Wisdom and Courage

Characteristics of the Wise and the Brave

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

—Attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr

The serenity prayer has become the credo for many ordinary people who are struggling with life challenges. We open with this reference because it makes two points that we examine throughout this chapter. First, as the prayer reveals, the notions of wisdom and courage have been intermingled, historically, in literature. We will examine this link and the reasons for it. Second, the prayer suggests that the extraordinary qualities of wisdom and courage are available to everyone. This point is discussed in the context of the reviews pertaining to wisdom and courage.

Wisdom and Courage: Two of a Kind

Some philosophers and theologians consider wisdom (prudence) and courage (fortitude) to be two of the four cardinal virtues (along with justice and temperance). These primary virtues, traditionally ranked in the order prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, “are cognitive and motivational dispositions that in themselves designate not only adaptive fitness for individuals’ achievements, but also the idea of convergence of individual goal achievements with becoming and being a good person from a communal and social-ethical point of view” (Baltes, Glück, & Kunzmann, 2002, p. 328). The cardinal virtues facilitate personal development; good living through practicing them may foster the development of social resources that spark the growth of other people. Both wisdom and courage can inform human choices and fuel pursuits that lead to enhanced personal functioning and communal good. Courage also can help overcome obstacles that make the practice of other virtues more difficult.
Wisdom and courage often have been studied together, although their intermingling may cause difficulties in distinguishing them. This construct confusion is captured in a statement from the movie *The Wizard of Oz* (Haley & Fleming, 1939), in which the Wizard says to the Cowardly Lion, “As for you, my fine friend, you are a victim of disorganized thinking. You are under the unfortunate delusion that, simply because you run away from danger, you have no courage. You’re confusing courage with wisdom.”

Wisdom and strength both exemplify human excellence; they involve a challenge, they require sound decision making, they are culturally bound, and they typically contribute to the common good. Furthermore, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, ordinary people can demonstrate both of these extraordinary qualities. Without question, however, the scholarly discussion aimed at clarifying the relationship between wisdom and courage will be complex. In some cases, wisdom is characterized as the predecessor of courage. Moreover, in the strongest form of the argument, St. Ambrose believed that “[f]ortitude without justice is a level of evil” (cited in Pieper, 1966, p. 125). Some people even reason that wisdom can make courage unnecessary. This view is described in the words of Staudinger and Baltes (1994):

> [W]e need courage only in those instances when in fact they [wisdom and faith] do not suffice—either because we simply lack them or because they are irrelevant to or ineffective against our distress. Knowledge, wisdom, and opinion can provide fear with its objects or deprive it of them. They do not impart courage but rather offer an opportunity to exercise it or do without it. (p. 57)

In contrast to this perspective, courage has been portrayed as a precursor of wisdom. The logic here is that the capacity for courageous action is necessary before one can pursue a noble outcome or common good that is defined by wisdom. Courage sometimes is viewed as the virtue that makes all virtuous behaviors possible. Irrespective of their relative power or import, we believe that a discussion of implicit and explicit theories of wisdom and courage will help in understanding their importance in our daily lives.

### THEORIES OF WISDOM

Wisdom often is referenced in ancient maxims (e.g., Yang, 2001) and in philosophical reviews. For example, Robinson’s (1990) review of early Western classical dialogues revealed three distinct conceptualizations of wisdom: (1) that found in persons seeking a contemplative life (the Greek term *sophia*); (2) that of a practical nature, as displayed by great statesmen (*phronesis*); and
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(3) scientific understanding (*episteme*). Aristotle added to the list of types of wisdom by describing *theoretikes*, the theoretical thought and knowledge devoted to truth, and distinguishing it from *phronesis* (practical wisdom). (See the comments of classics professors as shared by Roger Martin.)

During the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries in the Western world, two issues dominated the scholarly discussion of wisdom. Philosophers, theologians, and cultural anthropologists debated the philosophical versus pragmatic applications of virtue, along with the divine or human nature of the quality (Rice, 1958). Both issues relate to the question of whether wisdom is a form of excellence in living as displayed by ordinary people or is more aptly seen as a fuzzy philosophical quality possessed only by sages. These issues have yet to be resolved, although psychology scholars have suggested recently that ordinary people are capable of living a good life by applying wisdom.

**Wisdom Difficult to Define, Attain**

Roger Martin

One day, somebody said, "I enjoy reading your column, but I'm not always sure what it does for the university."

It was one of those hot-potato moments.

I thought fast and tossed this back:

"Universities create knowledge through research and distribute it through teaching. The column suggests that, in doing that, universities are one of the sources of wisdom. And that's a great thing. Right?"

I wasn't actually that articulate or concise.

But that's what I meant.

Later, I started to wonder if I was jiving.

I think of this piece I do as a knowledge column. I realized I'd defend it because I love to write about the ideas that come to bright people who passionately study one thing.

The possible jive I detected was in my attempt to connect knowledge with wisdom. I wondered whether that was legitimate.

I called two University of Kansas professors of classics, Tony Corbeill and Stan Lombardo, thinking that, because they study the ancient Greeks, they would have thought about the relationship of knowledge and wisdom.

In Greek mythology, knowledge is the domain of the god Hermes, Lombardo said. Hermes is both inventive and tricky, but he's a lightweight compared with Zeus, the Greek god of wisdom.

According to Corbeill, the wisdom of Zeus was given to humans by the god Apollo.

Apollo spoke through prophets who lived in his temple at Delphi. The prophets were always women. They weren't known for their clarity. Their wisdom often came out garbled, or they spoke in riddles.

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In *Scientific American* last year, some researchers reported one possible reason. The prophets may have been sitting in a place where a lot of ethane, methane, and ethylene were leaking in. Imagine sniffing a lot of glue and then channeling Zeus, and you’ve got the idea. Whatever the source of the prophets’ inspiration, it’s significant to me that they weren’t easy to understand.

Wisdom sometimes arrives at the door in odd packages, ones that mere mortals have trouble opening.

Another source of the idea that wisdom is difficult is the Greek poet Empedocles. Empedocles says that, to get wisdom, you have to “sift knowledge through the guts of your being,” according to Lombardo.

Now, the university used to love this word *wisdom*. KU’s fifth chancellor, Francis Huntington Snow, thought a KU education was in part about attaining it. He had these words carved on a building that once served as a KU library:

“Whoso Findeth Wisdom Findeth Life.”

But the university seldom uses the word *wisdom* anymore, and it’s not the exclusive property of scholars, not by a long shot.

Corbeill says, “It’s rare for a polymath to be wise. What comes to mind are people who just learn language after language, for example, as if they’re collecting them.”

Nevertheless, I’ve been learning things for 25 years in order to write this column, and as the years have passed, I’ve become increasingly interested in wisdom—if not wise.

Given the difficulty of discovering wisdom, of breaking the puzzling code that contains it, my mule-headed persistence hasn’t hurt a bit.


Although our understanding of wisdom has progressed slowly over modern times, this started to change during the late twentieth century. Although the first president of the American Psychological Association, G. Stanley Hall, wrote a book in 1922 in which he addressed the wisdom gained during the aging process, this work was considered the bailiwick of religion and moral philosophers until about 1975, when psychologists began to scrutinize the concept of wisdom. These scholarly efforts produced a better commonsense psychological understanding of wisdom. Implicit theories (folk theories of a construct that describe its basic elements) of wisdom first were described by Clayton (1975, 1976; Clayton & Birren, 1980) and then further explicated by German psychologist Paul Baltes’s (1993) analysis of cultural-historical occurrences. Knowledge gained from these recent studies has informed the development of explicit theories (theories detailing the observable manifestations of a construct) of wisdom, the soundest of which presently include the balance theory of wisdom (Sternberg, 1998) and the Berlin wisdom paradigm (Baltes & Smith, 1990; Baltes & Staudinger, 1993, 2000). In the next section, we explore these implicit and explicit theories of wisdom.
Implicit Theories of Wisdom

Clayton’s (1975) dissertation study was one of the first systematic examinations of the wisdom construct. She had people rate similarities between pairs of words believed to be associated with wisdom (e.g., empathic, experienced, intelligent, introspective, intuitive, knowledgeable, observant). Through a statistical procedure known as multidimensional scaling, she identified three dimensions of the construct: (1) affective (empathy and compassion), (2) reflective (intuition and introspection), and (3) cognitive (experience and intelligence).

In a later study, Sternberg (1985) asked 40 college students to sort cards (each describing one of 40 wise behaviors) into as many piles as they thought necessary to explain their contents. Again, a multidimensional scaling procedure was used, and the following six qualities of wisdom were identified: (1) reasoning ability, (2) sagacity (profound knowledge and understanding), (3) learning from ideas and environment, (4) judgment, (5) expeditious use of information, and (6) perspicacity (acuteness of discernment and perception). In yet another study, Holliday and Chandler (1986) determined that five factors underlie wisdom: (1) exceptional understanding, (2) judgment and communication skills, (3) general competence, (4) interpersonal skills, and (5) social unobtrusiveness.

The meaning of wisdom also is communicated in our everyday language. In this regard, Baltes (1993) analyzed cultural-historical and philosophical writings and found that wisdom (1) addresses important/difficult matters of life; (2) involves special or superior knowledge, judgment, and advice; (3) reflects knowledge with extraordinary scope, depth, and balance applicable to specific life situations; (4) is well intended and combines mind and virtue; and (5) is very difficult to achieve but easily recognized. More recently, researchers have asked children what wisdom means to them. A group of Austrian school children ages 6 to 10 (Glück, Bischof, & Siebenhüner, 2012) answered open-ended questions such as, “What are wise persons like?” Children in this study listed attributes that fell into the categories of (1) cognitive aspects (e.g., “clever,” “astute”); (2) characteristics that addressed thinking of others (e.g., “friendly,” “helpful”); (3) facets involved in appearance (e.g., “green eyes,” “grey beard”); and (4) possession of real-world abilities (e.g., “gives good advice,” “can teach you things”). They also listed some characteristics such as “old” in specific relation to age (Glück et al., 2012). Perhaps this points to the possibility that wisdom may be present at young ages, as so much overlap exists between these children’s implicit definitions and those of their adult counterparts! One area of difference that Glück and colleagues note between these younger children is the absence of a “reflective” component of wisdom (e.g., life experience, or perspective-taking; p. 596). It may be that increased age comes with a better understanding of the value of these other, more abstract components.

