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Respect, Attentiveness, and Growth: Wisdom and Beliefs About Good Relationships

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Abstract

Objectives—Human beings are social entities – our development occurs in and through interaction with others. Thus, it seems likely that relationships influence the development of wisdom, especially long-term intimate relationships in which couples share many important life experiences, and that wisdom, in turn, influences relationships. How wisdom relates to characteristics of intimate relationships has received little attention in the research literature. As a first step in a research program addressing this question, this study analyzed associations between participants' levels of wisdom and their views of a good relationship.

Design and Participants—A sample of 155 individuals aged 23-90 years participated in two sessions including semi- structured qualitative interviews and questionnaires.

Measurements—The participants were interviewed about their views of a good intimate relationship. Wisdom was measured using a self-report scale and two open-ended performance measures.

Results—Wisdom was significantly related to some of the content categories identified in participants' views about a good relationship, although some correlations differed between wisdom measures. Emphasizing the relevance of mutual respect and conscious attention in relationships was related to both performance measures of wisdom. Paying considerate attention to the relationship and viewing it as a chance for personal development were each related to one measure of wisdom.

Conclusions—The results support the notion that wisdom is related to how participants regulate long-term relationships. We consider them as a promising first step in a research program investigating the dynamic interrelation between wisdom and intimate relationships.

Introduction

Wisdom is a relatively young field of psychological research. For about three decades, psychologists have been engaged with finding an unequivocal definition of wisdom and developing measures appropriate for this complex construct (for current overviews see

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Conflict of Interest

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Glück, 2016; Staudinger & Glück, 2011; Sternberg & Glück, in press). At first sight, the psychological wisdom literature suggests that there are as many definitions of wisdom as there are wisdom researchers. Wisdom has been defined, for example, as a form of expertise (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000), a personality type (Ardelt, 2003), self-transcendence (Levenson, Jennings, Aldwin, & Shiraishi, 2005), or practical intelligence combined with an ethical orientation (Sternberg, 1998). The definitions have a lot in common, however (Glück, in preparation); in fact, they seem to emphasize different facets of one concept rather than describe different concepts. Wisdom is a complex, multifaceted construct that consists of interrelated cognitive and non-cognitive components. The cognitive components include in-depth, experience-based knowledge about the difficult and important matters of the human existence and a form of reasoning characterized by self-reflection, relativism, and intellectual humility (e.g., Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Grossmann, 2017; Sternberg, 1998; Weststrate & Glück, 2017a). The non-cognitive components include a deep curiosity about the human existence, openness to new ideas and experiences, emotion regulation, compassion, and self-transcendence (e.g., Ardel, 2003; Glück, 2018; Glück & Bluck, 2013; Levenson et al., 2005; Webster, 2007). Some authors have made a distinction between personal wisdom, which refers to oneself and one's own life, and general wisdom, which refers to people and life in general (Staudinger, Dörner, & Mickler, 2005; Staudinger, in press).

Measures of wisdom can also be divided into two groups. Performance measures such as the Berlin wisdom paradigm (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000) use descriptions of life problems to elicit open-ended responses that are coded with respect to wisdom criteria; their focus is on the cognitive components of wisdom. Self-report measures such as Ardel's Three-Dimensional Wisdom Scale (Ardelt, 2003) consist of statements that describe people's general attitudes and behavioural tendencies; participants respond to them by indicating how much they agree to each statement. As study results vary somewhat according to which measure of wisdom was used (Glück et al., 2013), recent research tends to utilize several measures and interpret differences between them in the light of the different conceptions of wisdom underlying the measures (e.g., Webster, Weststrate, Ferrari, & Munroe, 2018; Weststrate & Glück, 2017a). It seems particularly useful to include both performance and self-report measures in order to control for influences of method variance (Glück, 2018).

Two important topics that have recently emerged in psychological wisdom research concern how wisdom develops (e.g., Glück & Bluck, 2013) and how contextual factors influence the manifestation of wisdom (e.g., Grossmann, 2017). Both aspects point to the importance of social contexts for wisdom. Concerning the development of wisdom, a lot of research has focused on individual growth after critical life experiences (e.g. Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006; Joseph & Linley, 2005). However, most authors agree that having experienced a life challenge is not sufficient for the development of wisdom; the way individuals handle these challenges and reflect upon them is crucial (e.g., Ardel, 2005; Glück & Bluck, 2013). In the MORE Life Experience Model, Glück and Bluck (2013; see also Glück, Bluck, & Weststrate, in press) proposed that five personal resources are considered as essential for developing wisdom from life experiences: Mastery, Openness, Reflectivity, Emotional Regulation and Empathy. Individuals higher in these resources are more likely to develop wisdom as they reflect upon life challenges.

