

2 Perceived Wisdom in an Advice-Giving Context

The present study adopts a social-constructionist perspective to investigate perceptions of wisdom within an advice-giving context. It was outlined earlier that this study suggests that wisdom is ascribed on the basis of a product such as a person's level of wisdom-related knowledge.

Different theories of wisdom are consistent with the idea that wisdom involves excellence in both the *intellectual* as well as the *interpersonal domain* (Achenbaum & Orwoll, 1991; Ardelt, 2000; Baltes & Smith, 1990; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Holliday & Chandler, 1986). The present study investigates how wisdom is ascribed to an advice-giver on the basis of *intellectual excellence*, as indicated by a high level of wisdom-related knowledge reflected in an advisor's advice, *interpersonal skills*, as indicated by an advisor's non-verbal empathic listening behavior, and *experience*, as indicated by an advisor's chronological age. These three personal characteristics represent prototypical characteristics of *ideally* wise persons. The present study investigates whether these characteristics are also used as cues to attribute wisdom to a *specific* person. In the next section each of these characteristics will be introduced in more detail.

In addition to the advisor's personal characteristics that influence perceptions of wisdom, the study also investigated the effect of two variables on participants' impression formation: (1) *wisdom cueing* and (2) *experience* with the advisor.

In the next section, the importance of the three selected advice-giver characteristics in the perception of advice-givers as being wise will be discussed. The final part of this chapter addresses social-cognitive processes that may influence the attribution of wisdom to an advisor.

2.1 Wisdom-Related Knowledge in an Advice-Giving Context

This study suggests that perceivers use an advice-giver's level of wisdom-related knowledge as a cue to attribute wisdom to this advice-giving person. An advice-giver's intellectual competence or wisdom-related knowledge is not directly observable, but can be inferred on the basis of a product, such as the advice that is given. In this section the specific characteristics of a wise piece of advice will be outlined and discussed.

Theories in the implicit wisdom tradition describe general cognitive attributes, such as „intelligent“ or „knowledgeable“, as being typical of wise persons (see Clayton & Birren, 1980). These general descriptions are categorized and described by higher-order categories, such as *exceptional understanding* or *exceptional judgment and communication skills* (see Holliday and Chandler, 1986; Sternberg, 1985). Implicit approaches emphasize the importance of knowledge and cognitive skills as a characteristic of wise persons, but they do not specifically address the characteristics of a „wise product“. This example is consistent with Baltes' conclusion that lay-

theoretical approaches are typically less deep and elaborated than explicit theoretical approaches to wisdom (see Baltes, 2004).

Different explicit theories of wisdom have emphasized slightly different and yet related aspects of wisdom-related thinking and knowledge. Some theories have suggested specific characteristics of wisdom-related thinking and knowledge, such as the ability to *identify a problem* (Arlin, 1990) or the recognition of the *limits* of one's knowledge (Kekes, 1983; Meacham, 1983, 1990; McKee & Barber, 1999). However, in these approaches, the specific features of a wise piece of advice are not explicated.

A more general view on the characteristics of wise thinking has been offered by scholars in the neo-Piagetian tradition of post-formal and dialectical thought (see Alexander & Langer, 1990; Kramer, 1983; 1990; 2000; Labouvie-Vief, 1980; 1982; 1990; Riegel, 1973; Sinnott, 1998). A central claim of these approaches is that wisdom involves the acknowledgement of the dialectical nature of life-problems and the identification and acceptance of contradiction (Riegel, 1973). According to Kramer (2000), for example, wisdom involves *insight* (breadth and depths of understanding) and an awareness of the *relativistic and uncertain* character of life-problems. This includes awareness of the relativistic nature of knowledge, acceptance of contradiction, and the integration of contradiction into the dialectical whole (Kramer, 1983; Kramer & Woodruff, 1986). In a similar way, Labouvie-Vief (1980; 1982; 1990) describes wisdom as *integrated thought* that involves the integration and balanced

dialogue of different modes of thinking (*logos* and *mythos*) and enables individuals to acknowledge and appreciate historical change and *contextual* diversity. Contextualism and the recognition of uncertainty are complemented in the highest stage of reflective judgment by the ability to find a *good solution* (Kitchener and Brenner, 1990). In sum, neo-Piagetian approaches imply that a wise piece of advice (or a wise advisor) should acknowledge the *dialectical nature* of life-problems and the *unpredictability/ uncertainty* involved in life-situations. Wise advice also should demonstrate the ability to find a *good solution*.

A similarly general and more comprehensive definition of the characteristics of wisdom-related knowledge has been suggested by Paul Baltes and his colleagues (Baltes et al., 1984; Baltes & Smith, 1990; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Dittmann-Kohli & Baltes, 1990; Dixon & Baltes, 1986; Staudinger & Baltes, 1994; Sowarka, 1989). Consistent with dictionary definitions and on the most general level of analyses, wisdom-related knowledge has been considered as good judgment and advice in difficult and fundamental life-problems (Baltes & Smith, 1990; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Kunzmann & Baltes, 2003a). The characteristics of wisdom-related knowledge are well elaborated and specified (for further details, see Baltes & Smith, 1990; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Staudinger et al., 1994).

On a psychological level of analyses, Baltes and colleagues have defined wisdom as an expert-knowledge about the meaning and conduct of life (i.e., the

Table 2

Examples of wise advice according to the Berlin Wisdom Model (adopted from Baltes & Smith, 1990)

Criterion	Instantiation in verbal response
Factual knowledge	Who, when, where? Specific knowledge, examples, variations General knowledge of emotions, vulnerability, and multiple options
Procedural knowledge	Strategies of information search, decision making, and advice-giving Timing of advice Monitoring of emotional reactions
Life span contextualism	Likely age sequence Socio-historical and idiosyncratic context Coordination of life themes and temporal changes Contextual conflicts and tensions
Value-Relativism/Tolerance	Religious and personal preferences Current/future values, goals, motives Cultural relativism
Uncertainty	No perfect solution Optimization of gain/loss Future not fully predictable Back-up solutions

fundamental pragmatics of life), including difficult and important issues related to life-planning, life-management, and life-review. Wisdom-related knowledge is characterized by a family of five criteria (Baltes & Smith, 1990; Staudinger et al., 1994). Table 2 illustrates how these criteria can be translated into a wise piece of advice.

