Wisdom and Courage

Two Universal Virtues

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I can not 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. This link and the reasons for it are examined subsequently. 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, 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 Staudinger and Baltes’s (1994) words:

[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 (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 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries in the Western world, two issues dominated the scholarly discussion of wisdom. Philosophers, theologists, 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.

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**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.

(Continued)
Although our understanding of wisdom has progressed slowly over modern times, this started to change during the late 20th 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

(Continued)

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.

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.

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.

Implicit definitions of wisdom also differ by cultural context. 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). Personal qualities such as compassion, open-mindedness, humbleness, and others may be a 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).
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 Orwoll’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 (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, shaping of the environment to fit the solutions, or 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., knowledge about topics such as human nature and development, individual differences, social relations and norms, etc.) and to “know how” (i.e., developing 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 (i.e., life-span contextualism, relativism

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**Figure 9.1** Sternberg’s Balance Theory of Wisdom

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, or sometimes it is also the match between the two, that can lead to difficulties in life (excerpted from Staudinger & Leipold, 2003, p. 184).

Baltes and colleagues have continued to refine their definitions of wisdom in recent years and have added the concept of what they term Sehnsucht (English translation: life longings) to their lifespan 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).

Becoming and Being Wise

DEVELOPING WISDOM

Influential developmental theorists such as Piaget (1932), Jung (1953), and Erikson (1959) provided building blocks for 20th-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.

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 indirect sometimes and direct at other times. 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.

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 facilitated the development of wisdom revealed that a person’s childhood does not have an impact on the development of wisdom, whereas the quality of one’s social environment in early adulthood does. Ardelt (1997) also found that wise people achieved greater life satisfaction than unwise people.

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; however, these researchers found that 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.)

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. Here, 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. 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, and he is working toward the development of a formal, standardized test of wisdom. 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 says 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 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 were adequate, though this measure has thus far been tested mainly in a college student population, and as such, more research is necessary.

The aforementioned measures of wisdom do not include any items commonly associated with conventional intelligence tests or measures of creativity. The exclusion of markers of intelligence and creativity 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.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN WISDOM AND INTELLIGENCE

Although implicit theories of wisdom and intelligence are similar (Sternberg, 1985), they 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.

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: “[S]uppose 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).
### Table 9.1  Selected Scholarly Definitions of Courage

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<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aquinas</td>
<td>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).</td>
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<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>
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<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>
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<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>
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<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>
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<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” (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>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
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.

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plato</td>
<td>The ability to remember what is worth prizing and what is worth fearing (cited in Rorty, 1988).</td>
</tr>
<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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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

\[
\ldots (1) \text{ magnificence, the planning and execution of great and expansive projects by putting forth ample and splendid effort of mind; (2) confidence, that through which, on great and honorable projects, the mind self-confidently collects itself with sure hope; (3) patience, the voluntary and lengthy endurance of arduous and difficult things, whether the case be honorable or useful, and (4) perseverance, ongoing persistence in a well-considered plan.} \quad (p. 305)
\]

**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 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
Taking action (either mental, physical, or spiritual) that is difficult because it makes you uncomfortable (because it is dangerous, threatening, or difficult)

Doing something outside of one’s comfort zone—fine line between courage and stupidity

Taking risks in the face of possible failure and uncertainty

Ability to take what life gives and make the best out of one’s life (positive attitude involved)

Initiate risk-taking behavior in the face of a threatening situation toward one’s emotional/psychological/spiritual/physical health

Standing up for what one believes in even if others don’t feel the same

Standing up for oneself in the face of adversity or harm even when the consequences are known

Willingness to take risks, not knowing if one may fail or succeed (being brave)

Sacrificing, working, or helping a cause; faith

Proceeding in a situation even when one is unsure about the outcome; challenging the norm in the best interest of society

Ability to face threats/fears/challenges and overcome obstacles

Ability to contain one’s fear enough to progress with a task

Self-confidence, belief in self and situations, making a choice and acting on it, strength

Bravery; act of strength/wisdom in moments of crisis

Defending a viewpoint that is different from the norm; standing up for what one believes in