Most previous research on how wisdom develops was based on the implicit or explicit assumption that wisdom emerges individually in a human being, based on his or her personal history. However, recent research has challenged the notion that wisdom is a stable personal trait, showing that contextual factors play an important role for the manifestation of wisdom (Grossmann, 2017). The development and manifestation of wisdom is influenced by social context (Glück et al., in press; Igarashi, Levenson, & Aldwin, 2018). We propose to extend and combine these lines of work by studying the role of social contexts not only for the situational manifestation, but also for the long-term development of wisdom. Intimate relationships are an interesting starting point for this new line of research. Felser (2007) proposed a model of intimate relationships as a context in which each partner's personal development and the development of the relationship itself mutually influence one another, especially in long-term, cohabitational relationships and marriages. The author argued that couples construct a system of options and limitations to their own development. In this vein, relationships can be described as dynamic processes that influence how and to what extent each partner can develop his or her personal potential. In this vein, how people establish a relationship, how they deal with challenges and maintain the relationship over time, and what they learn (or do not learn) from their partner is likely to have a strong influence on their individual development. In line with general theories about relationship development, our basic assumption is that wisdom can co-develop in a relationship as partners learn from one another, but relationships can also effectively block the development of wisdom.

While little wisdom research has explicitly looked at relationships, both theoretical accounts of wisdom and a number of relevant research findings support this notion. Based on an Eriksonian conception of identity development, one could argue that establishing the capacity for intimacy without "losing oneself" in a relationship is an important early-adulthood predecessor of the development of ego integrity and self-transcendence, which could be considered as equal to wisdom (Erikson, 1983). In a conceptual model of wisdom in relation to gender, Orwoll and Achenbaum (1993) argued that wisdom has three essential dimensions: affective, cognitive, and conative, each of which concerns the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and extrapersonal domain. The interpersonal domain consists of empathy (affective), understanding (cognitive), and maturity in relationships (conative). Thus, this model would suggest that wisdom is related to the way individuals deal with their partners, family, and friends.

Building on this work, Wink and Helson (1997) distinguished two components of the wise personality, namely, practical and transcendent wisdom. Both components involve intrapersonal aspects of wisdom (mature affective responses, self-knowledge, and integrity). However, practical but not transcendent wisdom reflects interpersonal development (empathy, understanding, maturity in relationships), whereas transcendent but not practical wisdom reflects interest and skill in the transpersonal domain (self-transcendence, recognition of the limits of knowledge, and philosophical or spiritual insight). Using a self-report measure of practical and a performance measure of transcendent wisdom, they found empirical support for these relationships. More recent wisdom research also supports the notion that interaction with close others has an influence on the development and manifestation of wisdom. König and Glück (2013) found that wiser people were more likely to express gratitude for their partners. In an ethnographic study of a small number of highly

wise individuals, Naschenweng (unpublished; see Weststrate & Glück, 2017b) found that her research participants viewed their partners as sources of happiness as well as personal insight. Igarashi et al. (2018) found that social support is a highly important factor that can help people develop wisdom from difficult life challenges.

Experimental research has also found that wisdom-related performance increases in certain interpersonal conditions, including when participants imagine discussing a problem with a close other person before responding and when they actually discuss it with a close other person and then have time to reflect upon the discussion (Staudinger & Baltes, 1996). More recently, Igor Grossmann's research group demonstrated that people show more wise reasoning if they consider a problem from the perspective of a friend than when they imagine having the problem themselves (Kross & Grossmann, 2012).

In sum, social contexts can help individuals de-center from their personal perspective and take a broader, more differentiated view. However, research on the "wisdom of crowds" demonstrates that the availability of different perspectives does not always increase the wisdom of outcomes. Only if diversity is considered as a valuable resource and divergent viewpoints are encouraged and taken seriously do groups make better decision than the individuals they consist of (overview in Surowiecki, 2005). Thus, relationships can be an important resource for the development of wisdom, but this is not necessarily the case. For example, considering one's partner's divergent perspective as interesting and enriching should lead to a broader understanding of individual differences, while considering it as a threat will hinder growth and learning.

The relationship between wisdom and relationship quality is likely to be dynamic and interactive: while relationships can be a context in which wisdom can develop, people's current levels of wisdom also manifest themselves in the way they live those relationships – in how they view and appreciate their partners, how they deal with conflicts, and how they think about their own relationships as well as about relationships in general. As a first step in a research program investigating how wise individuals navigate and negotiate their close relationships, this study investigated what people at different levels of wisdom think about the factors contributing to a good relationship. While people's thoughts about this topic may not necessarily translate into actual good relationships, they are likely to have an influence on their behavior and thinking.

