

Introduction

Wisdom is a complex phenomenon. This study is intrigued by the „social nature“ of wisdom (see Baltes & Smith, 1990; Staudinger, 1996): The study conceptualizes wisdom as a characteristic that is attributed to specific persons and investigates these attributions within the interpersonal context of an advice-giving situation.

The study addresses two main research questions: Which cues do perceivers use to detect wisdom in a person and how are attributions of wisdom made? To investigate these questions, an experimental person perception study is conducted that specifically investigates how three characteristics of an advisor — his/her level of wisdom-related knowledge, the quality of his/her empathic listening behavior, and his/her chronological age — contribute to the perception of this advisor as being wise. Moreover, the study investigates how these impressions change when perceivers' knowledge about wisdom is activated and when they have more time to think about a potentially wise advisor and to process wisdom-relevant verbal behavior.

The first two chapters review theoretical and empirical studies of wisdom that motivate the present study. The first chapter provides a general overview of different definitional approaches to wisdom. Although not all of these different definitions can be included in the present study, they are described to illustrate the

complexity of the field of wisdom, to increase the reader's awareness of the construct, and to provide the necessary theoretical and methodological background to evaluate the merits and limitations of the experiments carried out in this study. A social constructionist view on wisdom is proposed as a meta-theoretical framework for the present study.

In the second chapter, three characteristics of wise persons (wisdom-related knowledge, empathetic listening behavior, and older age) are identified based on past theoretical and empirical work on wisdom. Both explicit and implicit theoretical approaches to ideal forms of wisdom are used to define features that may be relevant for the attribution of wisdom to a specific person. The present study's second main focus is to investigate social-cognitive processes involved in the perception of a person as being wise. Thus, theories of impression formation are introduced in the final part of Chapter 2. The research predictions are introduced in Chapter 3. The fourth and fifth chapters describe the methods and results of the empirical investigation. The results of the empirical investigation are discussed and integrated into the general theoretical frame in Chapter 6.

A variety of theoretical approaches converge in the conceptualization of wisdom as a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon that involves the integration of *mind* and *virtue* (see Baltes & Smith, 1990; Baltes, Glück, & Kunzmann, 2002; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Dittmann-Kohli & Baltes, 1990). Wisdom-related knowledge,

empathic listening behavior, and chronological age are characteristics that are identified in both implicit and explicit theories of wisdom as being typical of wise persons. The present study extends past research on wisdom as it uses definitions of wisdom and *ideally* wise persons to investigate the perception of a *specific* person as being wise.