The *basic criteria* are (1) rich factual knowledge about the fundamental pragmatics of life and (2) rich procedural knowledge about the fundamental pragmatics of life. These criteria are called basic because factual and procedural knowledge are constituent of any expert-knowledge system (see Ericsson & Smith, 1991; Ericsson & Charness, 1994). The three *meta-criteria* of wisdom-related knowledge — (3) lifespan contextualism, (4) value-relativism/tolerance, and (5) awareness and management of uncertainty — are assumed to be unique to wisdom (Baltes & Smith, 1990; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Kunzmann & Baltes, 2003a).

Factual knowledge involves *general knowledge* about human nature and life conditions (including emotions, motives, and the dynamic interaction of personal, interpersonal, and societal conditions) and *specific knowledge* about life events, institutions, and societal norms. *Procedural knowledge* refers to ways of dealing with fundamental life issues, including strategies and heuristics of the interpretation and management of life. Specifically, it includes insightful decision-making (i.e., using and assessing the relevance of available information, listening to advice, flexible planning, cost-benefit-analysis), the application of knowledge from past experiences, strategies of goal-setting and attainment, consultation with helpful others, and strategies of giving advice in difficult life matters.

The criterion of *lifespan contextualism* involves the acknowledgement that critical life events are always embedded in various contexts (age-related, cultural,

biographical) that have to be integrated into sound judgment and advice. The criterion of *value-relativism and tolerance* is characterized by knowledge about differences in values and life goals. A wise piece of advice reflects distance from one's own values and an awareness of the individual differences in values due to individual differences in personal, social, and cultural backgrounds. At the same time, this perspective acknowledges, however, the universality of certain values (e.g., „Thou shall not kill.“). Value-related relativism is exemplified in the perspective of multiple possible solutions to a problem. Awareness and management of *uncertainty* involves knowledge about the relative uncertainty of life. This perspective acknowledges the limitations of knowledge; namely that the sources of knowledge are always incomplete and the contexts of life-problems and their interpretation can and do change. Good advice involves suggestions on how to manage unexpected life events, including testing the appropriateness of decisions and plans.

Within the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm, the five criteria have been used to evaluate the level of wisdom-related knowledge as reflected in verbal products (e.g., Staudinger et al., 1994). In the context of the present study, these criteria were used to construct two pieces of advice that differ in level of wisdom-related knowledge. It is investigated whether lay-persons use the level of wisdom-related knowledge reflected in an advice to attribute wisdom to an advice-giving person.

One person perception study used protocols of the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm to investigate attributions of wisdom (Hira & Faulkender, 1997). The authors could show that lay persons' attributions of wisdom corresponded with the trained raters' evaluations of the level of wisdom-related knowledge. However, in Hira and Faulkender's study, levels of wisdom-related knowledge were not varied. The authors found, however, that based on the same verbal protocol reflecting wisdom-related knowledge, different levels of wisdom were ascribed to different targets. This finding suggests that wisdom-related knowledge is not the only cue that is used to attribute wisdom to a specific person.

2.2 Wise Behavior in an Advice-Giving Context: The Role of Nonverbal Listening Behavior

Besides a high level of wisdom-related knowledge, perceivers may observe an advice-giver's level of interpersonal skill to attribute wisdom to this person. Wisdom theories have suggested that *interpersonal skills* are behavioral manifestations of wisdom (see Achenbaum & Orwoll, 1991; Ardelt, 2000; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000, Kunzmann & Baltes, 2003a for a summary).

To begin, research on implicit theories of wisdom has shown that lay persons perceive attributes such as „sensitive“, „compassionate“, „empathetic“, „displays concern for others“, „patient“ and „a good listener“ as being characteristic of wise persons (Clayton & Birren, 1980; Holliday & Chandler, 1986; Sternberg, 1985).

Interpersonal behaviors are also spontaneously used by participants as reasons for the nomination of a person as being wise. Denney et al. (1995) asked participants to nominate the wisest person in their life. Areas in which the nominees were perceived to be particularly wise included *personal/emotional/moral* (e.g., compassion, who to trust, emotions/feelings) and *interpersonal* (e.g., dealing with people, relationships, communication). Denney et al. (1995) also asked participants to nominate *interpersonally wise* persons, i.e. persons who are wise with respect to „understanding people and interpersonal relationships“ (p.38). Forty percent of their participants nominated the same person as being wise and interpersonally wise, a percentage that increased with participants' age to 60 percent in the oldest age group (60-70 years). This study illustrates that interpersonal skills are not only rated as being typical for wise persons, but also that wise persons are nominated on the basis of their interpersonal skills. In sum, these implicit approaches emphasize the importance of interpersonal skills as a characteristic of wisdom. They do not, however, specify the *situations* and *behavioral indicators* of wise interpersonal skills.

As outlined earlier, explicit approaches to wisdom have also suggested that interpersonal skills and behaviors are central elements of wisdom. For example, personality theories of wisdom suggest that wise persons are empathetic (Achenbaum and Orwoll, 1991; Ardelt, 1997; 2003; Orwoll & Achenbaum, 1993; Taranto, 1989) and have good listening skills (Ardelt, 2003; Baltes & Staudinger,

2000). Wise persons are also expected to express compassionate concern for others (Kramer, 2000). Within the Berlin Wisdom Model, interpersonal competence is conceptualized as part of a knowledge system. According to this theory, factual knowledge involves knowledge about emotions and vulnerabilities and procedural knowledge involves strategies and timing of advice-giving. Wisdom-related knowledge, as defined in the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm, has been shown to make a difference for people's actual behaviors in interpersonal and highly emotional contexts. For example, people with higher levels of wisdom-related knowledge show greater empathic concern with others and are better at perceiving others' inner feelings accurately than people with low levels of wisdom-related knowledge (Kunzmann & Richter, in prep.; Richter, 2004).