There is a lot of research on intrapersonal, interpersonal, and extrapersonal factors that objectively foster relationship quality. Specific personality characteristics, attitudes, competences, and behaviours influence satisfaction in long-term relationship (e.g. Epstein, Warfel, Johnson, Smith & McKinney, 2013; Landis, Peter-Wight, Martin & Bodemann, 2013; Schneewind & Wunderer, 2003; Stegmann & Schmitt, 2006), and some of these qualities are clearly related to wisdom. For example, Wunderer and Erkelenz (2004) found that people who believe that relationships have developmental potential demand more of their relationships, are more willing to accept divergent opinions, and are more optimistic about overcoming problems together. Wisdom is related to a general view of life as continuous change and growth (e.g. Ardel, 2005; Bluck & Glück, 2004; Glück & Bluck, 2013). Thus, wise individuals are more likely to see their partners as sources of personal

development and to learn from them, as well as to accept and consider their views even if they differ from their own. Le and Levenson (2004) investigated how self-transcendence, a construct that Levenson, Aldwin, and Cupertino (2001) consider as essential to wisdom, influences people's ways of loving their partners. They proposed three major reasons why self-transcendence is related to mature love. In mature love, people love their partners because of who they are and not because they fulfil their needs, they put their partner's needs before their own, and they develop self-knowledge and grow from experiences as they reflect on themselves and their behaviour in challenging situations.

Psychological conceptions of wisdom also include components that are likely to influence how people experience, regulate, and reflect upon their intimate relationships. First, reflectivity and, especially, self-reflection are considered as central facets of wisdom (e.g., Ardel, 2003; Glück & Bluck, 2013; Grossmann, 2017; Jeste, Ardel, Blazer, Kramer, Vaillant, & Meeks, 2010; Kramer, 2000; Mickler & Staudinger, 2008; Webster, 2007; Weststrate & Glück, 2017a). Reflective individuals seek to make meaning and learn from experiences, which should enable them to take a more positive approach to challenges in relationships and to think critically about their own role in conflicts and difficulties. As mentioned earlier, wiser individuals are more grateful for their partners and relationships (König & Glück, 2014), suggesting that they are conscious of their own role in maintaining the relationship and shaping how it evolves over time. Stegmann and Schmitt (2006) found that while change per se did not have an influence on satisfaction in long-term marriages, a crucial factor for maintaining high satisfaction was how the partners appraised changes in their relationship. Self-reflection is likely to help people view changes in their relationships more positively. This aspect is also related to the second relevant aspect of wisdom, namely, openness to divergent views and to new perspectives and experiences (e.g., Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Glück & Bluck, 2013; Jeste et al., 2010; Webster, 2007). Wiser individuals should be better able to accept differences in background and worldviews between their partners and themselves and to deal with divergences of opinions in constructive ways. According to Brandtstädter and Renner (1990), the ability to adapt flexibly to new circumstances is an important resource for maintaining high relationship quality. Felser (2007) pointed out that this flexible approach promotes the willingness to adapt one's own goals and needs to those of one's partner. Third, empathy and compassion are a part of some wisdom conceptions (e.g., Ardel, 2003; Glück & Bluck, 2013; Jeste et al., 2010; Kramer, 2000; Levenson, Jennings, Aldwin, & Shiraishi, 2005) and may be particularly relevant for long-term relationships. Especially when couples are faced with stressors originating outside the relationship, empathy may be very important for being supportive to one's partner (DeLongis & O'Brien, 1990; Bodenmann, 2000). Finally, accepting and managing the uncertainty and uncontrollability of human life is an essential aspect of wisdom (e.g., Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Glück & Bluck, 2013; Grossmann, 2017; Jeste et al., 2010; Mickler & Staudinger, 2008) that may influence the extent to which partners are able to accept one another's autonomy and the occurrence of fluctuations and changes in long-term relationships (Felser, 2007).

In sum, we propose that wisdom and close relationships are dynamically interrelated. Good relationships that provide both support and constructive challenges are likely to foster wisdom, and wisdom is likely to foster relationship quality. Ideally, the partners in a

relationship learn and grow through each other's wisdom. The current study is the first step in a new research program investigating how long-term relationships influence the long-term development of wisdom and vice versa. For this first step, participants in a larger research project completed measures of wisdom and were interviewed about what they considered as most important for a good relationship. We expected participants higher in measures of wisdom to differ from participants lower in those measures in their ideas of what a good relationship is and how it can be achieved. As the content categories analyzed in this study were inductively derived from the data, more detailed hypotheses could not be developed before the data were analyzed. Therefore, a section on hypotheses will be included at the end of the methods section following the description of the content categories.

Method

This study was part of a larger project with the main purpose of initiating a longitudinal study of the interplay between life challenges, the MORE resources, and wisdom (Glück et al., 2018).

Participants

Most participants were recruited through a random address sample obtained from the Austrian census bureau. Invitation letters including a response form and envelope were sent out to 3000 people. The invitation letters said that a research project at University of Klagenfurt was investigating how people are able to learn and develop from both positive and negative life experiences, and that the researchers were interested in the insights the recipients had gained in the course of their lives. Only 219 (7.3%) of the recipients responded and only 116 (3.9%) eventually participated. In addition, 14 wisdom nominees were recruited through media calls and 25 participants were re-recruited from an earlier study (Glück et al., 2013; König & Glück, 2014). In total, 155 people between 23 and 90 years of age ($M = 56.2$; $SD = 14.6$) participated. Of the 85 female participants, 74.1% were in a relationship at the time, as were 80% of the 70 men. The sample was somewhat more educated than the general population; 32.3% of the participants had completed a university degree, 40.7% had had ten to twelve years of schooling, and 26.5% had completed only the 9 years mandatory in Austria. To screen for mental health issues, participants completed the German version of the Brief Patient Health Questionnaire (Löwe, Spitzer, Zipfel, & Herzog, 2002), a screening for depression and anxiety disorders. The sample means were .37 on a 0-3 scale ($SD = .35$) for depression and .03 ($SD = .16$) on a 0-1 scale for anxiety, indicating that the sample was in good mental health.