Having the power and strength to face difficulties or challenges

Taking responsible risks, sacrificing part of oneself

Facing challenges rather than running away or pretending they don’t exist

Displaying actions that go along with one’s beliefs

Risking failure; determination in the face of failure

Form of assistance during a dangerous or life-threatening event

Selfless behavior; displaying concern for others rather than oneself

Committing acts of perceived bravery that an ordinary person might not do

Being mentally/physically strong

Under strenuous situations/circumstances, engaging in a behavior knowing that negative consequences may occur because of that behavior/action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 9.2 Laypeople’s Responses to the Question, “What Is Courage?”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Note: Major themes: taking risks (possible failure, negative consequences, uncertainty), particular attitude, facing challenges and defending beliefs
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 her intensive treatment regimen even though her 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. From ancient to present times, this disposition to act appropriately in situations involving fear and confidence in the face of physical danger seems to be universally valued (Rorty, 1988). For example, Ernest Hemingway was a major writer on the topic of courage in 20th-century America. His fascination with physical courage in a variety of arenas such as the 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.
Some recent current examples of this physical courage may include that of 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 his calm and steady bravery in the face of extreme danger. Or 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. Indeed, 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; I (SJL) will tell you about one such occasion where I was able to overcome my fear and preserve my integrity and that of others. I hope I can conjure up this kind of courage in similar situations in the future.

My (SJL) opportunity to practice what I preached occurred on a flight from Lafayette, Louisiana, to Houston, Texas. I was on the first leg of a trip back to Kansas City. I had just spent a week in my hometown of New Iberia helping my mother move into a new house. I was exhausted and more than ready to be reunited with my wife and son. Before boarding the plane, I recognized an acquaintance from my hometown and, I must admit, I avoided him because I remembered him as being somewhat caustic. Much to my chagrin, this man’s seat was right behind mine, and, as it turned out, I was surrounded by four of his friends, who were joining him on a hunting trip. I buried my nose in a newspaper and repeatedly thought of being greeted by my family at the Missouri airport. Despite my attempt to ignore the jocular banter of the five men, I overheard first one, then another, then another racist remark about African American hurricane evacuees, politicians, and athletes. There were five racist comments in all, most of which were initiated by my hometown acquaintance. After each comment, my resolve to express my disapproval of these comments grew and grew, as did the fear that made me lightheaded and nauseous. (I reconciled myself to waiting until the plane landed, because the five men had been drinking, and I was concerned that their reaction to my planned remarks would lead to great discomfort among other passengers.) When we landed and the seatbelt sign went off, I took a deep breath, turned to the acquaintance, and said, “I don’t approve of the racist comments you shared with your friends during this flight. It is that kind of ignorance that makes people feel unwelcome in our hometown.” To my great astonishment, my momentary euphoria was shattered by this man, who proceeded to justify his racist diatribe, and by his friends, who chimed in with a few expletives. As I parted company from the group, I was gratified to realize that the offensive response to my courageous action, which was less than ideal, really was irrelevant to the new confidence it engendered. I had practiced moral courage . . . and I knew I could do it again if I needed to.
Vital courage is at work as the patient battles illness through surgery and treatment regimens. Physicians, nurses, and other allied health professionals use their expertise to save human life or to improve 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 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 PARRY HONORED AS MOST COURAGEOUS

BERNARD FERNANDEZ

Philadelphia Daily News

1/27/2004—NEIL PARRY has no quit in him. If he did, he never could have exhibited the indomitable will and endless patience required to chase an impossible dream through 3 years and 25 surgical procedures. Somewhere along the way, Parry’s excruciating journey of self-discovery transformed the San Jose State football player into a national beacon of hope for the disabled.

You wouldn’t think someone like that would suddenly feel a need for instant gratification, but there it was. Parry was back on a football field again, his dream about to become reality, and he wanted the moment to play out as it had so often in his mind.

“It was unbelievable just to be out there for warmups [before a game Sept. 18 against Nevada],” said Parry, 24, last night’s recipient of the Most Courageous Athlete Award at the 100th annual Philadelphia Sports Writers Association dinner at the Cherry Hill Hilton. “When you go to a game and you’re just going to be on the sideline and not play, it’s not the same.