Recently, 30 international “wisdom experts” (primarily from North America and Europe) completed surveys regarding components that they believed should be included in an operationalization of wisdom as a construct (Jeste et al., 2010). Several characteristics of wisdom emerged from these data as those that most experts agreed upon: “[Wisdom] is uniquely human; a form of advanced cognitive and emotional development that is experience driven; a personal quality, albeit a rare one, that can be learned, increases with age, can be measured and is not likely to be enhanced by medication” (Jeste et al., 2010, p. 668). These experts also noted distinctions between other constructs often believed to overlap with wisdom, namely intelligence and spirituality. Thus, these data provide us with a more comprehensive view of how wisdom is defined, at least within Western expert opinion.
Lastly, implicit definitions of wisdom also differ by cultural context. Sternberg (2012) specifically argues that cultural context must be consulted with regard to both conceptualization of this construct and in terms of its measurement as a result of this. Though some similarities exist across cultures, followers of Western and Eastern ideology differ on their views of what makes someone wise (Yang, 2008). Those from Eastern traditions may take the affective side into account in equal balance with the cognitive side of wisdom, whereas Westerners might stress cognition over affective dimensions (Takahashi, 2000; Takahashi & Overton, 2005). Personal qualities such as compassion, open-mindedness, humbleness, and others may be part of a description of a wise person in these Eastern cultures, while intelligence, problem solving, and planning may be more emphasized in Western cultures (Yang, 2008). In another study, three factors were found to be contained within implicit definitions of Asian participants: (1) altruism, (2) determination, and (3) serenity (Brezina, 2010). While there is some overlap between these factors and those found in Western societies (e.g., altruism might overlap with affective components in Western models), some differences also exist (e.g., the inclusion of serenity; Brezina, 2010). More research in this area might broaden our understanding of how this construct is similar and different in various cultural groups.

Explicit Theories of Wisdom

Although informed by implicit theories, explicit theories of wisdom focus more on behavioral manifestations of the construct. Explicit theories applied to wisdom are intertwined with decades-old theories of personality (Erikson, 1959) and cognitive development (Piaget, 1932), or they emphasize the application of pragmatic knowledge in pursuit of exceptional human functioning (Baltes & Smith, 1990; Baltes & Staudinger, 1993, 2000; Sternberg, 1998).

In his (1932) stage theory of cognitive development, Jean Piaget describes the qualitatively different kinds of thinking that occur during childhood and adulthood. Children typically move from the sensorimotor stage (in which the child’s world is experienced through sensing and doing) to the preoperational stage (in which the child’s world is framed in symbolic thought) to the concrete operations stage (in which the child’s experience begins to be understood through logical thought) during the first 12 years of life. During the formal operations stage, people develop the ability to reason by systematically testing hypotheses. Riegel (1973) built on Piaget’s work and considered a form of postformal operational thinking referred to as the dialectical operations stage or, more simply, wisdom. These dialectical operations (logical argumentation in pursuit of truth or reality) associated with wisdom involve reflective thinking that attends to a balance of information and to truth that evolves in a cultural and
historical context. Such reflective, or dialectical, thinking facilitates an integration of opposing points of view (Kitchener & Brenner, 1990), dual use of logical and subjective processing of information (Labouvie-Vief, 1990), and an integration of motivation and life experiences (Pascual-Leone, 1990).

Life-span theorists (e.g., Erikson, 1959) view wisdom as part of optimal development. For Erikson, wisdom reflects a maturity in which concerns for the collective good transcend personal interests. In Orwell’s (1989) study of people nominated as wise, this Eriksonian integrity was accompanied by elevated concerns for the collective good.

Both Sternberg’s (1998) balance theory and Baltes’s (Baltes & Smith, 1990; Baltes & Staudinger, 1993, 2000) Berlin wisdom paradigm are similar in that they emphasize the organization and application of pragmatic knowledge. Furthermore, both views of wisdom propose that wise people can discern views of others, develop a rich understanding of the world, craft meaningful solutions to difficult problems, and direct their actions toward achieving a common good.

Yale psychologist Robert Sternberg built on his previous work on intelligence and creativity (Sternberg, 1985, 1990) and proposed the balance theory of wisdom as specifying “the processes (balancing of interests and of responses to environmental contexts) in relation to the goal of wisdom (achievement of a common good)” (Sternberg, 1998, p. 350). More specifically, Sternberg theorized that the tacit knowledge underlying practical intelligence (i.e., “knowing how” rather than “knowing what”) is used in balancing self and other interests within the environmental context to achieve a common good (R. Sternberg, personal communication, October 8, 2003). See Figure 9.1 for a diagram of Sternberg’s wisdom model. In this model, the wise person goes through a process that may resemble high levels of moral decision making (Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1983). First, the person is challenged by a real-life dilemma that activates the reasoning abilities that were first developed in adolescence and then refined in adulthood. Then, the person’s life history and personal values bear on his or her use of available tacit knowledge in balancing interests and generating wise responses. The person striving to be wise then examines possible responses to determine the extent to which solutions require adaptation to the environmental and cultural context, the shaping of the environment to fit the solutions, or the selection of a new environment where the solutions might work. Finally, if balance is achieved, then the common good is addressed with the proposed solution. (For a related discussion of wisdom as a “balance strength,” see Bacon, 2005.)

According to Sternberg, wisdom involves forming a judgment when there are competing interests that lack a clear resolution. For example, a wise approach to resolving a conflict over a proposed ban of cigarette smoking on a college campus would consider the interests of all people (smokers, nonsmokers, students, faculty, visitors, etc.); review the options for serving the interests of those people; and act to best serve the common good. As such, balancing personal interests and actions and sharing a wise judgment may entail exceptional problem-solving ability.

In the Berlin wisdom paradigm, Baltes and his colleagues (Baltes & Smith, 1990; Baltes & Staudinger, 1993, 2000) define wisdom as the “ways and means of planning, managing, and understanding a good life” (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000, p. 124). Simply stated, “Wisdom is an expertise in conduct and meaning of life” (p. 124). The Baltes group (Baltes & Smith, 1990; Staudinger & Baltes, 1994) has identified five criteria that characterize wisdom (excellence) and wisdom-related (near-excellence) performance.

The two basic criteria, factual and procedural knowledge, indicate that wise performance necessitates expertise. According to Baltes, such expertise requires people to “know what”
(i.e., have knowledge about topics such as human nature and development, individual differences, social relations and norms, etc.) and to “know how” (i.e., be able to develop strategies for dealing with problems and giving advice, resolving life conflicts, and planning for and overcoming obstacles that could thwart problem resolution). Factual knowledge, or the behavior that is the “product” of that knowledge, could be evaluated with the following question: “To what extent does this product show general (conditio humana) and specific (e.g., life events, institutions) knowledge about life matters and the human condition as well as demonstrate scope and depth in the coverage of issues?” (Staudinger & Baltes, 1994, p. 149). “Know how,” or procedural knowledge, would be examined in light of the following question: “To what extent does this product consider decision strategies, how to define goals and to identify the appropriate means, whom to consult with and about strategies of advice giving?” (Staudinger & Baltes, 1994, p. 149). The three metacriteria that are specific to wisdom (life-span contextualism, relativism of values, and recognition and management of uncertainty) involve flexible thinking and dialectical processing. In particular, life-span contextualism requires that wise people consider the contexts of life (e.g., love, work, and play); cultural values; and the passage of time when reviewing problems and their associated solutions. Relativism of values and life priorities place the value differences across people and societies in perspective. Lastly, managing uncertainty provides the decision-making flexibility that is necessary for processing difficult information and coming up with appropriate solutions. These characteristics of wisdom also may be evaluated with additional probing questions (see Staudinger & Baltes, 1994).

To determine the quality of wisdom, Baltes challenges people with questions about resolving real-life problems. Then, the responses to such questions are transcribed and rated according to the five criteria of wisdom. Reliable wisdom scores can be calculated using this method. Specifically, Baltes asks people to consider how they would advise other people facing dilemmas (referred to as wisdom-related tasks requiring “life planning” or “life management”) or to conduct a “life review” by describing their responses to problems experienced in their lives. For example, people are asked to consider the following: “In reflecting over their lives, people sometimes realize that they have not achieved what they had once planned to achieve. What should they do and consider?” (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000, p. 126). One “high-level” (i.e., wise) response to this question demonstrates the value perspective plays in drawing meaning from life:

First, I would want to say that only very few and most likely uncritical people would say that they are completely satisfied with what they have achieved . . . . It depends very much on the type of goals we are considering, whether they are more of the materialistic or more of the idealistic kind. It also depends on the age of the person and the life circumstances in which he/she is embedded. . . . Next, one would start to analyze possible reasons for why certain goals are not attained. Often, it is the case that multiple goals were pursued at the same time without setting priorities and, therefore, in the end, things get lost. . . . It is important to gradually become realistic about goals. Often, it is helpful to talk to others about it. . . . Conditions external and internal to the person could be at work or sometimes it is also the match between the two that can lead to difficulties in life. (Staudinger & Leipold, 2003, p. 182)

Baltes and colleagues have continued to refine their definitions of wisdom in recent years and have added the concept of what they term Sehnsucht (“life longings”) to their life-span view of
positive traits that are experienced alongside such constructs as wisdom (Scheibe, Freund, & Baltes, 2007). These researchers define life longings as “the recurring strong feelings that life is incomplete or imperfect, coupled with a desire for ideal (utopian), alternative states and experiences of life” (Scheibe, Kunzmann, & Baltes, 2009, p. 176). Life longings are different than the concept of wisdom in that they are qualified as more idiographic experiential knowledge, as opposed to the more general focus of wisdom. This concept may be important as a supplement to discussing wisdom overall, particularly in older adults. (For a more detailed discussion of Sehnsucht see Scheibe et al., 2009.)

Developing Wisdom

Influential developmental theorists such as Piaget (1932), Jung (1953), and Erikson (1959) provided building blocks for twentieth-century wisdom theorists. As mentioned previously, Piaget's work has been extended beyond formal operations to include “dialectical operations” (Riegel, 1973).

The work of Erikson and Jung gave modern theorists clues about how resolving conflict leads to enhanced discernment and judgment. In this regard, Erikson emphasized that wisdom is gained through resolving daily crises, specifically those involving integrity and despair. Jung, with his interests in family-of-origin issues, proposed that wisdom develops through the resolution of psychic conflicts pertaining to individuating from the family unit.

Theorists such as Baltes (1993), Labouvie-Vief (1990), and Sternberg (1998) suggest that wisdom builds on knowledge, cognitive skills, and personality characteristics (discussed by Piaget, Jung, Erikson, and others), and that it requires an understanding of culture and the surrounding environment. Moreover, wisdom develops slowly through exposure to wise role models. Sternberg proposed that knowledge, judicial thinking style, personality, motivation, and environmental context precede wisdom, and Baltes and Staudinger (2000) suggested that fluid intelligence, creativity, openness to experience, psychological-mindedness, and general life experiences “orchestrate” to produce wisdom. In Taiwan, general agreement exists on similar factors believed to underlie wisdom, and a list of several facilitative factors of wisdom in this culture has been developed. Ideas similar to those found in Western contexts include life and work experiences, observation and social interaction, and professional development and reading (Chen, Wu, Cheng, & Hsueh, 2011). Also included in this list, however, are unique ideas more normative of Eastern culture, including “family teaching” and religion (Chen et al., 2011, p. 178). In addition, this study found that experts believed in certain types of conditions or scenarios as being more conducive to the development of wisdom (similar to Sternberg's ideas that environmental context plays a role).