Measures

We used both self-report and performance measures of wisdom. As a self-report measure, participants completed the Brief Wisdom Screening Scale (Glück et al., 2013), a scale that was empirically constructed by selecting those 21 items from three popular self-report wisdom scales that loaded most highly on a common factor. The three scales were the Three-Dimensional Wisdom Scale (3D-WS; Ardel, 2003), the Self-Assessed Wisdom Scale (SAWS; Webster, 2007), and the Adult Self-Transcendence Inventory (ASTI; Levenson et al., 2005). Thus, the BWSS covers aspects of the non-cognitive component of wisdom,

mostly focusing on self-transcendence, emotional regulation, openness, and reflectivity (Glück et al., 2013) as rated by the participants themselves. Cronbach's alpha for the BWSS in the current study was .84.

Performance measures were a problem from the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000) and a difficult-event interview based on the MORE Life Experience Model (Glück et al., in press). The BWP is based on a definition of wisdom as expert knowledge about the fundamental pragmatics of life, i.e., the complex and uncertain questions of the human existence. People who have acquired this kind of expert knowledge think about life problems in ways characterized by factual and procedural knowledge, value relativism, life-span contextualism, and recognition and management of uncertainty (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). Following the manual for the assessment of wisdom-related knowledge with the BWP (Staudinger, Smith, & Baltes, 1994), participants were first trained to think aloud about some introductory questions and then asked to think aloud about the so-called life-review problem (e.g., Glück & Baltes, 2006; Staudinger & Baltes, 1996): "In reflecting over their lives, people sometimes realize that they have not achieved what they had once wanted to achieve. What could one/what could these persons consider and do in such a situation?"

The MORE interview is based on the MORE Life Experience Model (Glück & Bluck, 2013; Glück et al., in press). The interview is based on the assumption that people's levels of the MORE resources manifest themselves in the way they reflect upon past life challenges. Participants were first asked to make a list of difficult events from their life. They were then asked to select the most difficult event and interviewed about it. The interview included an open-ended narrative of the event and follow-up questions concerning participants' feelings, thoughts, and possible insights gained from the event (see Glück et al., in press, for details).

Concerning their views of a good relationship, participants responded freely to the question, "What do you personally think are the crucial factors of a good relationship?"¹ Responses were transcribed; transcript length ranged from 39 to 2188 words ($M = 259.3$, $SD = 251.0$). Responses were coded inductively, i.e., content categories were derived from the data (Mayring, 2010).

Procedure

Each participant came to the laboratory for two interview sessions of about 90 minutes each. The order of measures was the same for all participants and carefully planned to minimize interference between measures. Before the first session, participants filled out a booklet at home that included measures of personality related to the MORE Life Experience Model (e.g., openness, self-efficacy, reflectivity), as well as the 3D-WS and those items of the SAWS that are part of the BWSS. At the beginning of the interview session, participants completed some practice think-aloud tasks from the BWP manual (Staudinger et al., 1994). Then, they were presented with six vignettes about difficult life events that are not relevant to the present study, and afterwards, with the BWP life-review problem. The last part of the

¹While the English word "relationship" can refer to various kinds of relationships, the German term "gute Partnerschaft" refers to intimate relationships only.

first interview session was about interpersonal relationships. Participants were first asked the open question about good intimate relationships and then presented with some scales concerning their own relationship experiences. This part also included an adapted short version of the Bremen Wisdom Paradigm (Mickler & Staudinger, 2008).

Between the first and second interview session, participants again filled out a booklet at home, which included a self-report measure of the MORE resources, the ASTI, and the Life Story Matrix (Glück & Bluck, 2007), a structured list of their most important, most difficult, and best life events and most important conflicts. In the second interview session, participants took the MORE interview about the most difficult event and the most difficult conflict from the respective lists. They were also interviewed about their views of a good life (Seizl, 2016) and completed a life-satisfaction scale and three short measures of intelligence. After completing the second interview, each participant received a reimbursement of €100.

Rating and coding

Response transcripts from the two performance measures of wisdom were scored for the respective wisdom criteria by trained student raters. Reliabilities for the BWP criteria were satisfactory with the exception of procedural knowledge (factual knowledge: ICC = .71; procedural knowledge: ICC = .37; value relativism: ICC = .60; lifespan contextualism: ICC = .74; recognition and management of uncertainty: ICC = .69); Cronbach's alpha for the total BWP score was .85. Reliabilities were similar for the MORE resources (mastery: ICC = .84; openness: ICC = .78; reflectivity: ICC = .55; emotion regulation: ICC = .58; empathy: ICC = .62; total MORE score: Cronbach's alpha = .82). In line with earlier research (Glück et al., 2013), the correlations between the three measures of wisdom were moderate: $r_{\text{BWSS-BWP}} = .099, p = .230$; $r_{\text{BWSS-MORE}} = .190, p = .021$; $r_{\text{BWP-MORE}} = .200, p = .016$. Thus, the three measures represent quite different facets of wisdom. Means and standard deviations for all measures are reported in Table 4.