“When I knew I was going to be getting into the game, I was like a kid in a candy store. The crowd is cheering, the band is playing, your family and friends are there.

“For 3 years, I’d run through my head how I wanted it to happen, and it didn’t happen like that. I had a little contact, but I didn’t really put a big hit on someone, the kind that makes the crowd go, ‘Oooh!’ I didn’t make the tackle. It wasn’t until after the game that I realized what a big deal it was, just being out there.”

Big deal? Well, only if you think someone whose right leg had been amputated below the knee in October 2000 had no business even daring to believe he again could compete in Division I-A football. A lot of people thought that. But then, they don’t know what Neil Parry is made of. Until the life-altering injury that presented him with an opportunity to go far beyond the universe as he had known it, even Parry couldn’t have been sure he had that kind of right stuff.
“People come up to me all the time and say, ‘If that happened to me, I wouldn’t be able to do what you’re doing,’” Parry said. “But nobody knows until you go through it yourself. I could have said the same thing. Before I got hurt, I saw something about that basketball player from Notre Dame [Mike Edwards, the PSWA’s 1999 Most Courageous honoree] who played with a [leg] prosthesis. I remember thinking, ‘Man, that’s awesome.’”

Then, on Oct. 14, 2000, Parry—a walk-on safety at San Jose State—was thrust into the same situation Edwards once found himself in. He made a tackle in the third quarter of an eventual 47–30 loss to Texas-El Paso, but his right leg was mangled in a pile of bodies. He had suffered a compound fracture.

And that wasn’t the worst of it. The leg became severely infected, and Parry was given the horrifying news: He would die unless the irreparably damaged limb was amputated. Just 9 days after he was injured, he woke up to see a bandaged stump where his leg had been.

“You never think it’s going to happen to you,” Parry said. “People say, ‘Play every play like it could be your last,’ but you never really take it in. When it did happen to me, I thought there had to be a way to save my leg. There wasn’t.”

San Jose State granted Parry—whose older brother, Josh, also played for the Spartans and was a practice-squad player for the Eagles this season—a full scholarship. But coach Fitz Hill never really thought the young man, who kept talking about playing again, ever would contribute more to the program than a heaping dose of inspiration to his teammates.

But the 25th operation brought Parry’s quest into sharper focus, and his doctors informed Hill that Parry, fitted with a new prosthesis, would be able to do virtually everything he had done before the injury. The coach told him to suit up.

Which brings us to the Nevada game and the big hit that Parry had hoped to deliver on his first play back. Miracles do happen, however, and Parry had come too far to be denied the sweet sensation of making a highlight-reel play at some point.

Parry, listed as a 6–1, 175-pound senior safety, would go on to participate in 19 plays last season, all on punt returns. And his presence on the field wasn’t the result of a coach taking pity on a nice but physically challenged kid; Division I football doesn’t work that way. Parry, whose best time in the 40-yard dash had been 4.6 seconds before the injury, now was being clocked in a tad under 5 seconds. He was still an athlete, maybe not a NFL prospect, but good enough to merit his roster spot.

Perhaps the folks at the East-West Shrine Game in San Francisco invited Parry to play in their Jan. 10 shindig because of his increasingly high profile. He had, after all, met President Bush and been the recipient of awards for courage in Chicago, New Orleans, and Tempe, Ariz. But Parry had one more game to play, and he wanted it to be something more than ceremonial.

In the second quarter, Parry’s West team kicked off, and Arkansas’ Lawrence Richardson took off on the return. But he didn’t get very far, as Parry flew in and flattened him.

(Continued)
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.

