2. Age-related change on the Practical Wisdom Scale associated with divorce. $N_s = 33$ for the divorced group and 44 for the rest of the sample. Standard deviations are enclosed in brackets. ACL = Adjective Check List.

measures assess two different types of wisdom, practical and transcendent.

In terms of Orwoll's model, we assumed that practical wisdom should be associated with interest and skill in the interpersonal domain, whereas transcendent wisdom should be associated with interest and skill in the transpersonal domain. In support of this hypothesis, only the PWS was correlated at midlife with CPI measures of social initiative and leadership (Dominance) and empathy, and only high scorers on the PWS demonstrated a generative attitude and reported an enjoyment of mentoring. In contrast, only high scorers on the TWR showed evidence of openness to experience (CPI Flexibility scale) and intuition (MBTI), and achievement in creative careers. There was also evidence that the two measures of wisdom were associated with different antecedent personality characteristics. Only PWS was correlated with CPI Dominance at age 21, and only TWR was correlated with CPI Psychological Mindedness and Flexibility at age 21.

We do not argue that either of our measures of wisdom is ideal. We ourselves began the study with misgivings. We would have preferred ACL descriptions made by observers rather than by the partici-

pants themselves as well as a series of open-ended questions on wisdom rather than only one question. However, we had to work with the tools available, and the results have been encouraging. It is possible that method variance contributed to the findings. To describe oneself in terms indicating wisdom in everyday life has confidence associated with it and to write a paragraph about one's wisdom that is not trite or superficial has openness and originality associated with it. Although these components are congruent with the kinds of processes we are trying to study, our measures may accentuate their role. We hope that others will help to clarify this picture.

To be able to assess wisdom in this longitudinal sample was advantageous in several ways. First, the archives provided sufficient information to demonstrate the construct validity of the two measures. Second, they provided personality data from age 21 so that we could demonstrate personality antecedents of the measures. Third, the ACL measure was available for both the women and their partners in young adulthood and mature middle age so that it was possible to study change in wisdom over this period. We now move to this topic.

We found that scores on the PWS increased significantly for both the women and their partners over a period of 25 years. This means that these college-educated individuals saw themselves as more tolerant, realistic, mature, and reflective in their 50s than in their late 20s or early 30s. Such growth in practical wisdom fits well with the life situations of middle-aged individuals who in their 50s often hold positions of experience and responsibility at work, are making decisions for their elderly parents, and are being increasingly appreciated by their young adult children. In the case of the Mills cohort in particular, the adult years involved living through a time of radical social changes and coincided with an explosion of new technologies and viewpoints. If wisdom is related in any way to experience, then growing older under these circumstances should have made our participants more aware of the transitory nature of things and of life's limits and uncertainties.

In search of experiences associated with growth in wisdom, we studied the effect of occupation (psychotherapy) and life events (divorce) on age-related changes on PWS. Pursuing the line of Baltes and his collaborators (Baltes et al., 1995; Smith et al., 1994; Staudinger et al., 1992), we found that at age 52 psychotherapists scored higher in wisdom than nonpsychotherapists. (This was the case for both our measures of practical and transcendent wisdom.) Using an Age \times Experience (occupation) paradigm, we found a steeper rate of increase in practical wisdom among the psychotherapists, who at age 27 scored somewhat lower but at age 52 scored significantly higher in wisdom than the rest of the women. Our findings thus support the Berlin studies.

The findings for the group of women who experienced a divorce are more difficult to interpret. As predicted, these women scored significantly higher on the PWS than the rest of the sample at age 52 but not at age 27. Though *t*-tests supported our hypothesis, we failed to find a significant Age \times Group interaction effect in the two-way analysis of variance. This was probably the case because the women who experienced divorce scored somewhat (insignificantly) higher in wisdom at age 27. It seems likely that a number of these women were already dealing with failures in love relationships or marital conflict at that time. However, it is also possible that antecedent characteristics, such as ascendance or dominance or unhappy parents, may have contributed to both these life experiences and the development of wisdom.

Of course, being a psychotherapist and being divorced are not the only routes to wisdom. Other kinds of work responsibilities and other kinds of pain can presumably make a reflective person wiser. Conversely, being a psychologist or getting divorced does not guarantee wisdom. Our findings show that the development of practical wisdom was particularly characteristic of women who were interpersonally confident and goal oriented and then suffered a divorce. Such an antecedent personality structure may have helped these women to deal with negative experiences in a way that promoted growth and development.

In conclusion, our findings indicate that wisdom as an aspect of personality can be profitably studied in a heterogeneous sample of college-educated men and women; that it is useful to distinguish among types of wisdom; that practical wisdom, at least, increases from young adulthood to mature middle age; and that the nature of life experience is related to change in practical wisdom.

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