Content coding

All transcripts were coded by the first author and a second coder blind to the hypotheses of the study; Cohen's kappas for coder agreement and code frequencies are reported in Tables 1 to 3. Content categories were generated for three different aspects of the responses. First, the content of the responses was analyzed. Participants' statements were divided into units of meaning and abstracted and summarized into content categories, which are shown in Table 1. During this first analysis, we noticed that participants' responses differed not only in explicit content, but also in two more abstract aspects. The first was analogous to the distinction between knowledge criteria and meta-criteria in the Berlin wisdom paradigm. The BWP knowledge criteria (factual and procedural knowledge) describe what participants actually know about an issue, whereas meta-criteria describe their knowledge about how to think about such issues. Value relativism, for example, is an awareness of how people's values differ and how what is right for oneself may not be right for others, and recognition and management of uncertainty refers to an awareness of how little one can know about complex issues and especially future developments (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). In the same vein, we found that participants differed markedly not only in the explicit content of what they said in the relationship interviews, but also in more general ways of thinking about

relationships. For example, “tolerance of ambiguity” indicates that participants can accept and integrate different and even contrary perspectives, and “individuality and relativity” indicates that they do not assume that what they have learned in their own life applies to all other relationships as well. These ways of thinking were not necessarily reflected in specific statements. The meta-categories are described in Table 2. The third group of categories, shown in Table 3, describes two formal aspects that distinguished some responses from the others. Some participants produced “lists” by more or less rattling off general issues and did not elaborate on any of these issues or relate the question to their own life experience. On the other hand, some participants talked about their “personal experiences only” – they did not show any abstraction, generalization, or differentiation beyond their own experiences with relationships.

The following two examples illustrate the coding approach. (All examples are translated from German.) The first example is a rather short response: *“Over the years, trust becomes very important, in the beginning, love – well, love is there anyway. In the beginning, passion is foremost, of course. Trust, respect, appreciation, that makes a good relationship for me.”* The individual aspects that this participant named (trust, passion, respect, etc.) were assigned to the corresponding content categories. The whole response was also assigned to the formal category “lists”. No indications of any meta-categories were found in this response.

The second example is part of a longer response: *“...namely, looking together in the same direction, at the same time remaining yourself, not having to suppress any aspects of each other or having to make yourself smaller than you are. Not having to reduce yourself or to change to make the relationship work, but simply, by being who both partners are, doing things together and therefore being double. I just made this sound very complicated [laughs]. I’m convinced that a good relationship is possible only if each enriches the other, not by making compromises but by each one in their entirety completing the entirety of the other.”* This participant showed more experience-based, indepth, reflective thinking about the question than the first one. The parts of the response were assigned to the respective content categories (e.g., acceptance), and the whole passage was also assigned to the meta-category “personal development”. At another point in her six-minute response, the same participant said, *“[The question is] difficult. I don’t know when a relationship is good. Maybe a relationship is good with everything as it is, with all limitations and problems, all challenges and discrepancies, with all that is pleasant and less pleasant. I believe it’s about living together, the exciting and beautiful and the difficult and painful, and just staying and not running away when it’s not pleasant (...). And I believe that every relationship is good in its own manner, the way it is. There is no perfect, after all.”* This passage was assigned to the meta-categories “tolerance of ambiguity” and “individuality and relativity”.

Hypotheses Concerning the Content Categories

As explained earlier, after the content categories were identified, hypotheses were derived by relating the categories to the aspects of wisdom that we consider as most central to relationships: reflectivity, openness, and empathy. Because (self-)reflectivity is a central aspect of wisdom, we expected participants higher in the wisdom measures to mention “respect and conscious attention” and “considerate attention” more often. Because of the

relationship between wisdom and openness to divergent views, the responses of participants scoring higher in wisdom were expected to include fewer “generalizations and stereotypes” and more indications of “tolerance of ambiguity” and “individuality and relativity.” Because of their general openness to new experiences and growth orientation, we also expected participants higher in the wisdom measures to more often mention “personal development” and describe a “relationship as dynamic process.” Because of the role of empathy for wisdom, we expected participants higher in the wisdom measures to more often talk about “acceptance.” With respect to the formal categories, wisdom was expected to be negatively related to both “lists” and “personal experiences only,” assuming that individuals higher in wisdom measures have thought about relationships frequently and in depth and that their thinking has gone beyond their own experiences to identify both broader patterns and individual differences.