The studies reviewed above, have provided first insights about the interpersonal nature of wisdom and wisdom-related knowledge. With the exception of one laboratory study (Kunzmann & Richter, in prep.), however, interpersonal behavior has not been studied directly and as it unfolds in a given advice-giving situation. Rather, more or less wise people have been asked to remember and describe their interpersonal behaviors in the context of self-report studies. Obviously, interpersonal behaviors are easier to study if they are verbally represented rather than investigated in vivo (e.g., Kunzmann & Baltes, 2003a).

In the next section, behaviors that are characteristic of good listening, which is an important aspect of advice-giving and interpersonal behavior in general, will be described and discussed in more detail.

2.2.1 Listening Behavior

Listeners are not just passive recipients of messages, but actively process information. Moreover, listening in a social context is not a one-way communication such as listening to a piece of music or to a radio broadcast. In social interactions, the listener influences the course of the interaction (Argyle, 1975). Bavelas and her colleagues (Bavelas et al., 2000) have emphasized the active role of the listener as a co-narrator. Listeners not only decode and process information, at the same time, they are senders: Nonverbal signals are a powerful means to communicate without interrupting the speaker (Argyle & Cook, 1976; Argyle, Lefebvre, & Cook, 1974; Bavelas et al., 2000; Kendon, 1967; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967).

According to Wolvin and Coakley (1994), listening competency involves (a) knowledge about listening, (b) the engagement in appropriate listening behaviors, and (c) the willingness to listen, an attitudinal component. In an exploratory study on perceptions of listening ability, Coakley, Halone, and Wolvin (1996) asked persons to indicate what listening attitudes and skills an effective listener must possess. Qualities associated with effective listeners were: open-minded, attentive/focused, willing to listen, understands/comprehends, establishes eye-contact, responds

appropriately, cares, and is interested. These responses can be categorized into cognitive (e.g., understanding), affective (e.g., cares), and behavioral categories. Within the behavioral categories, Coakley et al. (1996) have distinguished verbal (e.g. „clarify what is said”), nonverbal (open body posture, eye-contact), and interactive-oriented (e.g. no interruption) accounts.

To summarize, listening behavior involves both verbal and nonverbal accounts. The present study is interested in behavioral expressions of wisdom and therefore focuses on nonverbal aspects of listening behavior. This also facilitates the separation of the verbally encoded wisdom-related knowledge from interpersonal social behavior.

2.2.2 Empathic Listening Behavior

Which behaviors are displayed by a person who is a good or empathic listener? Some people are good listeners and are able to encourage disclosure of personal information in others (Miller, Berg, & Archer, 1983; Purvis, Dabbs, & Hopper, 1984; Shaffer, Ruammake, & Pegalis, 1990). So-called *openers'* visual and speech behavior is characterized by expressions of comfort, enjoyment, and attentive facial expressions, communicated through nonverbal behaviors such as eye contact, nods, and responsive facial expressions (Purvis et al., 1984).

High levels of eye contact, close proximity, and a forward lean body posture have been found to be associated with higher levels of perceived *intimacy* and

involvement (Burgoon, 1991; Burgoon, Buller, Hale, & deTurck, 1984). These nonverbal characteristics are also associated with perceptions of *rapport*, that is, a positive feeling that is due to mutual understanding and involvement with each other (see Tickle-Degnen & Rosenthal, 1990). Higher ratings of perceived rapport result from high levels of eye contact (Grahe & Bernieri, 1999), posture mirroring (Bernieri, Davis, Rosenthal, & Knee, 1994; Grahe & Bernieri, 1999; Harrigan, Oxman, & Rosenthal, 1985; La France, 1979; Trout & Rosenfeld, 1980), forward trunk leaning (Harrigan, Oxman, & Rosenthal, 1985), smiling (Bernieri, Gillis, Davis, & Grahe, 1996; Grahe & Bernieri, 1999), and close proximity (Bernieri et al., 1996; Grahe & Bernieri, 1999). Nonverbal behaviors influence perceptions of interpersonal *warmth* (Bayes, 1972; Carton & Carton, 1998; Ho & Mitchell, 1982). In a video study by Bayes (1972), nonverbal cues for warmth included posture, head movements, facial expressions and smiles.

Facial expressions are also used to nonverbally communicate *empathy*, either by mirroring the emotion or by expressing concern (Eisenberg, Fabes, Miller, Fultz, Shell, Mathy et al., 1989; Hoffmann, 1982; Levenson & Ruef, 1997; Marcus, 1987). Bavelas and her colleagues argue that motor mimicry is used to communicate knowing and caring because its occurrence is conditional on the visibility of a victim in pain (Bavelas, Black, Lemery, & Mullett, 1986). In therapeutic settings, nonverbal behaviors such as postural congruence (Maurer & Tindall, 1983), frequent head nods

(D'Augelli, 1974), eye contact, forward trunk leaning, close distance (Haase & Tepper, 1972, Tepper & Haase, 1978), and concerned facial expressions (Tepper & Haase, 1978) have been found to be related to perceptions of a target's empathy.