Others examined laypeople’s ideas of how wisdom develops, and though variability exists in responses to questions in this vein, in general two main themes emerged from this data (Glück & Bluck, 2011). Similar to the experts’ views, many individuals in this study asserted the belief that life experience mixed with tutelage from wise individuals breeds wisdom, while others added dealing with emotionally challenging incidents to these first two components. Life experience appeared to be positively correlated with the idea that emotional challenge was included in the development of wisdom, though growing older in and of itself did not factor into the explanations offered (Glück & Bluck, 2011).

Wisdom grows as people learn to think flexibly to solve problems, and such problem solving entails recognizing ideas according to place and culture. In turn, by recognizing that the answers to questions depend both on contextual factors and on the balancing of many interests, people become even more flexible in their thinking. On these points, Baltes and Staudinger (2000) also emphasize the importance of “guidance by mentors or other wisdom-enhancing ‘others’” (p. 127), though such mentoring benefits are sometimes indirect and sometimes direct. Indeed, Staudinger and Baltes (1996) agree with the old adage. “Two heads are better than one,” when it comes to responding wisely to life challenges. These same researchers also found that people who discussed dilemmas with loved ones (and others) and then were allowed time for reflection showed increases in their wisdom-related performances; moreover, the older participants benefited more from these
interactive experiences than did the younger participants. Some of the benefits here may be linked to the fact that having distance from a problem appears to enhance wise behavior and reasoning (Kross & Grossman, 2012). In addition, neurobiological research on wisdom and decision making in groups has shown that when neural activity is combined across multiple individuals, accurate decisions are made more often (Eckstein et al., 2012). This supports the idea that collective wisdom can be beneficial for many reasons.

The transmission of wisdom from generation to generation has been considered in other literature. Edmondson (2012) conducted a study of family interactions in the West of Ireland and found via ethnographic study that access to wisdom in the form of interactions with older members of the family provided younger members with more resilience and competence, even in the face of very difficult situations. The transmission of wisdom described here is not necessarily a mere sharing of advice, however, but also a modeling of the way in which people in older generations might listen to the information provided and the ways in which they may use this to direct their behavior. Wisdom seemed to be bred from close observation, close relationships, and an emulating of wise characteristics found in others. It is also, according to accounts of the participants in this study, partially in the way that the information is transmitted between generations. One older participant remarked, “You must give them knowledge in a way that interests them, that they enjoy, that they feel they are able to take in” (Edmondson, 2012, p. 89). Those who are teachers, parents, and mentors may do well to remember that the methods of imparting information may be just as important as the information itself.

**Wise People and Their Characteristics**

Over centuries and cultures, the *sage* was considered the carrier of wisdom (Assmann, 1994; Baltes, 1993). These mysterious and rare sages were purveyors of life guidance, but they often did little to teach life understanding and the skills needed for wisdom. Modern characterizations of the wise person suggest that the ordinary person can acquire expertise in life matters. In this latter regard, clinical psychologists have been found to possess high levels of wisdom (discussed subsequently; see Smith, Staudinger, & Baltes, 1994; Staudinger, Smith, & Baltes, 1992).

Monika Ardelt, a researcher who has studied aging, measured what she referred to as the “timeless and universal knowledge of wisdom” (2000, p. 71). California residents were the participants in her longitudinal study, the Berkeley Guidance Project. Her analysis of the characteristics that facilitate the development of wisdom revealed that a person’s childhood does not have an impact on this development, whereas the quality of one’s social environment in early adulthood does. She (1997) also found that wise people achieved greater life satisfaction than unwise people. More recently, Ardelt (2010) examined differences with regard to age and wisdom and found that few differences in wisdom score were found...
between older adults in general and current college students. Larger differences were found, however, when comparisons were made between older college-educated adults and current college students. Ardelt (2010) thus posits that “wisdom might increase with age for individuals with the opportunity and motivation to pursue its development” (p. 193).

While some take a more cognitive view of wisdom, others believe that wisdom may have an affective component that is neglected by this conceptualization (Labouvie-Vief, 1990; Levenson, 2009). These researchers believe that those who are truly wise integrate these two components. Some slight gender differences have been found, pointing toward a more cognitive bent in wise men and a more affective bent in wise women (Ardelt, 2010); this difference was larger when dealing with true-life contexts as opposed to being asked to abstractly think about a situation (Glück, Strasser, & Bluck, 2009).

In 1993, Orwoll and Achenbaum reviewed the role that gender played in the development of wisdom and concluded that wisdom combines traditional masculine and feminine sensibilities. In their review, they also reported that many of men’s wise acts took place in public, whereas women’s wise acts took place in private. In more recent research conducted by Ardelt (2009), however, the link between wisdom and gender has not been found. In a comprehensive study comparing men and women from two different age cohorts (college age versus adults older than 52 years of age), Ardelt found that some of the earlier findings discussed by Orwoll and Achenbaum were present only in the older cohort, leading to an explanation that this may reflect the different gender roles perceived by younger adults today. In addition, this study and others (e.g., Glück et al., 2009) found that when separating wisdom into affective and cognitive aspects, women in both age groups scored higher on affective aspects of wisdom. Those individuals deemed the most wise did not appear to differ along the variable of gender, giving support for the point made by several researchers, including Orwoll and Achenbaum (1993), that people who are wise have integrated cognitive and affective characteristics of wisdom (Aldwin, 2009; Ardelt, 2009).

Life-span researchers also have explored whether wisdom-related performances vary with chronological age (Smith & Baltes, 1990; Staudinger, 1999). In exploring the performances of 533 people, Baltes and Staudinger (2000) found that “for the age range from about 25 to 75 years of age, the age gradient is zero” (p. 128). In this study, therefore, there were no age differences in levels of wisdom. Wisdom does appear to decline, however, in the late 70s and beyond. Furthermore, researchers studying adolescents (e.g., Pasupathi, Staudinger, & Baltes, 1999) have reported that the decade between years 15 to 25 is a major time for acquiring wisdom. Taken alone, these findings suggest that adolescence and young adulthood are fertile times for wisdom development, and the late 70s and beyond bring about declines in wisdom. More research is needed to explain wisdom development during the 50-year period between 25 and 75.

The role of professional background also has been considered in regard to the expression of wisdom (see Smith et al., 1994; Staudinger et al., 1992). This research revealed that clinical psychologists had higher levels of wisdom-related performance than people in other professional jobs who were matched on educational level and age. Although the wisdom displayed by psychologists was elevated, it was not at the expert level. Based on these findings, the researchers concluded that professional specialization does play a role in the manifestation of wisdom. (Of course, it also may suggest that people predisposed to the development of wisdom self-select for certain professions—that is, those who are disposed toward being wise decide to pursue educations and careers in clinical psychology.)
It may also be that certain characteristics related to wisdom are cultivated more purposefully in some cultures. In investigating differences in wise strategies used to handle conflicts, samples from Japan and the Midwestern United States were compared. Researchers found that individuals in Japan showed evidence of wise traits throughout their life span (whereas those in the United States exhibited increased wisdom with increased age), and that younger and middle-aged Japanese adults showed greater utilization of wise strategies when compared to their U.S. counterparts (Grossman et al., 2012). These authors hypothesized that, due to the strong motivation within Japanese culture to avoid conflict, Japanese individuals become skilled at resolving conflicts in wise ways at an earlier age due to normative pressure to maintain group harmony. Individuals in the United States, however, may not have as much motivation to resolve conflicts, and as such they may not practice these strategies as frequently; wisdom related to resolving conflict accrues more quickly in Japanese individuals but takes a lifetime to develop in U.S. adults (Grossman et al., 2012). This provides more evidence for the old adage, “Culture matters.”

We have met thousands of psychologists during our careers, and we have had the privilege of working with a handful of applied psychologists who could be considered master therapists. In our estimation, these therapists are paragons of wisdom because not only are they prudent in their daily lives, they also are able to impart wisdom to some of the people they counsel and educate. One master therapist whom we have gotten to know through her writings is the popular author Dr. Mary Pipher; we encourage you to get to know her as well. Dr. Pipher’s keen ability to provide perspective on complex issues has been demonstrated in books such as the 1995 bestseller Reviving Ophelia, a work that deals with the cultural pressures exerted on adolescent girls in America. Her wisdom as a therapist was shared broadly with psychologists-in-training in her 2003 book Letters to a Young Therapist. In this book, she shares pages and pages of “know-how,” a basic criterion of wisdom, and she encourages readers to adopt a “back to the basics” approach when helping others. Similar to the advice given by the individuals in the study mentioned previously in the West of Ireland (Edmondson, 2012), she emphasizes the need to contextualize clients’ problems and to recommend treatment strategies that fit with the person at this time in their lives. She also addresses the uncertainty that is part and parcel of life, and she describes numerous strategies for managing, or better yet, accepting, this uncertainty. Through her Letters book, which is an excellent primer on human change, Piper suggests that young therapists practice wisely and share their perspective-taking skills with their clients.

The Measurement of Wisdom

Several measurement approaches have been used in the models of wisdom described in this chapter. For example, developmental and personality theories of wisdom have yielded self-report questions and sentence completion tasks. The forms of wisdom involving expertise in the conduct and meaning of life have been tapped via problem-solving tasks. Sternberg (1998) has proposed that wisdom problems require a person to resolve conflicts. Consistent with his emphasis on pragmatism, Baltes (Baltes & Smith, 1990; Baltes & Staudinger, 1993) has constructed a series of difficult life problems such as the following: “Someone receives a telephone call from a good friend, who
sits that he or she cannot go on like this and has decided to commit suicide. What might one/the person take into consideration and do in such a situation?” (Baltes & Staudinger, 1993, p. 126). Respondents are encouraged to “think aloud” while considering the resolution of this problem. Their comments and solutions to the problem are evaluated by trained raters, based on the five criteria identified by the Baltes group (factual and procedural knowledge, life-span contextualism, relativism of values, and recognition and management of uncertainty).

A brief self-report measure of wisdom that includes Likert-type items recently was constructed and validated for inclusion in the Values in Action Classification of Strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; see Chapter 3 for a discussion of the classification system). The items are not linked to any of the aforementioned theories, however, and they tap five aspects of wisdom: curiosity, love of learning, open mindedness, creativity, and perspective. Although all respondents complete the wisdom items, only people who have wisdom as one of their top five strengths (out of 24) receive feedback on their capacity for wise living.

A longer self-report measure called the Wisdom Development Scale (Brown & Greene, 2006) also shows promise as a measure of wisdom. This measure is connected to a different theory of wisdom (Brown, 2004) than those that have been mentioned in this chapter thus far, and it includes dimensions for self-knowledge (6 items), altruism (14 items), inspirational engagement (11 items), judgment (11 items), life knowledge (9 items), life skills (11 items), and emotional management (9 items). Psychometrics for this scale are adequate, though this measure has thus far been tested mainly in a college student population, and, as such, more research is necessary. The Wise Thinking and Acting Questionnaire (WITHAQ; Moraitou & Efklides, 2012) is an assessment that specifically taps the cognitive facet of wisdom. This scale contains three subscales: Practical Wisdom, Integrated Dialectical Thinking, and Awareness of Life Uncertainty, and has been found to be psychometrically sound with both older and young adults.