Results

Table 4 displays the correlations and partial correlations (controlling for age, gender, and education) of the content categories with the three measures of wisdom and the correlations of the categories with age, gender, education, and transcript length. As the table shows, the correlations are relatively low, which is quite typical for correlations between content codes and psychological measures (see, e.g., Weststrate & Glück, 2017a; König & Glück, 2013).

The MORE interview was correlated with “respect and conscious attention” and with the meta-categories of “personal development” and “considerate attention.” The BWP was correlated with these categories, too, but also with “communication” and the meta-category “individuality and relativity,” as well as negatively with the formal category “personal experiences only.” The BWSS showed a somewhat different pattern, consistent with its different methodological approach. It was significantly correlated with “general positive approach,” the meta-categories “personal development” and “relationship as dynamic process,” and negatively with the formal category “lists.” Almost all these correlations were consistent with our hypotheses. When age, gender, and education were controlled for, a number of these significant correlations became insignificant. “Respect and conscious attention” was still correlated with both performance measures of wisdom, and the meta-category “considerate attention” was correlated with the MORE interview. The self-report measure of wisdom remained significantly correlated with the meta-category “personal development” and with the formal category “lists.”

Participants’ age and maximum relationship length were negatively correlated with mentioning compromises as important for a good relationship. Age was also positively correlated with the occurrence of “generalizations and stereotyping” and negatively with “tolerance of ambiguity”. Gender was negatively related to “respect and conscious attention,” indicating that men mentioned this category less often than women did. Education was unrelated with all of the content categories, but significantly and positively correlated with the meta-categories “tolerance of ambiguity,” “personal development,” “relationship as dynamic process,” and “considerate attention,” and negatively related to both of the formal categories. Interestingly, transcript length was positively correlated with all meta-categories, suggesting that participants who produced longer responses were also

more likely to take more abstract and differentiated perspectives on relationships. This effect also manifests itself in the high negative correlation between transcript length and the formal category “Lists”. The positive correlation with “personal experiences only,” on the other hand, indicates that participants who only talked about their own experiences tended to produce relatively long narratives.

Concerning relationships between the wisdom measures and demographic variables, age was positively correlated with the BWSS, $r = .317$, $p < .001$, and negatively with the BWP, $r = -.234$, $p = .004$, and the same pattern was found for the length of participants’ longest relationship (BWSS: $r = .239$, $p = .003$; BWP: $r = -.214$, $p = .010$). Gender was related to the MORE interview, with women receiving higher ratings than men, $r = -.228$, $p = .005$. Education was positively related to the BWP, $r = .276$, $p = .001$, a finding that replicates other research (Glück et al., 2013). Transcript length was correlated positively with all three wisdom measures (MORE: $r = .285$, $p < .001$; BWP: $r = .249$, $p = .002$; BWSS: $r = .182$, $p = .025$). In other words, wiser participants produced longer responses to the question about a good relationship. This seems plausible in light of the positive relations between transcript length and the meta-categories and the negative relations between transcript length and “lists.”

Discussion

This study investigated relationships between wisdom and views of a good relationship. A total of 155 participants completed three different wisdom measures and were interviewed about what they considered the crucial factors in a good intimate relationship. Participants’ responses were content-coded into three types of categories: content categories reflecting concrete statements, meta-categories describing more general approaches to thinking about relationships, and formal categories such as simply listing a number of aspects without further elaboration.

Independent of wisdom, participants most frequently mentioned “security and reliability” (75.5%), “acceptance” of the partner (61.9%), and “respect and conscious attention” for the partner (60.6%). Interestingly, the meta-category “generalizations and stereotypes” was positively correlated with age, and “tolerance of ambiguity” was negatively correlated with age. These findings may reflect the typical declines in openness and complex thinking over adulthood (e.g., Li, Lindenberger, & Hommel, 2004; Specht, Egloff, & Schmukle, 2011). “Compromise” was also considered as more important by younger than by older people. One possible explanation is the higher salience of conflicts in younger people’s relationships, as indicated by a study that found that young adults gave wiser responses than old adults to a life problem concerning a couple conflict (Thomas & Kunzmann, 2014). More highly educated participants were better able to take different perspectives and meta-perspectives in their responses to the question about a good relationship, as they less often responded by short lists of aspects without elaboration or by referring to their personal experiences only. Interestingly, participants higher in education also talked more often about the importance of tolerance of ambiguity – accepting the negative as well the positive sides of the partner and the relationship – and about viewing relationships as changing over time and as a source of personal development.

Relationships between the content-analytic categories and wisdom varied somewhat by measure of wisdom. For the two open-ended performance measures of wisdom, our first hypothesis was confirmed. The content category “respect and conscious attention” was related to both performance measures, and the meta-category “considerate attention” was related to the MORE interview. These findings suggest that wisdom is related to appreciating one's partner and relationship and to a conscious awareness of the importance of paying attention and respect to one's partner. This aspect of wise relationships could be described as mindfulness – not taking the partner or the relationship for granted, but actively engaging in the maintenance of a positive relationship. Similarly, König and Glück (2013) found that wisdom nominees were more likely than others to express gratitude for their partners.