In listening, *generic* and *specific* listener responses have been distinguished (Bavelas et al., 2000). These listener responses signal attention, appreciation, or reaction to the story. *Generic listener responses* mainly involve back channel behaviors: They are not specific to the content of the speaker's narration and keep the listener in the role of listener/audience. In contrast, *specific listener responses* are defined as behaviors that contribute to the narrative content, such as facial and motor mimicry or supplement of appropriate phrases, that is, they serve as co-telling acts. Both specific and generic responses involve verbal and nonverbal aspects and depend on the meaning of the response rather than on its channel. Bavelas and colleagues describe these listener actions as follows: „They include (but are not limited to) nodding, ‚mhm‘, ‚yeah‘, smiling, laughing, motor mimicry, gesturing the content of the story, supplying words or phrases, dramatic intakes of breath, and displays of excitement, fear, or alarm.“ (Bavelas et al., 2000, p. 945).

„Responsive listening behavior“ was investigated by Pasupathi et al. (1999) in couples discussing conflict issues. Emotionally positive listening behavior involves *attentive* aspects such as facial display of interest (non-committal nodding, eye contact) and *emotional* aspects such as positive facial expressions (smiling). Bull (1987)

investigated listeners' gestures and postures signaling interest or boredom and agreement or disagreement. A „forward lean“ was perceived as signaling interest, whereas „backward lean“ and „stretched-out legs“ were perceived as indicators of boredom.

Eye-contact in speaker-listener interactions is of central importance to synchronize interactive behavior (Kendon, 1967). In general, people look more at the other person when they listen rather than when they speak. People tend to look away when they start a longer utterance and look back at the person when it ends, which serves as a signal to the other person to begin his/her commentary. According to Kendon (1967), looking away in times of emotional arousal functions as a „cut off“ act and allows both participants of the interaction to regulate their level of emotionality.

Altogether, these studies suggest that nonverbal behaviors such as nodding, smiling, certain postures, movements, and certain facial expressions, contribute to positive perceptions of a listener. The present study investigates the degree to which these nonverbal listener characteristics – communicating both warmth and interest – are relevant to the attribution of wisdom.

2.2.3 Negative Nonverbal Listening Behavior

Within Gottman's „Specific affect coding system for observing emotional communication in marital and family interaction“ (SPAFF), two dimensions of

negative listening are distinguished: a *valence* dimension (e.g., display of negative facial expressions) and an *engagement* dimension (e.g. withdrawal from interaction). Gottman (1996) points out that lack of emotion expression in general, and expression of interest in particular, are important criteria for negative listening behavior and are perceived to be negative rather than neutral. Another form of negative listening according to Gottman (1996) is auto-involvement, i.e., actions in which a person is involved with herself or concerned with her own body. These behaviors involve „creature comfort behaviors“ (i.e., rubbing eyes, yawning, shifting positions, coughing) and „away behaviors“. Gottman (1996; SPAFF-21) points out: „The behavior of the listeners is a rich source of these away behaviors, especially if listeners act as if they do not want to be there.“

As outlined earlier, nonverbal behaviors are also related to perceptions of warmth (Bayes, 1972). In her study, Bayes found that cold behavior was mainly characterized by the absence of cues for warmth and the display of negative affect. Moreover, target persons who were perceived as „cold“ were perceived to lack interest and involvement, as indicated by lack of facial expression and lack of body movement.

In sum, the studies suggest that negative, non-empathic listening behavior is characterized by the lack of positive back-channel behaviors in addition to away-behaviors that signal distraction and boredom. In the present study, two qualities of

listening behavior are investigated: positive, empathic listening behavior, and negative, non-empathic listening behavior.

2.3 Age and Wisdom in an Advice-Giving Situation

The third personal characteristic of wise advisors that is investigated in the present study is the advisor's chronological age. This study argues that age is relevant for the perception of an advice-giver as being wise because, in the absence of „better cues“, age is taken as a *proxy for experience*.

Wisdom is expected to develop through structured interactions and experience with the world, different life contexts and life problems (Baltes, 2004; Baltes & Smith, 1990; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Robinson, 1990; Taranto, 1989; Webster, 2003). If experience is seen as the major source of wisdom-related knowledge, older persons can be expected to possess higher levels of wisdom to the extent that they have encountered more situations that provide them with the opportunity to deal with difficult life matters. For instance, normative age-related changes, such as „developmental tasks“ (see Havighurst, 1972) or psycho-social crises (e.g., Erikson; 1959; 1982) structure an individual's life course in a largely age-graded society (see Riley, Foner, & Riley, 1999). These normative expectations about age-related tasks can serve as the basis for the expectation of older persons' expertise in life.

Empirical studies that show age-related increases in wisdom-related capacities in late adulthood are rare (see Kramer & Woodruff, 1986; Wink & Helson, 1997). Increases in wisdom-related performance from young to middle adulthood are well-documented (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Kramer, 1983; Labouvie-Vief, 1982; 1990; Pasupathi, Staudinger, & Baltes, 2001; Riegel, 1973). In later adulthood, however, typically stability in wisdom-related performance has been found (see Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Staudinger, 1999; Smith, Staudinger, & Baltes, 1994; Webster, 2003).²

Theories of lifespan development suggest that age *per se* does not explain developmental outcomes in adulthood very well (see Baltes, 1987; 1997). The developmental model of wisdom proposed by Baltes and his colleagues suggests that growing older is not a sufficient condition for the development of wisdom (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000).³ Rather, certain *constellations* of general personal factors, expertise-specific factors, and facilitative experiential contexts influence the development of wisdom-related knowledge. Moreover, losses in old age, such as biological decline (see Flavell, 1970; Riegel, 1973; Staudinger, 1999) and less awareness of uncertainty due to increased experience (Meacham, 1990) may be factors that oppose wisdom-related growth in later adulthood for most people.

² It should be noted that to study the lifespan development of wisdom, it would be exceedingly valuable to have longitudinal rather than cross-sectional data in order to disentangle cohort from age-related effects (Baltes, 1987).

³ However, from adolescence to young adulthood, age significantly predicts higher wisdom-related performance (see Pasupathi et al., 2001).

