

Does wisdom come with individuality, health, or age?

 [examiner.com/article/does-wisdom-come-with-individuality-health-or-age](https://www.examiner.com/article/does-wisdom-come-with-individuality-health-or-age)

Anne Hart, photography and book.

Wisdom comes with age for Americans, but not for numerous other cultures, a new study reveals. And wisdom is defined, at least in a new study of wisdom and [aging](#) as being good at resolving conflict. You have on one hand the "wisdom of Solomon" finding out the real mother by judging that the best way to judge who's the real mother is to find out who loved the baby the most should the possibility of harm be brought into the verdict. But does the wisdom of Solomon come with age or individuality? This new study focused on cross-cultural differences in how wisdom is perceived as related to attitudes toward aging.

That depends on what culture you're researching as to what constitutes or defines wisdom and aging. Is wisdom about health and survival or about resolving conflict without harming anyone? Does wisdom come with individuality or with the advanced years seen in physical aging? Or is aging apart from mental maturity, empathy, and responsibility? With age does come the ability to walk in another person's shoes for some.

It depends upon your culture whether wisdom comes with age or individuality

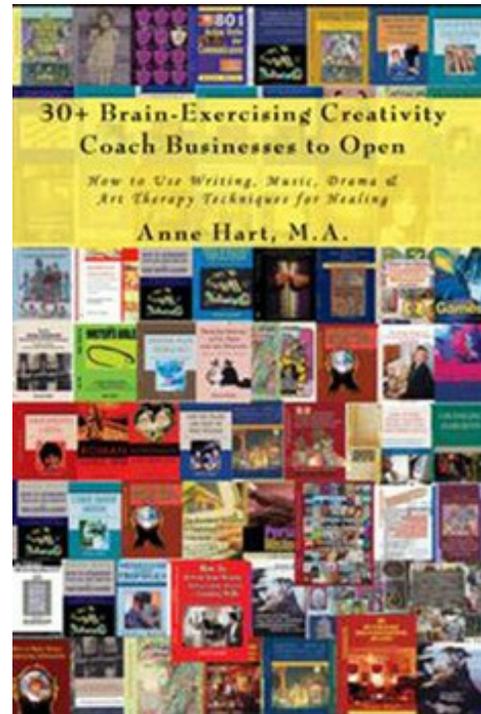
It depends on your culture whether your culture's youth are trained to think wisdom comes with age, with individuality, or whether you think age is a sign shrinking brains and rambling instead of focus, according to a new study from the [Association for Psychological Science](#) published this week in the journal [Psychological Science](#). Interestingly, in the latest study, while older age was associated with higher wisdom scores for the American participants, there was no such relationship for the Japanese participants.

"Wisdom comes with winters," Oscar Wilde once said. And it's certainly comforting to think that aging benefits the mind, if not the body. But do we really get wiser as time passes? Would you trade the energy of youth for the wisdom of age?

There are many way to define what exactly wisdom is, but previous literature suggests that having wisdom means that you are also good at resolving conflict. But conflict is not handled the same way across cultures.

Americans have been shown to emphasize individuality and solve conflict in a direct manner, such as by using direct persuasion. In contrast, the Japanese place a greater emphasis on social cohesion, and tend to settle conflict more indirectly, using avoidance strategies or relying on mediation through another person.

In a study forthcoming in [Psychological Science](#), a journal of the [Association for Psychological Science](#), psychological scientist Igor Grossmann of the University of Waterloo, Canada and his colleagues



investigated how the resolution of conflict and, by extension, wisdom differ between Japanese and American cultures.

The researchers hypothesized that Japanese individuals, who tend to be socialized to value interpersonal harmony, would be better at resolving conflict and show more wisdom earlier in life. Americans, on the other hand, experience more conflict over time and the researchers hypothesized that this would result in continued learning about [conflict resolution](#) across the lifespan and greater wisdom later in life.

Japanese participants and American participants, ranging in age from 25 to 75, were asked to read newspaper articles that described a conflict between two groups and respond to several questions, including "What do you think will happen after that?" and "Why do you think it will happen this way?"

Next, they read stories about conflict between individuals – including siblings, friends, and spouses – and answered the same questions, according to an August 30, 2012 news release, "[Does wisdom really come with age? It depends on the culture.](#)" You may also enjoy viewing the original study's abstract, "[Aging and Wisdom: Culture Matters.](#)"

The researchers measured the extent to which participants' responses illustrated six previously established characteristics of wise reasoning: (1) considering the perspectives of others, (2) recognizing the likelihood of change, (3) recognizing multiple possibilities, (4) recognizing the limits of one's own knowledge, (5) attempting to compromise, and (6) predicting the resolution of the conflict.

People from different cultures vary in the ways they approach social conflicts, with Japanese being more motivated to maintain interpersonal harmony and avoid conflicts than Americans are. Such cultural differences have developmental consequences for reasoning about social conflict, the latest study reports.

In the study reported here, researchers interviewed random samples of Americans from the Midwest United States and Japanese from the larger Tokyo area about their reactions to stories of intergroup and interpersonal conflicts. Responses showed that wisdom which can be defined as recognition of multiple perspectives, the limits of personal knowledge, and the importance of compromise, increased with increasing age among Americans.

On the other hand, older age was not associated with wiser responses among Japanese. Younger and middle-aged Japanese showed greater use of wise-reasoning strategies than younger and middle-aged Americans did. Americans usually hear from media sources or via the grapevine that Asian cultures think of the older person as wiser or show more respect to older relatives than American youth does, or at least as American advertisers do when trying to sell youth-oriented gadgets and social media devices.

In this new study, the cultural difference was weaker for older participants' reactions to interpersonal conflicts and was actually reversed for intergroup conflicts. This latest research has important implications for the study of aging, cultural psychology, and wisdom. Aging for many deals with handling losses gracefully and stopping more to notice nature and environments.

Japanese compared to Americans regarding "wisdom scores"

In the latest study, as Grossmann and his colleagues predicted, young and middle-aged Japanese participants showed higher wisdom scores than same-aged Americans for conflicts between groups. For conflicts between people, older Japanese still scored higher than older Americans, though this cultural difference was much smaller than the difference observed between the younger adults.

These findings underscore the point that culture continues to be important for human development, even into old age. While wisdom may come with winters for Americans, the same may not be true for other cultures.

“Cross-cultural researchers have been very good at situating their results in a cultural context, but don’t often consider how lifespan development may contribute to cultural differences (or lack thereof),” says Grossmann, according to the August 30, 2012 news release, "[Does wisdom really come with age? It depends on the culture.](#)"

The study is one of the few extensive cross-cultural studies in psychology that includes people of different ages and different socio-economic backgrounds. This research also shows that some abilities – specifically those involved in resolving social conflicts – remain intact into old age. Grossmann hopes that the study may act as an antidote to the detrimental ageism stereotypes in both Western and East Asian societies.

Seniors often wonder whether aging benefits the mind, if not the body. Research suggests that having wisdom means includes being good at resolving conflict. Researchers found that conflict is not handled the same way across cultures. The latest study focused on how wisdom--defined as the resolution of conflict differs between Japanese and American cultures.

The International Max Planck Research School on the Life Course Fellowship, and the NIH/National Institute on Aging also was involved in the study. You also might find an interesting read, "[Want to Feel Healthier and Happier? Cut Back on Lying.](#)"