The self-report measure of wisdom was correlated with the category “personal development.” In other words, participants with high BWSS scores were more aware of having grown through their relationships. Thus, while the performance measures of wisdom were related to self-reflective aspects of relationships, the self-report scale seems to be more related to openness to change and development. This divergence between the wisdom measures makes sense as open-ended measures focus on cognitive aspects, i.e., participants' thinking about their own life and life in general, whereas self-report scales emphasize non-cognitive aspects such as openness (see, e.g., Ardel, 2005; Glück et al., in press).

Several of our hypotheses were not confirmed. At least when age, gender, and education were controlled for, participants scoring higher in the wisdom measures did not show fewer “generalizations and stereotypes” as they talked about relationships, nor did they show more “tolerance of ambiguity” or more appreciation of “individuality and relativity”. The relativistic way of thinking that is characteristic of wise individuals when they talk about difficult life problems, as is the case in the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000), does not seem to translate into a strong characteristic of people's thinking about relationships. One could argue that participants higher in the wisdom measures may have focused more on the concrete “relationship task” of dealing with the individuality of one's partner than on general statements about differences between people. There was no relationship between “acceptance” and wisdom either, but that may be due to the rather high general frequency of acceptance – the importance of accepting one's partner as he or she is may be a somewhat stereotypical insight about relationships that many people mention, even if they are not necessarily able to realize it in everyday life.

As expected, negative relationships with wisdom were found for the formal category of “lists”. Participants who produced “lists” of important aspects that they did not elaborate any further scored lower in the BWSS. These responses were largely stereotypical and reflected general knowledge that probably was not really internalized by the individual (Ardelt, 2004).

In sum, when participants high in the wisdom measures talked about relationships, what distinguished their responses most from those of other participants was not so much their relativism and acceptance of individuality, but their emphasis on conscious awareness and appreciation of one's partner and relationship. These findings suggests that wise individuals do not take their partners for granted, they remain actively engaged in their relationships,

which they consider a source of personal development. One could argue that wiser individuals are engaged in a constant, active dialogue with their partners that enriches them and that they appreciate and value accordingly.

Some cautionary remarks concern the sample and the measures included in this study. First, while our sample was quite representative with respect to age and gender, it was somewhat biased toward higher education. More importantly, the low response rate to the invitation letter suggests that the participants were particularly willing and, possibly, able to think and talk about life experiences. In this sense, the sample as a whole may be more reflective than a random population sample would be. With respect to the measures used, we consider it as a strength of this study that three different measures of wisdom were used and two of them were open-ended interviews. As the results show, the conceptual and methodological differences between measures are also reflected in somewhat divergent results. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the interview about a good relationship clearly only tapped conscious, verbalizable beliefs and insights. It did not tell us much about the extent to which the participants also put these beliefs into practice in their actual relationships. We do believe that this approach has some validity for studying wisdom, however, because wiser individuals are likely to reflect about experiences and derive relevant insights. However, in future research we plan to include more ecologically valid, behavior-oriented approaches.

We consider this study as a starting point for investigating the co-development of wisdom and close relationships. Our findings suggest that wisdom may thrive in relationships among people who fully respect and appreciate one another's individuality and are willing to actively contribute to the quality of the relationship. Individuals can be sources of wisdom and growth for one another. Many people, however, may value security and reliability in their relationships more highly than learning and growth, which may lead to stable and positive, but not necessarily wisdom-fostering relationships. In future research, we intend to investigate the dynamic development of wisdom in actual relationships in more detail.

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Table 1
Content Categories

Content Category	N	Definition	Examples
Security and Reliability	117	Security, reliability, and dependability in a relationship.	"[A good relationship means] to be there for the partner no matter what...", "...trust [is important].", "to rely on one another..."
Acceptance	96	Tolerance and acceptance of the partner as he or she is, including the acceptance of personal free spaces and the importance of understanding the partner.	"to accept the shortcomings of the partner", "to give him space...", "...to have sympathy for all situations in life, mutually"
Respect and conscious attention	94	Respect, appreciation, and positive awareness of the partner or the relationship as a whole.	"to have respect...", "a relationship has to be at eye level, ...", "to treat each other tenderly, carefully and cautiously, ..."
Communication	73	Aspects of communication concerning frequency or positivity, but also constructively critical communication.	"...to be free to talk about everything", "...talking about things, and listening to each other"
General Positive Approach	26	A general positive approach to life, oneself, and relationships.	"a piece of happiness, confidence"
Physical relationship	21	Sexuality, physical contact, tenderness.	"...a good, balanced sex life", "tenderness"
Compromise	14	All kinds of compromise.	"...to be willing to make compromises", "...to find a way that is comfortable for both"