However, although not all older adults may become wise, wisdom could be a developmental outcome for some individuals. The present study does not investigate older adults' level of wisdom, but focuses on *perceptions* of wisdom (see Meacham, 1990). In addition, the study investigates attributions of wisdom to *specific* individuals rather than general relations between age and wisdom. In the next section, findings on lay persons' perceptions about the relationship between wisdom and age will be reviewed.

2.3.1 Implicit Theories about the Relation Between Age and Wisdom

Age and Lexical Prototype Studies of Wisdom. Several studies on implicit theories of wisdom have shown that age and experience are part of lay people's conceptions of wisdom (Clayton & Birren, 1980; Holliday & Chandler, 1986). Clayton and Birren (1980) have demonstrated that the concept of wisdom can be described by several dimensions, one of which was interpreted as a developmental, age-related component of wisdom characterized by the attributes „experienced“ and „aged“. The attribute „experienced“ has been found to be seen as very typical of wise persons in several studies that investigated prototypicality ratings (Hershey & Farrell, 1997; Holliday & Chandler, 1986; Sternberg, 1985). Holliday and Chandler (1986) have found that „having learned from experience“ was seen as the most prototypical wisdom description. The attribute „aged“ is seen as somewhat typical in some studies (see Holliday & Chandler, 1986), but often this attribute is not separated from

experience (e.g., has age, maturity, or long experience; see Sternberg, 1985). Defilippo (1996) asked subjects (college students) to list words associated with „wisdom“. The most frequent association was „old“ (70% of all respondents), followed by „intelligence“ (49%), „knowledge“ (48%), and „experience“ (39%).

In sum, these studies indicate that experience and wisdom are related concepts. Age and experience are not clearly separated. The present study argues that at the lack of better cues, age will be used as a proxy for experience. Again, it is important to note that not all older adults are perceived as being wise. Stereotypes of older adults, in general, tend to be more negative than positive (Crockett & Hummert, 1987; Kite & Johnson, 1988; Lutsky, 1980).⁴ However, several studies have shown that multiple and diverse sub-stereotypes of older adults exist (Brewer, Dull, & Lui, 1981; Chasteen, Schwarz, & Park, 2002; Hummert, 1990; Schmidt & Boland, 1986). For instance, the positive stereotype of the *perfect grandparent* is characterized by attributes associated with wise persons (e.g., capable, useful, understanding, family-oriented, and wise; Schmidt & Boland, 1986, see also Hummert, 1990).⁵

⁴ These different stereotypes seem to have consequences for older people's lives. Levy and her colleagues (Levy, 1996; Levy, Hausdorff, Hencke, & Wei, 2000) could show that the subliminal activation of positive stereotypes of aging (e.g., wise, sage) compared to the activation of negative stereotypes leads to better memory performance and reduced cardiovascular stress in older people.

⁵ One limitation of these studies is that they used younger participants only. Studies that investigated middle-aged and older participants' perceptions of older people reveal partially different results, mostly indicating that older persons' perceptions of wisdom and older persons are more elaborated and less stereotypic (see Brewer & Lui, 1984; Clayton & Birren, 1980; Heckhausen et al., 1989; Hummert, Garstka, Shaner, & Strahm, 1994).

To summarize, lexical studies on wisdom and studies on age-stereotypes have shown that the prototype of an *ideally* wise person includes age and experience and that some stereotypes of older adults include the attribute „wise“. However, from these studies it can not be concluded whether age is essential for a *specific* person to be perceived as being wise. The attribution of wisdom to specific persons is investigated in nomination and experimental person perception studies.

Nomination Studies and Age. Nomination studies have consistently revealed that participants of different ages tend to nominate persons who are older than 50 years as being wise (Baltes, Staudinger, Maercker, & Smith, 1995; Denney et al., 1995; Perlmutter et al., as cited in Orwoll & Perlmutter, 1990). Age and experience are also among the most prevalent *reasons* for the nomination of persons as being wise (Defilippo, 1996). These studies support the notion that age plays an important role in the perception of persons as being wise.

Yet in nomination studies a person's age is confounded with other personal characteristics. For instance, in the Baltes et al. (1995) study a panel of high-level journalists nominated wise persons active in public life. These nominees played important roles in Berlin's public life even before they were older adults. The difference between *idiosyncratic* and age-related effects cannot be disentangled in nomination studies.

Moreover, the nominees are most likely not randomly selected from the nominator's social network, but are selected based on specific experiences a nominator has had with the nominee (Denney et al., 1995) or based on criteria such as the nominee's societal reputation and impact (Baltes et al., 1995).

Experimental Person Perception Studies. One way to investigate the relative importance of age for the perception of a person as being wise relative to other personal characteristics is to experimentally manipulate the information given about a fictitious person in a person perception paradigm. Several studies have investigated the role of age in the perception of people as being wise and are reviewed in more detail below because they are central to the present study.

Defilippo (1996) presented participants with short vignettes that described different persons who were introduced as potential life guides. The age of the targets was manipulated to be either in the 30s or in the 50s/60s. The vignettes also included other target characteristics that had been indicated as reasons for the nomination of a person as being wise in previous studies. Defilippo (1996) found no age-related differences in the selection of targets as life-guides.

Knight and Parr (1999) used short vignettes to investigate the role of age in judgments of wisdom and creativity. The vignettes consisted of a fictitious target's name and her/his age (young, middle-aged, older) in combination with two descriptive statements drawn from Sternberg's (1985) work on implicit theories of

wisdom and creativity (e.g., wisdom statement: „has the unique ability to look at a problem or situation and solve it”; creativity statement: „makes up rules as he or she goes along”). As expected, older targets were generally perceived as wiser than middle-aged and younger targets. A significant participant-age-by-target-age interaction indicated that younger participants judged younger targets as wiser than did middle-aged and older participants.