The aforementioned measures of wisdom do not include any items commonly associated with conventional intelligence tests or measures of creativity. The exclusion of these markers is deliberate because IQ and creativity are not necessarily associated with wisdom. Hence, the very intelligent or very creative person should not be automatically considered a wise person. Although implicit theories of wisdom and intelligence are similar (Sternberg, 1985), the two constructs can be distinguished by their roles in daily living. Intelligence provides the basic knowledge for accomplishing daily life-supporting tasks for oneself and others, whereas wisdom includes the know-how, judgment, and flexibility to resolve major life problems for the common good (Clayton, 1982; Sternberg, 1985). Clayton (1982) noted that crystallized intelligence is time bound (knowledge acquired today may be obsolete in 20 years), and wisdom is timeless (knowledge that endures in utility across decades and even centuries). Likewise, Sternberg (1985) characterized wisdom, more than intelligence, as involving interpersonal savvy (listening to and dealing with many different people) and day-to-day life management skills. In addition, wisdom need not be correlated with education or access to resources (Choi & Landeros, 2011). Separating wisdom from these other constructs may assist practitioners in avoiding bias about “who is wise” and in helping individuals from diverse life experiences to uncover strength and resilience in their day-to-day lives.

**Benefits of Wisdom**

As may be expected, wisdom is associated with many other positive psychological constructs. Studies with young adults have found that wisdom is related to having a coherent sense of self
and a solid and consistent ego, which may be linked to other beneficial qualities both inter- and intrapersonally (Webster, 2010). In addition, wise individuals appear to have less investment in hedonistic pursuits (e.g., seeking pleasure) and more interest in reflection and personal growth (Bergsma & Ardelt, 2012; Webster, 2010). The wise also tend to reserve social judgment in favor of making attempts to understand the whole situation and its context before making conclusions; this may have implications for decreasing prejudice and the making of ultimate attributional errors (i.e., assuming that actions of all members of a group can be attributed to internal and stable conditions).

Recent studies have also found moderate and positive links to happiness and life satisfaction (Le, 2011; Walsh, 2012). One reason for this may be the fact that wise individuals appear to be more open to experience in general, as well as open to various attributions for different life experiences (both bad and good; Le, 2011). In addition, as others including Sternberg (2012) have suggested, having a wise outlook on life may allow an individual to be more flexible, adapting and changing as life requires.

**The Neurobiology of Wisdom**

Though it would seem to fit naturally in the discussion, wisdom has not often been included in neuroscience for various reasons, one of which is the perception that it falls outside the realm of biological science (Jeste & Harris, 2010). Recently, however, some researchers have begun to discuss brain regions that appear to be fundamental to the development of wisdom. In cases where traumatic brain injuries have been centralized in the frontotemporal lobe, deficits are found in ability to be socially appropriate, process emotions effectively, and control impulsivity; all of these are, as Jeste and Harris state, “the antithesis of wisdom” (2010, p. 1603). One potential sticking point related to the neurological bases of wisdom lies with the oft-found circumstance where wisdom appears to increase with age. This is contrary to many past biological findings with regard to brain activity; however, emerging research on neuroplasticity in aging adults appears to support the idea that brain function can increase in some ways as an individual gains more experience (Jeste & Harris, 2010). More research is needed in this developing area, but we are hopeful that wisdom will be included in future neurobiological discussions.

**THEORIES OF COURAGE**

Like wisdom, courage is appreciated in many cultures. Go to any corner of the earth, and you will find that courage is valued, though potentially manifested in very different ways. Read the works of Eastern philosophers and Western thinkers, and you will find that even the wisest people in the history of the world marveled at courage. Socrates is one of many who sought to understand this noble quality, as illustrated in his question to Laches: “Suppose we set about determining the nature of courage and in the second place, proceed to inquire how the young men may attain this quality by the help of study and pursuits. Tell me, if you can, what is courage,” implored Socrates (Plato, trans., 1953, p. 85). Although this age-old question has long intrigued scholars and laypeople, it is only in the last few decades that researchers from diverse fields (e.g., Finfgeld, 1995; Haase, 1987; Putman, 1997; Rachman, 1984; Shelp, 1984) have established the requisite theoretical and scientific springboards needed for launching more
comprehensive examinations of courage. In fact, as can be seen in Table 9.1, there are at least 18 different conceptualizations of courage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aquinas</th>
<th>Defined <em>fortitudo</em> as “firmness in mind in enduring or repulsing whatever makes steadfastness outstandingly difficult, that is, particularly serious dangers, primarily sustaining action to overcome fears of bodily harm and death and secondarily in persevering in attacking” (1273/1948, p. 123).</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aristotle</td>
<td>Defined <em>andreia</em> (military courage) as the disposition to act appropriately in situations that involve fear and confidence—a rationally determined mean between cowardice and foolhardiness (cited in Rorty, 1988).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finfgeld</td>
<td>“Being courageous involves being fully aware of and accepting the threat of a long-term health concern, solving problems using discernment, and developing enhanced sensitivities to personal needs and the world in general. Courageous behavior consists of taking responsibility and being productive” (1998, p. 153).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gergen &amp; Gergen</td>
<td>“To be courageous, then, is to remain steadfast within the bosom of those relationships from which one’s sense of personal esteem and identity are derived” (1998, p. 144).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haitch</td>
<td>“Courage is two-sided: there is an aspect of standing firm or fighting, and an aspect of accepting intractable realities; courage is the psychic strength that enables the self to face danger and death” (1995, p. 86).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemingway</td>
<td>Grace under pressure (Parker, 1929).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kant</td>
<td>Defined <em>fortudido</em> as the “capacity and the resolved purpose to resist a strong but unjust opponent; and with regard to the opponent of the moral disposition within us” (cited in Rorty, 1988, p. 65).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennedy</td>
<td>(Describing senators with political courage) “Men whose abiding loyalty to their nation triumphed over personal and political considerations” (1956, p. 21).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kohut</td>
<td>“Oppose the pressures exerted on them and remain faithful to their ideals and themselves” (1979, p. 5).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Byrne et al.</td>
<td>“Dispositional psychological courage is the cognitive process of defining risk, identifying and considering alternative actions, and choosing to act in spite of potential negative consequences in an effort to obtain ‘good’ for self or others, recognizing that this perceived good may not be realized” (2000, p. 6).</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Wisdom and Courage: Characteristics of the Wise and the Brave

Hemingway’s definition (see Table 9.1) appears to be the most parsimonious, whereas Hobbes’s view is the most critical of courage. Each of these definitions provides a different historical glimpse of what scholars and society valued in terms of persevering in the face of fear. One other scholarly description, that of the Roman statesman Cicero (as summarized by Houser, 2002), may be the view of courage that best transcends time (as suggested by a comparison to implicit and explicit views on courage detailed later in this chapter). Houser noted that Cicero saw courage as

(1) magnificence, the planning and execution of great and expansive projects by putting forth ample and splendid effort of mind; (2) confidence, that through which, on great and honorable projects, the mind self-confidently collects itself with sure hope; (3) patience, the voluntary and lengthy endurance of arduous and difficult things, whether the case be honorable or useful, and (4) perseverance, ongoing persistence in a well-considered plan.

(p. 305)

Implicit Theories of Courage

To examine laypeople’s views of courage, O’Byrne, Lopez, and Petersen (2000) surveyed 97 people and found considerable variation. For example, as seen in Table 9.2, some perceive courage as an

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Plato</th>
<th>The ability to remember what is worth prizing and what is worth fearing (cited in Rorty, 1988).</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Putman</td>
<td>Facing the fears associated with the loss of psychological stability (summarized from Putman, 1997).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachman</td>
<td>Persevering in the face of fear (summarized from Rachman, 1984).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seligman</td>
<td>The capacity to rise to the occasion (Seligman, personal communication, January 7, 2001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelp</td>
<td>“The disposition to voluntarily act, perhaps fearfully, in a dangerous circumstance, where the relevant risks are reasonably appraised, in an effort to obtain or preserve some perceived good for oneself or others, recognizing that the desired perceived good may not be realized” (1984, p. 354).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snyder</td>
<td>“Responding to extraordinary times with behaviors that seem natural and called for in those circumstances. It is only later, when removed from courage-eliciting events, that the protagonist and others view the behaviors as particularly worthy of the label courageous. This view of courage obviously gives greater weight to situational than to personal factors and suggests that most people are capable of courage if faced with the appropriate circumstances” (Snyder, personal communication, October 17, 2005).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodard</td>
<td>“The ability to act for a meaningful (noble, good, or practical) cause, despite experiencing the fear associated with perceived threat exceeding the available resources” (2004, pp. 4–5).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
attitude (e.g., optimism), and others see it as a behavior (e.g., saving someone's life). Some refer to mental strength; others write of physical strength. Some claim that courage involves taking a risk, whereas others accentuate the role of fear. Neither the risk component nor the fear component, however, is found in all descriptions of courage.

Across history and cultures, courage has been regarded as a great virtue because it helps people to face their challenges. Philosophers offered the earliest views on understanding courage. Over the past centuries, efforts to construct socially relevant views of courage have transported it from the hearts of the warriors on the battlefields to the daily experiences and thoughts of every person. Whereas Aristotle analyzed the physical courage of his "brave soldier," Plato marveled at the moral courage of his mentors. The philosophical focus seemed to shift to the deeds and traits of veterans of moral wars with Aquinas's (1273/1948) attention paid to steadfastness in the face of difficulty and Tillich's (1980) interpretation of courage as the reaffirmation of self and being. These latter two types of courage (physical and moral) have captured most philosophers' attentions, and the classification of courageous behavior has broadened over the years.

After reviewing work on courage, two groups of researchers developed similar classifications of courage. In their Values in Action classification system, Peterson and Seligman (2004) conceptualized courage as a core human virtue comprising such strengths as valor (taking physical, intellectual, and emotional stances in the face of danger); authenticity (representing oneself to others and the self in a sincere fashion); enthusiasm/zest (thriving/having a sense of vitality in a challenging situation); and industry/perseverance (undertaking tasks and challenges and finishing them).

In a similar model, O'Byrne et al. (2000) identified the three types of courage as physical, moral, and health/change (now referred to as vital courage). Physical courage involves the attempted maintenance of societal good by the expression of physical behavior grounded in the pursuit of socially valued goals (e.g., a firefighter saving a child from a burning building). Moral courage is the behavioral expression of authenticity in the face of the discomfort of dissension, disapproval, or rejection (e.g., a politician invested in a "greater good" places an unpopular vote in a meeting). Vital courage refers to the perseverance through a disease or disability even when the outcome is ambiguous (e.g., a child with a heart transplant maintaining his or her intensive treatment regimen even though the prognosis is uncertain).