My own (SJL) experience with an elderly client, Carl, led to my fascination with courage and hope and with positive psychology in general. I met Carl on what he referred to as the worst day of his life. He had been diagnosed with kidney failure. The physician realized that this news shook Carl to his core; this observation led to the psychology referral which led Carl to me. Within minutes of meeting Carl, I knew he was suicidal. Within an hour, I knew why he wanted to end his life. In short, the diagnosis of kidney failure was not a surprise; Carl saw it coming. He also realized that kidney failure meant dialysis; dialysis meant a loss of vitality; a loss of vitality meant an inability to work 12-hour days; anything less than full devotion to his work meant that he might lose the family farm. Carl feared his illness because he feared the loss of his purpose and meaning. By hour two, with Carl’s permission, I had enlisted his wife in our efforts to develop a plan that would help him cope with this devastating news. By the end of

“Finally got to lay somebody out,” Parry said at the time, his smile indicative of the victory he had achieved, a victory that goes beyond the lines on a football field. He had confronted the worst thing life has presented him to this point, and he had beaten his doubt and fear.

Parry talks of the disabled kids, some amputees, who regard him as a role model, and he takes that responsibility seriously. The walk-on has, in his own way, become a superstar.

Asked whether he would trade all of his awards for the return of his leg, Parry said he had pondered that hypothetical question often.

“It has crossed my mind,” he said. “But I don’t think I would do it. I’ve met more people and gone more places than I ever would have.

“I was put in a situation where I can help others. I guess this has brought out my character, shown who I am. I’ve been able to help more people than I ever would have with two legs.”

hour three, Carl was stable enough to be allowed to go home rather than being admitted to an inpatient unit. The next morning, he returned for an extended counseling session, and he told me that he was going to battle his illness and learn how to “get the job done” on the farm while undergoing treatment. It was as if he had tapped into a wellspring of hope and courage. Over the next three months, I watched in delight as Carl’s health improved... without the help of dialysis. His perseverance was unwavering; his vital courage was ever present. It was Carl’s courage that helped me realize the power and potential of human strengths.

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; 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 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.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral Courage</th>
<th>Physical Courage</th>
<th>Vital Courage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Firefighters completing a training exercise prepare for their life-threatening work.</td>
<td>Elie Weisel devoted his life to fighting for human rights after he survived youth in a concentration camp.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources: Rosa Parks: © Reuters/CORBIS; Firefighters: Comstock/Thinkstock; Ellie Wiesel: © Ramin Talaie/Corbis.*
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 who was 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 221, 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

Finfgeld (1995, 1998) says that courageous behaviors follow the identification of a threat, after which there is a shift away from defining the problem as an insurmountable obstacle. Behavioral expectations, role models, and value systems also appear to determine if, when, and how courage unfolds. 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 is this more evident than in that of 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, 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 the keeper of Anne’s diary, remained humble about the civil courage she showed by her involvement in 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 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.

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 state 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 effects the occurrence of courageous action in future endeavors.

**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)
Figure 9.3 Subjective Experience of Courage

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 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 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 and appears to be psychometrically sound (Woodard & Pury, 2007). Recent scale development has been completed by positive psychology research teams who were working on what originally was called “wellsprings” measures and now is 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 tap 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.).

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 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 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.

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 mindful approach to life, can develop wisdom and courage. Feel free to test this hypothesis by completing 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.

(Continued)
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.
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?


**Personal Mini-Experiments: In Search of the Wisdom and Courage of Everyday People . . . Including Yourself**

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, and vital. Write a brief biography of each person, and, if you are inclined, write a note to these people telling why you think they possess courage. You may be surprised by how easy it is to find people who demonstrate courage, as well as how uncomfortable courageous people are with the label.

**The Controversial Courage Debate.** Debating an emotionally provocative, controversial topic sometimes requires great wisdom. A “controversial courage debate” might require you to apply flexible thinking and consider variations in others’ values and life priorities (i.e., value relativism). In a small group, in class or in a social setting, discuss both sides of the following issue: “The terrorists who crashed their planes into the World Trade Center towers were courageous.” Focus on personal definitions of courage and on ideas about whose common good needs to be considered when identifying courage.
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 as well as 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, you also can.

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.

• Face the fear often associated with dating and making new friends by introducing yourself to twice as many people today as you did yesterday.

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.

• 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 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.

**Sehnsucht** (English translation: life longings): A concept developed by Scheibe, Freund, and Baltes (2007); an emotional realization that life is imperfect combined with a desire for an ideal life.

**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.