Farrell (1999) constructed vignettes based on the criteria of the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm. In these vignettes, a target person witnesses a child stealing in a shop. In the „wise behavior” vignette, the target gently grabs the child and reports it to the shop keeper, explains why stealing is wrong, pays for the stolen food, offers help by contacting an protective aid service, and feels good about his deed. In the „unwise behavior” vignette, the target character grabs the child angrily and reports it to the shop keeper and feels bad about his day being messed up. The target character’s age was indicated as either 22 or 70 years of age. As expected, the „wise” behavior was perceived as being wiser than the „unwise” behavior. The target’s age, however, did not influence perceptions of wisdom. Older and younger targets were perceived to be equally wise in both the wise and the non-wise behavioral contexts. Farrell (1999) points out one reason for the lack of an age-related effect: The behavior descriptions they used were very complex and therefore may have decreased the salience of the target’s age.

One way to possibly increase the salience of a target's age is by using pictorial rather than verbal material. As described earlier, Hira and Faulkender (1997) have applied a video-based paradigm to investigate the role of age and gender in the perception of a target person as being wise. They did not find a general age effect, but rather an age-by-gender interaction: The old man and the young woman were perceived to be wiser than the older woman and the younger man. However, this study has several limitations because the target persons were not matched in terms of their performance (reading quality and expressiveness) and personality characteristics.

In sum, the results of these studies on the relation between age and wisdom in person-perception studies are inconsistent. Whereas some studies found evidence for a greater tendency to perceive older persons rather than younger persons as being wise (Knight & Parr, 1999), others failed to find such evidence (Defilippo, 1996; Farrell, 1999). It should be noted that in studies that use verbal descriptions of age it remains unclear which sub-stereotypes of older persons are activated in participants' minds. Research on stereotypes indicates that stereotypic judgments are more likely when people do not have much information on the person to be judged (Kite & Johnson, 1988). Vignette paradigms can be very useful in person perception research because target characteristics, such as age and gender, can be very easily manipulated without adding possible confounding variables, and hence internal

validity is increased. On the other hand, this methodological strategy may have negative effects in terms of external validity. Age is a visible personal characteristic and as such is used for immediate categorizations (see Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Milord, 1978). It is usually not perceived and processed in a verbal, explicit, and systematic way, but rather in a nonverbal, implicit, and intuitive way (see Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Fiske et al., 1999).

2.3.2 The Perception of Older Advice-Givers as Being Wise

The present study investigates the influence of age on perceptions of an advice-giving person as being wise. As outlined earlier, lay persons see *personal experience* as a major source of wisdom (see Baltes, 2004; Kekes, 1983; Taranto, 1989; Webster, 2003). An advice-giving situation is characterized by an imbalance between an advice-seeker's and an advice-giver's knowledge or capability to cope with the situation. A person will be consulted for advice because the advice-seeker assumes that this person will be helpful and provide insights that differ from one's own. Within an advice-giving context, wisdom includes the transmission of information that is new or beneficial to the receiver of the advice. Therefore, the advice-giver should possess a body of knowledge that is different from the advice-seeker's knowledge system. A younger person might want to consult an older person because of this person's different perspective and presumed experience. The present study investigates whether older adults are perceived as being wiser than younger adults

when they show the same level of wisdom-related knowledge and quality of listening behavior.

2.4 Processes of Impression Formation and Perception of Advisors as Being Wise

Beyond illustrating the importance of certain personal characteristics for the recognition of a person as wise, this study also addresses social cognitive processes associated with the formation of perceptions of wisdom.

The empirical investigation focuses on two variables: First, it is investigated how *cueing* the general *concept of wisdom* influences participants' attributions of wisdom to a specific target person. Second the study addresses differences in the processing of nonverbal and verbal material by simulating *increased experience* with an advisor through repeated exposure to the same material.

2.4.1 A Prototypical Wise Advisor

Some theoretical approaches to wisdom have suggested that wisdom is a concept that is prototypically organized (see Holliday & Chandler, 1986; Sowarka, 1989). Prototypes are *ideal instantiations* of a category of objects. The concept of prototypes was introduced in cognitive psychology by Rosch (1978) to describe the classification of objects. She suggested that objects are classified as members of a category through their resemblance to the prototype of this category. For instance, a sparrow is a prototypic bird. A penguin is a less prototypic bird because it cannot fly,

but it resembles the *Gestalt* of a prototypic bird such as a sparrow enough to be classified by most people as a bird. Prototypes are characterized by fuzzy categorical boundaries rather than by a specific set of features that a target has to possess to be classified as a member of a category.

Cantor and Mischel (1977; 1979) have suggested that the concept of prototypes can also be applied to the categorization of persons. In the case of person perception, prototypes facilitate the organization of knowledge about people and provide expectations about typical behaviors and the range of behaviors to be expected from a person. These expectations are assumed to guide a perceiver's impressions of persons in that they focus a person's attention on those aspects of a stimulus that define the prototype. Classifying a specific stimulus as representative of the respective category would be easier the more prototypic facets are present.

Lexical studies on wisdom have suggested that exceptional knowledge or intellectual performance, good interpersonal skills, and age or the age-associated accumulation of experience are prototypical attributes of wise persons (see Holliday & Chandler, 1986; Staudinger et al., 1998). The prototype or ideal instantiation of the category of a wise person would therefore be an older person who demonstrates both a high level of wisdom-related knowledge in combination with exceptionally good interpersonal behavior. If the activation of the category „wise“ activates this prototype of a wise person, these attributes should be used in judging a person as

being wise. A person should be perceived as being wiser if she demonstrates more wisdom-related facets.