Physical courage has evolved slowly from the Greek andreia, the military courage of the brave soldier in ancient Greece. Finding the rugged path between cowardice and foolhardiness distinguished a Greek soldier as courageous. This disposition to act appropriately in situations involving fear and confidence in the face of physical danger has been valued in many cultures for centuries (Rorty, 1988). For example, Ernest Hemingway was a major writer on the topic of courage in twentieth-century America. His fascination with physical courage in a variety of arenas, such as the
### Table 9.2 Laypeople’s Responses to the Question, “What Is Courage?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taking action (either mental, physical, or spiritual) that is difficult because it makes you uncomfortable (because it is dangerous, threatening, or difficult)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing something outside of one’s comfort zone—fine line between courage and stupidity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking risks in the face of possible failure and uncertainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to take what life gives and make the best out of one’s life (positive attitude involved)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiate risk-taking behavior in the face of a threatening situation toward one’s emotional/psychological/spiritual/physical health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing up for what one believes in even if others don’t feel the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing up for oneself in the face of adversity or harm even when the consequences are known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to take risks, not knowing if one may fail or succeed (being brave)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrificing, working, or helping a cause; faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proceeding in a situation even when one is unsure about the outcome; challenging the norm in the best interest of society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to face threats/fears/challenges and overcome obstacles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to contain one’s fear enough to progress with a task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence; belief in self and situations; making a choice and acting on it; strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bravery; act of strength/wisdom in moments of crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using one’s power to stand up for those who have none in the name of social justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defending a viewpoint that is different from the norm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having the power and strength to face difficulties or challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking responsible risks; sacrificing part of oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facing challenges rather than running away or pretending they don’t exist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Displaying actions that go along with one’s beliefs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risking failure; determination in the face of failure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Form of assistance during a dangerous or life-threatening event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking up when something that is not right is happening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfless behavior; displaying concern for others rather than oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committing acts of perceived bravery that an ordinary person might not do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being mentally/physically strong</td>
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</table>

Note: Major themes: taking risks (possible failure, negative consequences, uncertainty); particular attitude; facing challenges; and defending beliefs
battlefield, the open sea, and the bullfighting arena, seemed to mirror the American fascination with staring danger in the face and persevering. In fact, the “Hemingway code” of living a life characterized by strength, knowledge, and courage provided a code of conduct for many Americans.

Jack Rachman’s research on courage stemmed from his realization that courage was the mirror image of fear. He noticed that, when faced with physical jeopardy, some people dealt with the perceived danger better than others. Therefore, Rachman (1984) worked with paratroopers, decorated soldiers, and bomb squad members to gather information on the nature of fear and its counterpart, courage. He found that courageous people persevere when facing fear and thereafter make quick physiological recoveries. He also suggested that courageous acts are not necessarily confined to a special few, nor do they always take place in public. In regard to this latter point, he became intrigued by the inner battles and private courage displayed by his psychotherapy clients. He concluded that clearly there was more to courage than andreia and related physical conquest of danger.

One recent current example of this physical courage may be Captain Chesley B. “Sully” Sullenberger and the “Miracle on the Hudson” in 2009. Though his plane hit a flock of geese, this potential tragedy resulted in no loss of life due to Sullenberger’s calm and steady bravery in the face of extreme danger. Similarly, the 19 Granite Mountain Hotshot firefighters who lost their lives fighting the Arizona wildfire in June of 2013 can be held up as examples of bravery and courage. These men knew the danger they were in and still pressed forward to try to stop the raging fire. Other examples would of course include the tens of thousands of service men and women who leave their families and friends to go to fight for our country every day, sometimes volunteering for extended tours of duty despite the daily threat of death. These individuals must feel the bite of fear on a regular basis and yet press onward due to their great courage.

Moral courage involves the preservation of justice and service for the common good. Fascinated by moral courage, John F. Kennedy spent years gathering stories of statesmen who followed their hearts and principles when determining what was “best” for the American people—even when constituents did not agree with their decisions or value their representations. Although Kennedy himself was a military hero, in his Profiles in Courage (1956), he seemed to give more attention and reverence to moral courage than to physical courage.

Authenticity and integrity are closely associated with the expression of personal views and values in the face of dissension and rejection. Exactly when should one take a stand? In one example, Rosa Parks said that she took a seat at the front of a bus because it was time to do so. Doctors and nurses, when facing difficult situations with patients and families, must be truthful and straightforward even when it would be easier, emotionally, to sugarcoat diagnoses and prognoses (see Finfgeld, 1998; Shelp, 1984). Not only does it take courage to speak the truth (Finfgeld, 1998), it also takes courage to hear the truth. Moral courage can take yet another form when an individual stands up for the rights of the underprivileged and the disadvantaged and confronts someone with power over him or her.

Moral courage might be considered the “equal opportunity” form of this virtue; we all experience situations in which a morally courageous response is provoked, and this behavior requires no special training. We may encounter discomfort or dissension and be challenged by the task of maintaining authenticity and integrity in those situations. Physical courage, on the other hand, is sparked only in special circumstances, and often those who engage in physically courageous behavior have received training that helps them overcome fear. (Thankfully, most of us, except for soldiers and first responders, are not called upon to put our lives at risk to protect the common good every day.) Similarly, vital courage is not needed unless we encounter disease or disability, and often professionals teach us
how to battle the infirmity. So, how does a common person like you or me respond to situations that challenge our core assumptions about the world and about people? When discomfort or dissension is experienced, and prudence suggests that a stand needs to be taken, we have the opportunity to engage in behavior consistent with moral courage. Unfortunately, we (SJL and JTP) encounter many situations every month in which a person (who is present or not present) is not getting a “fair shake” because of someone’s prejudice, be it ageism, racism, or sexism. (We guess that you witness bias of some sort once or more a month as well.) On occasion, we are able to muster up the moral courage to address the perceived injustice; we hope you can conjure up this kind of courage in similar situations in the future. Most of us will never have to summon the type of courage shown by Malala Yousafzai. All of us should be relieved that such a brave girl has recovered. Perhaps we can use her unfailing courage as an inspiration to be courageous in our own ways.

Malala Yousafzai’s Courage

The New York Times

October 10, 2012 – If Pakistan has a future, it is embodied in Malala Yousafzai. Yet the Taliban so feared this 14-year old girl that they tried to assassinate her. Her supposed offense? Her want of an education and her public advocation for it.

Malala was on her way home from school in Mingora, Pakistan, in the Swat Valley, on Tuesday when a Taliban gunman walked up to the school bus, asked for her by name and shot her in the head and neck. On Wednesday, doctors at a military hospital removed the bullet that lodged in her shoulder. She remains in critical condition.

Malala was no ordinary target. She came to public attention three years ago when she wrote a diary for the BBC about life under the Taliban, which controlled Swat from 2007 to 2009 before being dislodged by an Army offensive. Last year, she won a national peace prize.

The Pakistani Taliban was quick and eager to take credit for Tuesday’s attack. Malala “has become a symbol of Western culture in the area; she was openly propagating it,” a spokesman, Ehsanullah Ehsan, told The Times. If she survives, the militants would try again to kill her, he vowed.

Malala has shown more courage in facing down the Taliban than Pakistan’s government and its military leaders. Her father, who once led a school for girls and has shown uncommon bravery in supporting his daughter’s aspirations, said she had long defied Taliban threats.

Pakistan’s founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, envisioned a democratic and moderate Muslim nation. But extremism is engulfing the country, and too many people are enabling it or acquiescing to it. This attack was so abominable, however, that Pakistanis across the ideological spectrum reacted with outrage, starting with the president and prime minister. Even Jamaat ud Dawa, the charity wing of the militant Islamist group Lashkar-e-Taiba, which waged its own violent campaigns against India, couldn’t stay silent. “Shameful, despicable, barbaric attempt,” read a message on the group’s official Twitter feed. “Curse be upon assassins and perpetrators.”

(Continued)
The attack was an embarrassment for the Pakistani Army, which has boasted of pushing the Taliban from Swat. The army chief, Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, visited the hospital where Malala was being treated, and, in a rare public statement, he condemned the “twisted ideology” of the “cowards” who had attacked her.

Words only have meaning if they are backed up by actions. What will he and other leaders do to bring Malala’s attackers to justice and stop their threat to ordinary citizens and the state?

In recent years, the Taliban destroyed at least 200 schools. The murderous violence against one girl was committed against the whole of Pakistani society. The Taliban cannot be allowed to win this vicious campaign against girls, learning and tolerance. Otherwise, there is no future for that nation.


Vital courage is at work as a patient battles illness through surgery and treatment regimens. Physicians, nurses, and other allied health professionals use their expertise to save human lives or to improve the quality of the lives of those whom they serve. Many researchers have examined vital courage (though not calling it such), and their work has captured the phenomenon that captivates us when we hear about someone facing chronic illness. Haase (1987) interviewed nine chronically ill adolescents in order to answer the question, “What is the essential structure of the lived-experience of courage in chronically ill adolescents?” She found that courage involves developing a deep personal awareness of the potential short-term and long-term effects of the illness.

Amputee a Driving Force in Getting People With Disabilities Moving

Julie Deardorff

The Chicago Tribune

12/21/2012—Army veteran Melissa Stockwell has one strong, healthy leg. The other is a scarred, 6-inch stump that she has proudly nicknamed “Little Leg.”

The Bucktown woman throws birthday parties for this shortened limb, always dresses it in her favorite colors — red, white and blue — and has trouble imagining going through life any other way. “I’ve done more with one leg than I ever could have with two,” she often says.

The first female soldier to lose a limb in Iraq, Stockwell, 32, has managed to turn a traumatic above-the-knee amputation into an uplifting experience, one that motivates people of all abilities. Since the injury she has shaken hands with presidents, won three consecutive paratriathlon world
In interviews about courage with middle-aged adults with various physical illnesses, Finfgeld (1998) determined that courage involves becoming aware of and accepting the threat of a long-term health condition, solving any related problems through the use of insight, and developing enhanced sensitivities to oneself and others. Finfgeld (1995) also interviewed older adults who were demonstrating courage in the face of chronic illnesses and concluded that being courageous is a lifelong process that entails factors such as significant others, values, and hope.