Table 2
Meta-level Categories

Meta-level Categories	N	Definition	Examples
Generalisations and Stereotypes	45	Generalized statements and fixed assumptions. Explicit mention of the importance and universal validity of one's ideas are pointed out. Mention of universal rules for relationships in general. Stereotypical statements about men and women or about sexual orientations.	"... because, if the woman has a child, and the man works all day, then in my opinion, the woman is there for the child first and foremost. This I have to say. Out of the 100% of parenting, the woman takes 80%, the man 20% if at all"; "men die earlier because men drink too much, eat too much..."
Tolerance of ambiguity	38	Mentions of positive and negative aspects, explicitly stating that both are part of good relationships. Viewing flaws and imperfections of the partner not just as acceptable but as potentially enriching and loveable. Emphasizing that there should be a balance between positive and negative aspects, instead of aiming for perfect harmony.	"...and I think setbacks are part of life as well as good times are"; "you fall in love with this human being even because of their limitations"; "it is a give and take"; "there should be a balance between closeness and distance"
Personal Development	34	Being interested in the individuality of the partner without trying to change him or her, seeing the partner as a chance to learn and grow, e.g., by trying to take his or her perspective.	"to be curious about getting to know the partner"; "and trying to put myself in his position"
Individuality and Relativity	31	Pointing out that there are many different kinds of relationships and not just one right way of living (in) a relationship. Describing one's own relationship as individual and not generalizable.	"This is my recipe [for a good relationship]. But of course there are thousands of other recipes"
Relationship as Dynamic Process	26	Awareness that expectations, priorities, and needs in relationships change over time.	"growing together"; "from a certain age on, some things are not so important anymore"
Considerate attention	20	Considerate attention to and interaction with the partner. Focusing conscious attention on the relationship and the partner as a strategy in difficult times.	"this should not sound automatic, you have to think about it and say it consciously: what's going on, or what's the news..."

Table 3
Formal Categories

Formal Category	N	Definition	Examples
List	50	Buzz phrases and sayings about relationships, without explaining these words mean to the participant personally, even after a prompt by the interviewer asking if they can think about anything else. The category Lists refers to the whole response, so it can be coded even if only one or two points are listed, as long as there is no deeper explanation.	„A good relationship: respect for one another, acceptance, trying to do a lot of things together, listening, talking, acting in concert but still granting personal freedom.”
Personal Experiences Only	35	This category is coded if a participant talks only about his or her personal experiences, without any abstraction or generalization. It is not coded if a personal narrative is used to explain or illustrate a point.	“A good relationship, yes, I have to say that I don't have such a thing anymore. I really have to say that my husband is unable to listen, he has become selfish...”

Table 4
Correlations and Partial Correlations (Controlling for Age, Gender, and Education) of
Categories with Wisdom and with Age, Relationship Length, Gender, Education, and
Number of Words

	MORE		BWP		BWSS		Age	Longest Rel.ship	Gender	Educ.	Number of Words
	<i>M</i> = 1.05 <i>SD</i> = .53		<i>M</i> = 2.33 <i>SD</i> = .96		<i>M</i> = .74 <i>SD</i> = .11		<i>M</i> = 56.2 <i>SD</i> = 14.6	<i>M</i> = 24.0 <i>SD</i> = 14.6	<i>N</i> _{fem} = 85 <i>N</i> _{male} = 70	<i>M</i> = 3.6 <i>SD</i> = 1.2	<i>M</i> = 259.3 <i>SD</i> = 251
	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> _{partial}	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> _{partial}	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> _{partial}	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>
Content categories											
Security and reliability	-.037	-.041	-.045	-.078	-.129	-.151	-.028	.013	-.059	.026	-.067
Acceptance	.079	.036	.057	.020	.052	.069	-.117	-.048	-.060	.079	.161*
Respect and conscious attention	.296**	.249**	.205*	.193*	.050	.002	-.006	.008	-.198*	.070	.144
Communication	-.006	.007	.176*	.120	-.034	.010	-.156	-.104	-.016	.082	.102
General Positive Approach	.043	.035	.046	.051	.161*	.151	.067	.095	-.069	.005	.116
Physical relationship	.130	.125	.075	.027	-.051	-.079	-.015	-.086	.127	.145	.215**
Compromise	.043	.051	.102	.050	.011	.083	-.195*	-.223**	.025	.050	.090
Meta-level categories											
Generalizations and Stereotypes	-.039	.015	-.126	-.065	.019	-.039	.245**	.086	.121	-.085	.160*
Tolerance of Ambiguity	.134	.089	.152	.069	.019	.005	-.166*	-.060	-.137	.258**	.343**
Personal Development	.164*	.120	.169*	.072	.194*	.205*	-.131	-.097	-.017	.270**	.231**
Individuality and Relativity	.066	.047	.161*	.150	.022	.013	-.023	-.014	-.075	.049	.253**
Relationship as Dynamic Process	.138	.120	.079	.066	.178*	.126	.072	.103	-.069	.171*	.287**
Considerate Attention	.190*	.204*	.211**	.156	.126	.160	-.145	-.103	.031	.177*	.179*
Formal categories											
Lists	-.161	-.156	-.050	.004	-.172*	-.199*	.110	.076	-.057	-.180*	-.644**
Personal Experiences Only	.023	.011	-.185*	-.106	-.017	-.027	.083	.136	-.004	-.199*	.358**