2.4.2 Wisdom Cueing: Recognition of Prototypical Wisdom-Relevant Features

Impression formation theories distinguish between two perceptual processes: category-based or top-down processes and individuating or bottom-up processes (Brewer, 1988; Brewer & Feinstein, 1999; Fiske and Neuberg, 1990; Fiske et al., 1999). Category-based or top-down processes are assumed to be dominant in perceivers' initial impression formation processes. According to this idea, perceivers first categorize others on the basis of easily accessible personal characteristics, such as age, race, and gender. The application of stereotypes reflects one example of category-based, top-down processing. Rich evidence exists that stereotypes are activated automatically and without the perceiver's control upon coming into contact with a member of the stereotyped group (e.g., Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Gilbert & Hixon, 1991; Kunda & Spencer, 2003). However, some categories may be more accessible and more often applied than others (Higgins, 1996). The accessibility of category-relevant knowledge can be increased through priming of the category (Higgins & Brendl, 1995; Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977; Lepore & Brown, 1997; Macrae, Milne, & Bodenhausen, 1994) or priming of attributes related to the category (Blair & Banaji, 1996; Devine, 1989; Srull & Wyer, 1979; 1980). The implicit or explicit activation of a stereotype category

facilitates stereotypic judgments (Blair & Banaji, 1996; Devine, 1989, Higgins & Brendl, 1995; Lepore & Brown, 1997). The same effect has been documented for the perception of ambivalent behaviors in terms of a specific trait category. Higgins et al. (1977) demonstrated that the exposure to positive or negative trait terms influenced participants' subsequent interpretation of ambivalent behaviors in the direction of the activated trait category. Srull and Wyer (1980) also showed that only the activation of a category prior to encoding a stimulus material influences judgments of a target.

These findings suggest that the activation of a category will influence attributions in systematic ways. Here, this effect will be used to demonstrate that the prototype of wisdom includes the three suggested person attributes (i.e., wisdom-related knowledge; nonverbal, empathetic listening behavior; and age). Given the fact that wisdom is considered a rather rare characteristic of persons, the prototype of a wise person may not be activated spontaneously when participants are asked to evaluate an advice-giver. Thus, the instruction to think about wisdom may help to activate the knowledge of the prototype of a wise person. If the prototype of a wise advisor is characterized by features such as a high level of wisdom-related knowledge, empathetic listening behavior, and older age, then the instruction to think about wisdom should facilitate the recognition of these wisdom prototypic characteristics in a specific advisor. Specifically, the instruction to think about

wisdom should make these features more salient and a lack of these features would be recognized easily.

2.4.3 Increased Experience with an Advisor: Processing Verbal versus Nonverbal Personal Characteristics

The present study also investigates how wisdom attributions may change across time. Experimental perception studies on wisdom investigated the role of aspects such as age or gender in the perception of persons as being wise by asking participants to attribute wisdom to an unfamiliar stimulus person. Moreover, these studies used mainly verbal information in the form of vignettes to describe targets of different age or gender (e.g. Defillipo, 1996; Farrell, 1999; Knight & Parr, 1999).

Research on impression formation and person perception suggests, however, that *initial impressions of others* are formed on the basis of *visible characteristics* such as age, gender, or race (see Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). As mentioned above, dual-process theories of impression formation posit that initial impression formation processes are fast, automatic, category-based processes, whereas more effortful processes occur later in the process (see Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Fiske et al., 1999) or when prompted by the perceiver's impression formation goals (see Brewer, 1988; Brewer & Feinstein, 1999). Based on these models, it can be expected that when evaluating a target that is characterized by attributes that differ in their visibility, perceivers should first use more visible person attributes for their initial judgments,

whereas less easily visible attributes, such as verbal behavior, will take more time and more frequent exposure (i.e., more experience with a target) to be processed effectively.

The present study investigates three person attributes that differ in their visibility. As outlined earlier, age is a personal characteristic that is very easily visible and used for automatic categorization processes (see Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). Perceivers may use a target person's chronological age as a first cue to evaluate the target person's level of wisdom and this impression may be formed relatively effortless by relying on stereotypes of old wise persons.

The second personal attribute that was suggested to be prototypical for wise persons is nonverbal listening behavior. Nonverbal listening behavior is also relatively easily visible as suggested by several lines of research. First, despite differences in language, the meaning of many nonverbal cues such as facial expressions of emotion seems to be universal as indicated by the similarity of nonverbal expressions across cultures (see Ekman, 1993; Ekman & Friesen, 1969). Second, perceivers are able to reliably evaluate a person's personality traits based on very little information about that person's nonverbal behavior (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992; Borkeuau & Liebler, 1992; Borkeuau, Mauer, Riemann, Spinath, & Angleitner, 2004). Ambady and Rosenthal (1992) showed in a meta-analysis that longer observations of a person's expressive behavior (4 - 5 minutes) do not yield

more accurate predictions of this person's behavior than shorter observations (less than 30 seconds). Third, Gilbert and Krull (1988) have suggested that the processing of non-linguistic behaviors is more automatic than the processing of linguistic behaviors. They argue that non-linguistic behaviors are often highly redundant and less complex than linguistic behaviors. Whereas linguistic behaviors require the extraction of meaning from a sequence of words and sentences, the encoding and categorization of nonlinguistic behaviors is relatively simple. For instance, detecting anger in a verbal message often requires attending to more than a word, whereas an angry facial expression is decoded relatively easily at first sight. That nonverbal cues are processed more easily than verbal ones is also illustrated by the finding that when cognitive resources are restrained, nonverbal processing seems to be less impaired than verbal processing (Gilbert & Krull, 1988).

Taken together, the work reviewed above suggests that nonverbal behavior, such as listening behavior, will influence an observer's wisdom attributions immediately – without the necessity for elaborate and effortful processing.

The third characteristic discussed earlier as being characteristic of wise persons is wisdom-related knowledge. Knowledge can be understood in terms of verbal propositions stored in long-term memory (see Kintsch, 1988). Wisdom-related knowledge has been assessed within the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm primarily in the form of verbal protocols (see Staudinger et al., 1994; but see also Kunzmann & Baltes,

2003a; Kunzmann & Richter, in prep. on behavioral indicators of wisdom-related knowledge).