Regarding the courage of physicians, Shelp (1984) found that this virtue, along with competence and compassion, is a very desirable characteristic of health care providers. Moreover, instilling courage through “encouragement” (p. 358) is required of anyone in a profession that exemplifies care and concern. Furthermore, Shelp states that the necessary components of courage are freedom of choice, fear of a situation, and the willingness to take risks in a situation with an uncertain but morally worthy end. We believe that vital courage frequently is exhibited by people who are suffering, by the health care providers who treat them, and by the many significant others who care for loved ones during hard times. This vital courage of family and friends who cared for an ailing significant other was one of the many backstories in Jerome Groopman’s work, The Anatomy of Hope: How People Prevail in the Face of Illness. In this 2004 book, Dr. Groopman told the stories of people who were enduring illness. Often, the sick person was accompanied by a caring doctor...
and a loving support person. Those caregivers shared, albeit vicariously, in the suffering of the ill person; they faced their own fears, including the fear of the loss of the person who meant so much to them. Hence, vital courage in the face of suffering often is manifested by people other than the identified patient. Groopman’s account of a mother with colon cancer and her teenage daughter’s coping was particularly poignant. Indeed, the story of Frances and Sharon Walker (pseudonyms for an actual patient and her daughter), discussed in Chapter 2 of the Groopman text, revealed how courage can be seen in the virtuous behavior of those who are ill and the loved ones who suffer alongside them. Furthermore, this case demonstrated that, when one caregiver (the physician in this example) behaves in a cowardly manner, other caregivers might be challenged to rise to the occasion. Frances Walker, during her battle with cancer, was the model patient; she was determined to endure, and she was compliant with treatment. Sharon, her teenage daughter, believed that her mother would be cured, and the young woman was a constant source of comfort and support to her mother at every appointment. Unfortunately, Frances’s oncologist was not honest with them; her cancer treatment was only palliative, not curative as he had boldly asserted. The colon cancer was indeed terminal, a fact the doctor probably knew when first rendering his diagnosis. When Frances was overwhelmed by her true prognosis, and the physician would not keep his appointments with her, young Sharon stood by her mother and stood up to the medical staff. She grappled with her fears about her mother’s suffering and her dread of losing her loved one in the near future, and she overcame her hesitancy to challenge authority (the medical staff) when she realized she wasn’t getting straight answers. Frances, the patient, and Sharon, the caregiver, embodied the vital courage necessary to fight an illness and maintain dignity.

**Psychological courage**, as Putman (1997) described it, is strength in facing one’s destructive habits. This form of vital courage may be quite common in that we all struggle with psychological challenges in the forms of stress, sadness, and dysfunctional or unhealthy relationships. In light of these threats to our psychological stabilities, we stand up to our dysfunctions by restructuring our beliefs or systematically desensitizing ourselves to the fears. One striking argument that Putman advanced about psychological courage is that there is a paucity of training for psychological courage as compared to physical and moral courage. Putman goes on to say that pop culture presents many physically and morally courageous icons in literary works and movies, but exemplars of psychological courage are rare. Perhaps this is due to the negative stigma surrounding mental health problems and destructive behaviors. It is also possible, however, that the language surrounding vital courage is new relative to that for moral and physical courage (the latter having been acknowledged since the ancient Greeks). The people in Figure 9.2 exemplify moral, physical, and vital courage.

Other researchers have discussed the construct of **civil courage**, which is defined by Greitemeyer, Osswald, Fischer, and Frey (2007) as “brave behavior accompanied by anger and indignation that intends to enforce societal and ethical norms without considering one’s own social costs” (p. 115). This form of courage is thought to combine facets of physical courage and moral courage, as defined by O’Byrne et al. (2000) and Pury, Kowalski, and Spearman (2007) (Greitemeyer et al.). As an example, someone exhibiting civil courage may decide to intervene in a situation where someone is under physical attack as a result of prejudice. Greitemeyer and colleagues state that this type of courage is separate from helping behaviors more commonly labeled as altruism (e.g., helping an individual who has dropped something) because of the common cost experienced by the individual who decides to help in these circumstances. In the example given here, the “helper”
who is exhibiting civil courage risks bodily harm in helping to fend off attackers but feels angered and morally and civilly obligated to stand up for what is right.

Consideration of the implicit views of courage and of modern scholars’ theoretical examination of courage suggests that our understanding of this virtue has changed little in the 2,000 years since Cicero’s work. Cicero’s definition, summarized previously on page 234, is a timeless one. For example, his comments on courage take into account its multidimensional nature, going beyond the culturally lauded physical courage to honor the patience and perseverance necessary for vital courage and the magnificence inherent in moral courage. Today’s implicit views and scholarly operationalizations of courage include references to the qualities of hope, confidence, and honor that appeared in Cicero’s definition.

**BECOMING AND BEING COURAGEOUS**

Courageous behaviors follow the identification of a threat, after which there is a shift away from defining the problem as an insurmountable obstacle (Finfgeld 1995, 1998). Behavioral expectations, role models, and value systems also appear to determine if, when, and how courage unfolds.

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**Figure 9.2 Exemplars of Three Types of Courage**

- **Moral Courage**
  Rosa Parks stood up to injustice when she sat in a seat in the front of a Birmingham bus during a time of extreme prejudice.

- **Physical Courage**
  Firefighters completing a training exercise prepare for their life-threatening work.

- **Vital Courage**
  Elie Weisel devoted his life to fighting for human rights after he survived youth in a concentration camp.

Sources: Rosa Parks: Copyright © Reuters/CORBIS; Firefighters: Copyright © Comstock/Thinkstock; Elie Wiesel: Copyright © Ramin Talaie/Corbis.
Courageous behavior may result in a sense of equanimity, or calmness; an absence of regret about one’s life; and personal integrity.

Using structured individual interviews, Szagun (1992) asked children ages 5 to 12 to rate the courage associated with 12 different risks (on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = Not courageous to 5 = Very courageous); moreover, the researcher asked the children to judge courage vignettes. The younger children (ages 5 to 6) likened courage to the difficulty of the task at hand, along with being fearless. The older children (ages 8 to 9) likened courage to subjective risk taking and overcoming fear. Still older children (ages 11 to 12) reported that being fully aware of a risk at the time of acting is a necessary component of courage. Not surprisingly, given their developmental stages, the younger group rated physical risks as entailing more courage than other risks (e.g., psychological risks).

More recently, Szagun and Schauble (1997) investigated courage using an interview technique for younger children and an open-ended questionnaire for adolescents and adults. These researchers asked participants to recall and then describe situations in which they had acted courageously and to focus on the thoughts and feelings of those situations. Children were asked about courage through the use of a short story about a specific character. Results showed that the young children did not consider fear or overcoming fear in describing the experience of courage, but this propensity to equate courage with the experience of fear increased with age. As in past research (Szagun, 1992), younger research participants conceptualized courage as more physical risk taking, whereas older children focused on psychological risk taking as being necessary for courage. The older children also conceptualized courage as a multifaceted emotional experience that involves fear, self-confidence, and an urge to act.

Several researchers have attempted to determine how people become courageous and/or decide upon courageous action in the face of certain circumstances (Fagin-Jones & Midlarsky, 2007; Finfgeld, 1995, 1998; Haase, 1987). Corrupt times often test our courageous mettle, and perhaps in no other historical era was this more evident than during the Jewish Holocaust. Fagin-Jones and Midlarsky interviewed two groups of individuals: (1) non-Jewish “rescuers” who assisted and/or saved the lives of Jews during this time, despite the obvious threat to their own personal safety; and (2) non-Jewish “bystanders” who did not make efforts to assist Jews, though they also did not participate in direct persecution of them (p. 139). These researchers aimed to better understand the effect of various positive characteristics of personality (e.g., social responsibility) on the “courageous altruism” that took place during this time (Fagin-Jones & Midlarsky, 2007, p. 136). Results showed that rescuers could be distinguished from bystanders on measures of social responsibility, empathic concern, and risk taking, as well as altruistic moral reasoning. These findings further exemplify the idea that personal traits may lead some individuals toward more courageous actions.

In January of 2010, one of the most famous of these rescuers passed away. Miep Gies, one of the incredible individuals who helped to hide Anne Frank and who was the keeper of Anne’s diary, remained humble about the civil courage she showed about helping the Franks until her death at 100 years old. Gies considered helping Anne Frank and her family to be not a choice but a duty (a key component of the concept of civil courage) and has been quoted as saying, “I am not a hero” (Goldstein, 2010). Nonetheless, history will always remember her as one.

Haase (1987) used a phenomenological, descriptive method of assessment to further his understanding of how people such as Gies and others become courageous. In an unstructured interview format with chronically ill adolescents, participants identified and described their courageous
Wisdom and Courage: Characteristics of the Wise and the Brave

experiences. They were asked the following: “Describe a situation in which you were courageous. Describe your experience as you remember it, include your thoughts, feelings, and perceptions as you remember experiencing them. Continue to describe the experience until you feel it is fully described” (p. 66). This instruction reveals an assumption that all individuals have the capacity for and past experience with courage. Haase’s findings regarding courage point to the development of attitudes and coping methods rather than descriptions of so-called born heroes. In particular, she found that, through daily encounters with “mini-situations” of courage (e.g., treatment, procedures, physical changes, and others that result from the illness), the adolescent comes to an awareness and resolution of the experience as one of courage. Increasingly, over time and experiences, the situation is viewed as difficult but not impossible. Through resolution of the situation of courage, the adolescent develops a sense of mastery, competence, and accomplishment and a feeling of growth. The mechanisms at the heart of Haase’s work may also be found in use with psychotherapy. Some psychologists have spoken of the use of courage in therapeutic treatment, specifically with regard to having the “courage to risk positive change” (Campos, 2012, p. 209). As a part of transactional analysis, therapists who are proponents of this style of treatment state that one must take some risks in order to seek out change in one’s life which requires courage. Campos (2012) and others write about building a “culture of courage,” in which clients are encouraged to try to change themselves or their community in some way (p. 215).

Sean Hannah, Patrick Sweeney and Paul Lester (2007) have proposed a theory explaining how the individual may experience courage on a subjective level and how these experiences may lead to the development of what they call “a courageous mindset” (p. 129). In Hannah et al.’s model (see Figure 9.3), factors such as the perception of risk are impacted by external constructs such as social forces (e.g., normative influences) and positive states (such as hope, efficacy, or the experience of positive emotions), as well as more internal characteristics such as positive traits (e.g., openness to experience and conscientiousness) and values and beliefs (e.g., valor, loyalty, honor). Hannah and colleagues posit that these influences have a collective effect on how risk is perceived, how fear is experienced, and whether courageous behaviors are exhibited. In addition, they theorize that the subjective experience of these courageous behaviors may lead the individual to develop the “courageous mindset” (Hannah et al., 2007, p. 129) that in turn affects the occurrence of courageous action in future endeavors. Interestingly, other research has found that mood (e.g., positive or negative affect) may not be related to deciding to engage in helping behavior when moral courage is on the line (Kayser, Greitemeyer, Fischer, & Frey, 2009). These researchers found that though positive mood predicts helping behavior in many settings, mood did not appear to impact helping behavior in situations requiring moral courage. Other studies in this vein have shown that general helping behavior and moral courage helping behavior may have differential predictors (Kayser et al., 2009).

In The Courage Quotient, Robert Biswas-Diener (2012) talks more about courage for the layperson. Biswas-Diener states that most people think first of physical courage when the word is mentioned. Images of people rescuing babies from burning buildings or daredevils willing to risk death to perform physical feats are often the first things that come to our minds. When we compare everyday actions of ourselves or others we know to these types of images, it seems that courage is a scarce thing, something not often seen. Biswas-Diener makes the point, however, that courage can mean more than this, stating “When we understand courage as ‘a quality of spirit or mind,’ we can see that this mental attitude can apply as easily to a child facing her first day of
school as to an executive who is willing to gamble on a new product. In the end courage is not found only in physical acts; it is fundamentally an attitude toward facing intimidating situations” (p. 5). If we are able to identify more courageous acts, we might also be able to emulate them in everyday situations. Bravery in trying something new, for example, is something that might be attempted in the workplace, in our relationships, and in setting difficult goals for ourselves. As we are able to pay more attention to more courageous acts in these domains, we may be better situated to become more courageous ourselves.

This is something we can try with our children as well. In my (JTP) house, we occasionally put up “The Bravery Tree” when inspiration for trying challenging new things seems to be needed. The Bravery Tree is just a makeshift shape of a tree, drawn with ribbons on our sliding glass door. Everyone in the family has a different branch, and each can earn Bravery Leaves for attempting acts of courage. A child might try a new food at the dinner table even though she thinks she won’t like it. Another might challenge himself by playing in the “big kids” basketball game at recess. A third might try her best not to cry, though she misses her mother while she is at school that day. We talk about “brave faces” and what we can do to make ourselves feel brave. One of my children likes to roar, “I am not afraid!” Another just lifts her chin ever so subtly. Praising acts of bravery in our children that involve these more everyday feats may instill in them the idea that they are Courageous Individuals, that this is something inside of them. There is no telling what they might do with this mindset in the future.

United States Senator John McCain’s View on Strengthening Courage—April 2004

"Moral courage we can strengthen. The first time you stand up to a bully, it’s hard. The second time, it’s not so hard. Physical courage sometimes you run out of. And when I ran out of courage and came back to my cell and tapped on my wall, it was my comrades that picked me up, that lifted me up, that sustained me, that gave me strength to go back and fight again.” (Transcript of MSNBC’s Hardball With Chris Matthews)

COURAGE RESEARCH

The Measurement of Courage

Over the last 30 years, numerous brief self-report measures of courage have been created for research purposes. Although several of these measures have some strong points, all warrant additional development.

In 1976, Larsen and Giles developed a scale to measure existential (akin to moral) and social (related to physical) courage. The existential courage domain is tapped by 28 items, and 22 items examine social courage. Psychometric support for this measure is limited, and little if any work has been done to refine the scale.
Schmidt and Koselka (2000) constructed a seven-item measure of courage. Three items relate to general courage, and four assess what is considered panic-specific courage (possibly a subtype of vital courage). This scale meets basic standards for reliability, but evidence for its validity is limited.

Woodard (2004) used a carefully researched definition of courage as the willingness to act for a meaningful (noble, good, or practical) cause, despite experiencing fear (associated with perceived threat exceeding available resources), to develop a different measurement of courage. This psychometrically sound scale has since been revised (now called the Woodard-Pury Courage Scale [WPCS-23]), and new scoring calls for analysis of the items that address the willingness piece of this construct in four factors. These factors include the willingness to act in a courageous way for (1) one’s job or self-interest; (2) one’s beliefs (e.g., religious, patriotic); (3) individual social and/or moral situations; and (4) situations relevant to family (Woodard & Pury, 2007). Recent scale development has been completed by positive psychology research teams who were working on what
originally were called “wellsprings” measures, and now referred to as the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The first version of a wellsprings measure included five items (e.g., “I have taken a stand in the face of strong resistance”) that tapped courage. The current version measures four types of courage, including valor, authenticity, enthusiasm/zest, and industry/perseverance. Norton and Weiss (2009) have developed a final measure more recently that consists of items that ask individuals to judge their likelihood of acting when experiencing fear, regardless of situational characteristics. More research on psychometric characteristics must be conducted to determine its utility (Pury & Lopez, 2009), but this appears to be another promising research tool for assessing the construct of courage.

In addition, measures of distinct types of courage exist. Kastenmüller, Greitemeyer, Fischer, and Frey (2007) have developed a scale that specifically measures the construct of civil courage (see previous sections for a discussion of this concept). Though at the time of publication this scale is only offered in German, it provides more information about this type of courage and appears to be psychometrically sound (Kastenmüller et al.).

More recently, a new measure designed to assess courage in children has been developed. The Courage Measure for Children (CM-C; Norton & Weiss, 2009) is a 12-item scale that asks Likert-based questions regarding the likelihood of a participant acting in a courageous way (e.g., “If I am anxious about something, I will do it anyway” and “If something scares me, I try to get away from it.”). In addition to a self-report version, a parent version of the CM-C is also available for corroboration (Muris, Mayer, & Schubert, 2010).

The development of measures of courage is in its early stages because a comprehensive theory of courage has not been proposed and carefully examined. It will be difficult to develop a model of courage, but this task should be no more difficult than that accomplished already by several wisdom researchers. An important issue here is whether measurement should assess courage as displayed in a courageous act or as embodied by the courageous actor. To compound matters, it is not clear whether we should focus on the tonic (constant) and phasic (waxing and waning) elements of courage, or both. This may depend on the type of courage assessed. Moral courage may possess tonic qualities, as a person may demonstrate it steadily across situations, and it also may possess phasic qualities, as it only appears when necessary. (Physical and vital courage may be tonic and phasic as well, but the phasic characteristics are more evident.) For example, tapping the tonic elements of moral courage could be achieved with straightforward questions; traditional scales could yield a meaningful representation of this strength. On the other hand, the phasic elements of moral courage, which only emerge in their pure form when needed in a given situation, may require the assessment techniques of observation, narrative reports, experience sampling methods, and critical incident reviews.

Relationships Between Fear and Courage

Although the link between fear and courage has been assumed for centuries, the relationship is not well understood. One of the first researchers to examine this link, Rachman (1984), observed that frightened people can perform courageous acts. Though courage and fearlessness often are regarded as synonymous, many (see Table 9.1) have argued that perseverance despite fear is the purest form of courage. Indeed, Rachman proposed that true courage is being willing and able to approach a fearful situation despite the presence of subjective fear. In this case, physiological
responses may be measured to assess the presence of fear or stress in a given situation in order to determine how the courageous people respond.

Prior to his research on courage, Rachman’s (1978) work focused on describing subjective fear and its associated bodily responses. As he developed a firm understanding of fear and its bodily manifestations and made the shift toward courage research, Rachman and his colleagues (Cox, Hallam, O’Connor, & Rachman, 1983; O’Connor, Hallam, & Rachman, 1985) studied the relationship between fear and courage. These researchers compared bomb disposal operators who had received decorations for gallantry to undecorated operators with comparable training and years of service. (The decoration served as a method of identifying individuals with the experience of courageous acts.) Based on Rachman’s (1978) previous research, performances under stressors were determined by various subjective, behavioral, and psychophysiological measures. Comparisons revealed distinctive physiological responses under stress for the decorated as compared to the nondecorated bomb disposal operators, although there were no statistically significant differences found (Cox et al., 1983). In a subsequent experimental replication, O’Connor et al. (1985) demonstrated that, relative to comparison persons, the decorated operators maintained a lower cardiac rate under stress. The findings from these studies suggested that people who had performed courageous acts might respond (behaviorally and physiologically) to fear in a way that is different from people who had not demonstrated courage.

Rachman (1984), trying to understand why some people respond to fear in a manner that might be conducive to courageous behavior, studied beginning paratroopers. His assessment of subjective fear and corresponding physiological markers revealed that paratroopers reported a moderate amount of fear at the beginning of their program, but this fear subsided within their initial five jumps. Furthermore, it was found that the execution of a jump despite the presence of fear (i.e., courage) resulted in a reduction of fear.

This line of research begins to unravel the complex relationship between fear and courage. Given the common assumption that a prerequisite fear must be apparent for there to be courage, the link between fear and physical courage, moral courage, and vital courage needs further examination.

**Benefits of Courage**

There are many beneficial characteristics that seem to be correlated with the construct of courage. For example, in personality research, individuals who have the positive traits of agreeableness and openness also score higher on measures of courage (Muris et al., 2010). Courage was also found to correlate with the Big Five personality trait of extraversion in this study and to have a negative relationship with the trait of anxiety. In addition, courage exhibited in certain scenarios (e.g., educational settings) even in the face of fear of failure has other positive correlates, including a more adaptive coping style and higher levels of confidence, though there is a question of whether or not courage and confidence are distinct enough to be called different constructs (Martin, 2011). As more research is done on this interesting construct, it is likely that other positive correlates could emerge.

**Courage and Culture**

In closing, we would like to highlight the fact that there is a dearth of literature on the subject of courage and its manifestations in different cultures. Acts deemed “courageous” might differ from culture to culture. For example, the acts of suicide bombers in some areas of the world, or of those
who choose to bomb abortion clinics within the United States, are at times considered courageous
by the proponents of these cultural groups (e.g., extremist members of some religions). It is safe
to say, however, that these might not be considered acts of courage by members of other cultural
groups. In some cultural groups (e.g., Asian cultures), deciding to keep a personal opinion quiet in
service of the pursuit of harmony of the group might be viewed as courageous, though speaking
up at all costs might be viewed as courageous in other groups (e.g., Western cultures; Pedrotti,
Edwards, & Lopez, 2009).

In addition, some cultural groups might find courage to be necessary more often than others.
For instance, the young Pakistani hero Malala Yousafzai, discussed previously, was faced with
extreme discrimination and danger, the likes of which might not be present for members of many
other cultural groups. Within the United States, problematic race relations may require a basic
level of courage from racial, ethnic, and other minorities in order to live day-to-day in our country
despite violence directed disproportionately at these groups. As an example, the most recent FBI
(2012) statistics regarding hate crimes in the United States show that in the 5,467 incidents of racial
bias crimes in 2012, 66.2% were victims of anti-Black bias, versus 22% being victims of anti-White
bias. Of the 1,376 hate crimes perpetrated because of sexual orientation bias, 98.1% were due to
bias against lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals, in comparison to 1.9% of heterosexual indivi-
duals being targeted due to this type of bias. Finally, courage may be a necessary component of
life for women across the world as their safety is not commensurate to that enjoyed by men in
most areas of the world (National Organization for Women, 2012; A Safe World for Women, 2013).
In researching this necessary, though perhaps more quiet, courage that many of these individuals
may need in order to live their daily lives, we may discover a new source of strength to emulate.

FINDING WISDOM AND COURAGE IN DAILY LIFE

Wisdom and courage, probably the most valued of the virtues, are in high demand in our world,
and fortunately there is not a limited supply. Indeed, we believe that most people, through a mind-
ful approach to life, can develop wisdom and courage. Feel free to test this hypothesis by complet-
ing the Personal Mini-Experiments. Then, create some mini-situations of wisdom and courage by
implementing the Life Enhancement Strategies.

Can Courage Be Learned?
Vic Conant
President of Nightingale-Conant Corporation

If you look at the most revered people in history, the people who have done the most for the world,
the people who have pushed society forward, you’ll invariably find that a major characteristic of those
individuals is courage. But what is courage?

S. J. Rachman, a Canadian psychologist specializing in fear and courage, says that many people
think of courage as fearlessness. However, Rachman defines courage as perseverance in the face of
fear and stress.
Courage is a personal strength, which equates to the ability to act when others of lesser courage will not. It’s the ability to act in spite of fear and overwhelming opposition. It’s the ability to act in spite of hardship, despair, and sometimes imminent personal physical danger.