The processing of verbal material requires the serial processing of words and sentences to extract meaning (Gilbert & Krull, 1988). Impression formation processes that are based on verbal behavior were investigated for instance within the field of message persuasion (Chaiken, 1980; Chaiken, Wood, & Eagly, 1996; Petty and Cacioppo, 1981; Cacioppo & Petty, 1985; 1989). These dual-process theories suggest that less elaborated or heuristic perceptual processes can be distinguished from deep, effortful systematic perceptual processes.

The heuristic-systematic processing model developed by Chaiken and Eagy (Chaiken, 1980; Chaiken et al., 1996) suggests that heuristic processing will dominate the evaluation of message persuasiveness because of its economic advantages. Systematic processing will occur only when perceivers are very motivated, for instance when the message is self-relevant.

The elaboration-likelihood model by Petty and Cacioppo (1981; Cacioppo & Petty, 1985; 1989), on the other hand, suggests a continuum from peripheral to more central processing routes. *Central* routes refer to the cognitive processing of message arguments, whereas *peripheral* routes involve any other aspects of a message, for example, the expertise of the message source or formal criteria of the message, such

as length („length implies strength“). Elaboration-likelihood described the extent to which deeper, i.e. central, modes of processes are applied.

Elaboration likelihood is influenced by a person’s motivation and their abilities: Elaboration likelihood will be high when both a person’s motivation (composed of issue involvement, personal relevance, need for cognition) and ability (composed of message comprehensibility, issue familiarity, appropriate schema) to engage in issue-relevant thinking are high. When elaboration likelihood is low, people will use the „peripheral route“ and will process the information superficially to derive a „reasonable“ attitude.

However, elaboration-likelihood can also be enhanced, for instance, through repeated exposure to the message. Repeated exposure is expected to increase the likelihood of deeper processing of the message arguments (see Craik & Lockhart, 1972). Cacioppo and Petty (1989) demonstrated that moderate levels of message repetition increased perceived persuasiveness of messages that provided strong arguments, but not the persuasiveness of messages including weak arguments. This indicates that repeated exposure does not just increase participants’ liking for any message (Zajonc, 1980), but indeed contributes to the deeper processing of the content of the verbal messages.

It is expected that processing a target person’s level of wisdom-related knowledge takes more time than processing a target person’s age and nonverbal

behavior. Participants will be more likely to use the advisor's wisdom-related knowledge as a cue for judgments of the advisor's level of wisdom after they have had the chance to process the wisdom-related knowledge more frequently. At the same time, repeated exposure to the same stimulus material „simulates“ the notion of repeated long-term interactions with a person (see Baltes & Goulet, 1971; Lindenberger & Baltes, 1995). Whereas *initial impressions* of an advisor's wisdom may be based on peripheral and easily visible cues that are easily processed (such as the advisor's age and nonverbal behavior) later impressions – that are based on more experience with an advisor – might be influenced more by central and less visible cues, such as an advisor's knowledge.

2.5 Summary and Theoretical Rationale for the Present Study

The first and second chapter discussed theoretical and empirical approaches to wisdom. It was outlined that wisdom is a multi-dimensional phenomenon: Wise persons are expected to be knowledgeable, to demonstrate a high level of interpersonal skill and to have learned from their own personal experience.

Different methodological approaches are used to investigate the phenomenon of wisdom. Scholarly definitions or explicit theories focus on defining wisdom-related capacities and measuring these qualities in specific people. Lay-theoretical or implicit approaches, on the other hand, investigate the structure of the concept of wisdom using lay-persons' definitions of the concept. The present study uses both

lines of research to investigate who is perceived as being wise. This study adopts a social constructionist approach and treats wisdom as a characteristic that is socially ascribed. It is argued that wisdom attributions are an interesting research topic because they may have implications for people's everyday behavior, such as the selection of a particular person as an advice-giver.

The present study extends past research in the tradition of implicit wisdom theories by investigating wisdom attributions within the specific context of an advice-giving situation. Specifically, the study investigates the role of three personal characteristics of an advice-giver in the attribution of wisdom to a given person. These three characteristics are the advisor's chronological age, the advisor's demonstrated level of wisdom-related knowledge, and the advisor's interpersonal skills, as indicated by his/her empathic listening behavior. In past research, these characteristics were identified as prototypical for ideally wise persons. The present study uses an experimental person perception paradigm to investigate whether these characteristics are used by observers to attribute wisdom to an advice-giving person. As outlined in the introduction, for the present study these „general“ characteristics are translated into specific behavior: Wisdom-related knowledge is operationalized as the verbal advice an advisor is giving to the life-problem. The advisor's level of interpersonal skills is shown in a video capturing this person's empathic listening behavior. Age of the advice-giver is operationalized by having younger and older

actors play the role of the advice-giving person. It is expected that all three advice-giver characteristics influence attributions of wisdom.

The present study does not only focus on components of the wisdom prototype that are used for wisdom attributions, but also addresses social-cognitive processes associated with these attributions. Previous research has shown that the activation of a higher-order category influences the subsequent processing of category-relevant information. In the present study it is investigated how the cueing of the general concept of wisdom influences the perception of wisdom-relevant personal characteristics. It is expected that the activation of the general concept of wisdom increases the sensitivity for the configuration of wisdom prototype relevant features.

Extending past research, the present study uses a video-based paradigm to investigate perceptions of wisdom. The three proposed personal characteristics of a wise advice-giver differ in how visible they are. Visible characteristics such as age and nonverbal behavior are processed more automatically than verbal material, such as the advisor's advice. The present study investigates how wisdom attributions change as participants have the chance to process the wisdom-relevant features more frequently. It is expected that repeated exposure to the stimulus material will allow participants to process the information more frequently and therefore increase

participants' likelihood to use the advice-giver's level of wisdom-related knowledge as a cue for their wisdom attributions.