Ask yourself, who’s the most courageous individual you’ve personally known? Next, who’s the most courageous person you can identify throughout history? Now, what were the courageous characteristics that caused you to choose these individuals? My personal favorite is Winston Churchill. At the end of World War I, Churchill was in charge of the British navy. After a major naval defeat, he was removed from office and then had to endure more than 20 years of rejection of his political views. He admittedly suffered some very low times. But he never wavered on his beliefs. His views were eventually proven correct when the Germans swept through Europe, and Churchill was the obvious choice to become Britain’s wartime prime minister.

Everyone automatically looked to him in this time of need because they knew where he stood, and they witnessed him display courage in battle, putting himself in harm’s way over and over again. His personal courage and determination helped inspire an entire nation to continue to resist a force that at the time must have seemed to most insurmountable. And yet Churchill wasn’t a likely person to become courageous. According to Stephen Mansfield, in his book *Never Give In: The Extraordinary Character of Winston Churchill*, Churchill didn’t have physical strength or towering stature. He was neglected, ridiculed, and misused by friends and family alike. He was brought up in the leisure class, which seldom produces principled men of vision. However, in spite of all that, he developed a staggering moral and physical bravery.

Mansfield goes on to say about courage, “It cannot be taught, though it can be inspired. And it normally springs from something like faith or resolve—a commitment to something larger than oneself. It can burst forth instantly as though awakened by a sudden jolt. But, more often, it waits in silence until aroused by some pressing challenge. What is certain of courage, though,” he says, “is that true leadership is impossible without it.”

Churchill himself said, “Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities, because it is the quality that guarantees all others.”

Mansfield is right to say that it would be difficult to teach someone to operate at, as he says, “the staggering level of courage of a Churchill or a Gandhi or a Martin Luther King.” However, it’s been proven that courage can be learned, and that is incredibly important for any of us who would like to increase our courage in some area of our lives.

Among S. J. Rachman’s research, he observed the military bomb-disposal officers serving in the British army in Northern Ireland. He discovered that these men were able to cultivate a great capacity for courage, even if they initially lacked a high degree of self-confidence or a natural ability to persist under pressure. He found that the ability to persist and function well in the face of great danger was largely the result of intense and specialized training for their job. Not only being prepared, but knowing you are prepared.

Denis Waitley describes fear as one of the strongest motivating emotions we can experience. Yet we do have the power to choose an even stronger motivation that can override fear and cause us to act courageously.

(Continued)
Denis used to be a Navy pilot, and he observed the training of our astronauts. After some of the most arduous and intense training ever devised, astronauts have been able to act efficiently and effectively, even in incredibly dangerous situations. As Neil Armstrong said after he walked on the moon, "It was just like a drill. It was just like we planned it."

It’s apparent that we can become more courageous with enough preparation. If we venture, we do so by faith, because we cannot know the end of anything at its beginning. Isn’t this the ultimate reason that doubt and fear are able to eat away at our courage? We’re fearful because we cannot know the end of anything at its beginning, and we start imagining the worst possible scenarios. So, it seems our best chance to overcome fear and become courageous is to prepare and then have faith. Now, in what area of your life would you like to become more courageous?

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PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

In Search of the Wisdom and Courage of Everyday

In this chapter, we discuss two of the most celebrated human strengths, wisdom and courage. Our review suggests that both these qualities, although extraordinary, are manifested in one’s daily life. Here are a few ideas for finding wisdom and courage in everyday people.

The Wisdom Challenge. Consider your views on the following life event. Think aloud and write them down. "A 15-year-old girl wants to get married right away. What should one/she consider and do?" (Baltes, 1993, p. 587). What questions would you want to ask before offering a comment? Write them down. Then, informally evaluate how well your questions address the five criteria of wisdom (factual and procedural knowledge, life-span contextualism, relativism of values, and recognition and management of uncertainty).

Today’s Superheroes. Identify real-life superheroes, people you know, who exemplify each type of courage—physical, moral, vital, and civil. Write a brief biography of each person, and,
Everyday Courage. Look for opportunities to be courageous in your everyday life, and watch for examples from others as well. Don’t just focus on big and loud acts, look for quiet courage and bravery as well. Challenge yourself to be brave and start now! Focus on personal and cultural definitions of courage and on ideas about whose common good needs to be considered when identifying courage. Sometimes a great deal of wisdom is needed in determining this.

Life Enhancement Strategies

Pursuits of wisdom and courage have been chronicled in many historical and fictional accounts. For example, Buddha abandoned everything that he knew and loved in order to seek enlightenment, a state of wisdom and love that has defined the Buddhist traditions. And, as we referenced at the beginning of this chapter, the Cowardly Lion trekked through the magical forest in hopes that the Wizard of Oz would grant him the courage that he thought he lacked.

We believe that, over the journey that is your life, you can develop the wisdom and courage to make your life more fulfilling and to contribute to a greater good. By no means do we think it is easy to develop these qualities, but other ordinary people have been able to do so by facing life’s challenges... and with mindful practice, so can you.

As in most chapters, we categorize the life enhancement strategies across three of life’s important domains—love, work, and play. We share two suggestions for each domain, one related to wisdom and one to courage.

Love

• Balancing your love life with your work life will take a tremendous amount of wisdom. Identify one person in your family who is the best role model for using wisdom to balance his or her love life with his or her work life. Interview this person and determine the four wise acts in which he or she engages to maintain that balance.
PART IV  POSITIVE COGNITIVE STATES AND PROCESSES

(Continued)

• Face the fear often associated with dating and making new friends by introducing yourself to twice as many people today as you did yesterday. You can increase and broaden the impact of this challenge to yourself by making sure that some of these new faces look different than your own.

Work

• Share your wisdom about succeeding academically and socially with freshmen at your college or university. Your perspective on how to adapt may prove valuable to other students, particularly those who may not have others in their lives to share this type of wisdom (e.g., first generation college students).

• Stand up for what is just when your rights or the rights of others are violated. Take opportunities to display your moral and civil courage, especially in situations where someone who has less power than you is being mistreated (e.g., situations involving racism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, etc.).

Play

• Balance your work or school demands with your leisure activities. Reflect on the past week and determine how well you balanced your daily living.

• Pursue recreational interests with a passion, but do not confuse rashness or fearlessness with courage.

THE VALUE OF WISDOM AND COURAGE

“To understand wisdom fully and correctly probably requires more wisdom than any of us have” (Sternberg, 1990, p. 3). Likewise, to understand courage may require a good bit of wisdom. This chapter provides a brief review of what we know about these strengths. Undoubtedly, despite our effort to demonstrate that everyday people embody both of these extraordinary characteristics, the number of times that you are exposed either directly or by the media to images of unwise and rash behavior may outnumber the times that you see virtuous behavior. Given that many people are enamored of the stupid behavior of the unwise and the apparent fearlessness of contestants on past television shows such as Fear Factor, we feel compelled to make an even stronger case for celebrating virtue: Wisdom and courage have evolutionary value, whereas stupidity and rash fearlessness thin the herd.

A clear argument for the adaptive value of wisdom is made by Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1990). Wisdom guides our action, and through that wisdom we make good choices when challenged by the social and physical world. This practiced wisdom is intrinsically rewarding and beneficial to the common good; it promotes the survival of good ideas, of oneself, and of others. Indeed, wise ideas and wise people may stand the test of time. A similar case can be made for courage. Physical courage and vital courage often extend lives. So, too, do moral and civil courage preserve the ideals of justice and fairness.
KEY TERMS

**Authenticity**: A dimension of courage in the Values in Action classification system. Authenticity involves acknowledging and representing one’s true self, values, beliefs, and behaviors to oneself and others.

**Balance theory of wisdom**: A theory developed by Sternberg (1998) that specifies the processes used to balance personal interests with environmental context to achieve a common good. The processes involve using tacit knowledge and personal values to form a judgment of or resolution for competing interests.

**Berlin wisdom paradigm**: A theory developed by Baltes et al. suggesting that wisdom requires knowledge and insight into the self and others within a cultural context and is “the ways and means of planning, managing, and understanding a good life” (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000, p. 124). The paradigm addresses life-span contextualism, relativism of values, and managing uncertainty.

**Civil courage**: Described by Greitemeyer, Osswald, Fischer, and Frey (2007) as “brave behavior accompanied by anger and indignation that intends to enforce societal and ethical norms without considering one’s own social costs” (p. 115).

**Dialectical operations**: The use of logical argumentation, discussion, and reasoning as a method of intellectual investigation. Dialectical thinking involves examining and resolving opposing or contradictory ideas and integrating subjective information, motivation, and life experiences.

**Enthusiasm/zest**: A dimension of courage in the Values in Action classification system. It involves thriving, or having motivation, in challenging situations or tasks.

**Explicit theories**: Explicit theories examine the externally visible aspects of a construct. For example, in the study of wisdom, explicit theories examine behaviors thought to demonstrate wisdom, such as problem-solving ability. These theories focus on the observable characteristics of a construct.

**Implicit theories**: Theories that examine the nature or essence of a construct, such as courage, that cannot be directly seen or revealed. Implicit theories or “folk theories” seek to explain through describing characteristics, qualities, and/or dimensions of the desired construct.

**Industry/perseverance**: A dimension of courage in the Values in Action classification system. It involves undertaking tasks or having initiative and determination to start and complete challenges.

**Life-span contextualism**: A component of the Berlin wisdom paradigm that requires understanding a problem in terms of its context. These contexts can be aspects of life, such as love, work, and play, as well as cultural and temporal contexts (time and place in society).

**Managing uncertainty**: A component of the Berlin wisdom paradigm. Using this skill means understanding that any problem-solving strategy or solution involves limitations and requires decision-making flexibility.

**Moral courage**: Part of O’Byrne, Lopez, and Petersen’s (2000) classification of courage; the authentic expression of one’s beliefs or values in pursuit of justice or the common good despite power differentials, dissent, disapproval, or rejection.
Phasic: Pertaining to a nonenduring characteristic, a quality that is subject to change depending on the situation, context, or when it is needed.

Physical courage: Part of O’Byrne, Lopez, and Petersen’s (2000) classification of courage; an attempted physical behavior or action that seeks to uphold the values of a society or the common good.

Psychological courage: Described by Putman (1997) as a form of vital courage that involves the strength to acknowledge and face personal weaknesses, destructive habits, or threats to one’s own psychological stability.

Relativism of values: A component of the Berlin wisdom paradigm; involves understanding that values and priorities are different across people, societies, and time. The value of any idea may vary depending on the context in which it is presented.

Tonic: Pertaining to an enduring characteristic or trait-like quality.

Valor: A dimension of courage in the Values in Action classification system. It involves taking a physical, emotional, or intellectual stance in the face of danger or fear.

Vital courage: Part of O’Byrne, Lopez, and Petersen’s (2000) classification of courage, formerly health/change courage; a person’s persistence and perseverance through a disease, illness, or disability despite an uncertain outcome.