



# Exploring the Developmental Underpinnings of Wisdom in Adolescence: A Short-Term Longitudinal Study



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## Introduction

- Researchers generally agree that wisdom entails exceptional *cognition*, facility with *emotional* issues in life, and *prosocial* motivations (e.g., Staudinger & Gluck, 2011). Because adolescence is defined by *cognitive*, *emotional*, and *social* transitions (Steinberg, 2023), it may be rich with developmental change in aspects of wise reasoning.
- Cross-sectional research (Pasupathi, Staudinger, & Baltes, 2001) shows that late adolescents score higher on wisdom measures than early adolescents. Stressful events and autonomy striving can push some adolescents to think about themselves and their social problems in increasingly mature and rational ways (e.g., Mansfield & Diamond, 2017). Longitudinal data on changes in incipient wisdom is lacking.
- The present study addressed two questions about incipient wisdom: 1) Do adolescents gain in wisdom-related thinking over a 9-month period?, and 2) Do personality traits matter for these gains?

## Hypotheses

- 1) We expected a higher composite SWRS score at wave 3 (W3) based on previous cross-sectional research (Pasupathi et al., 2001). We thought it most likely that teens would improve in perspective taking given social cognitive development in adolescence.
- 2) We expected gains in wisdom to be higher for adolescents with higher scores at wave 1 (W1) on trait openness to experience, humility, and empathy.

## Participants

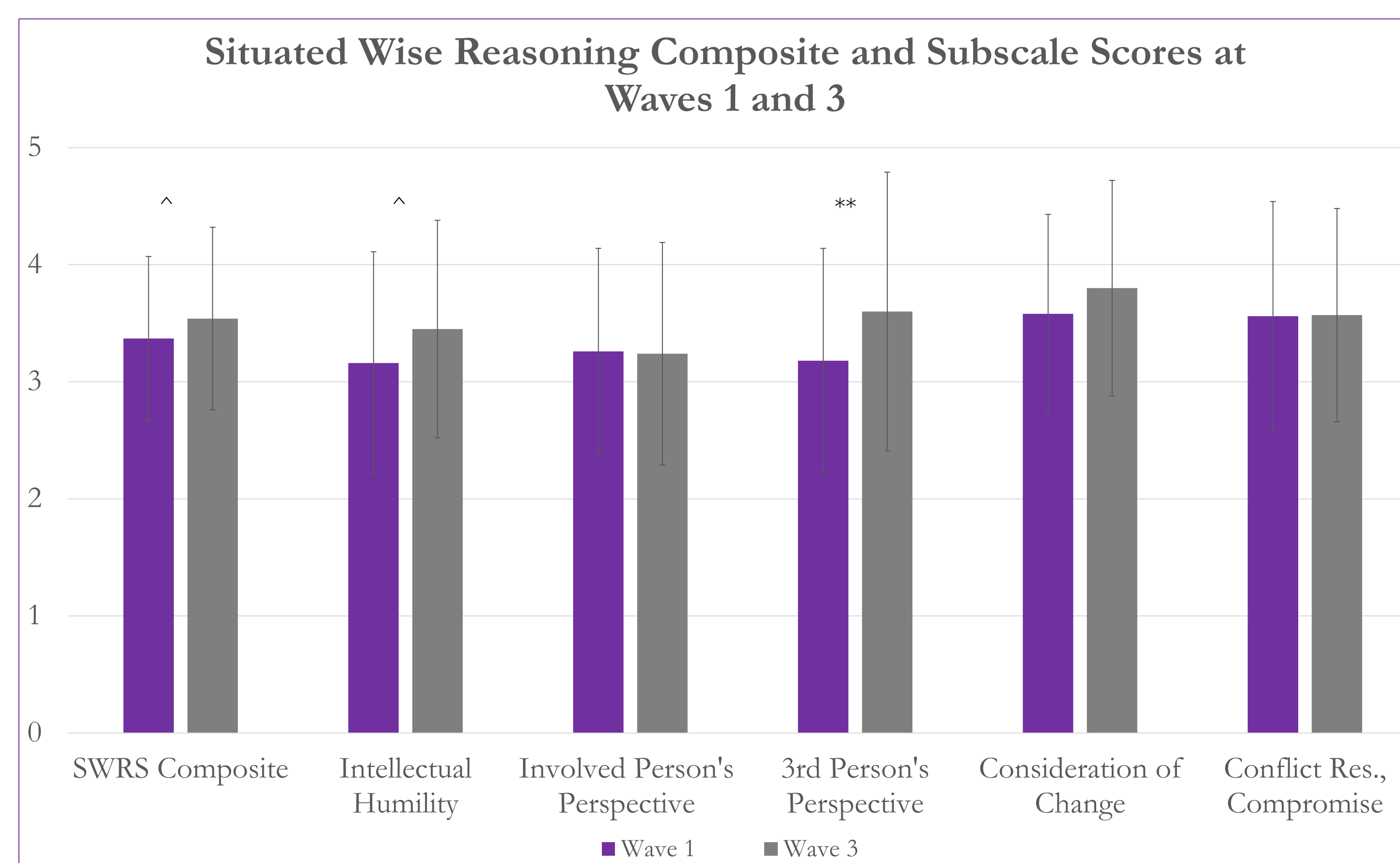
- 15- and 16-year-olds ( $M=15.8$  years, 55.7% female) were recruited through local advertising and word-of-mouth. Parental consent and teen assent were obtained.
- Participation took place online over a 9-month period in 2021. At each wave, participation was ~30-40 minutes and participants were compensated \$20 in e-gift cards. Data from the first (W1, March,  $N=52$ ) and last (W3, December,  $N=43$ ) waves are relevant to this poster.

## Procedure and Measures

- (W1 and W3) Situated Wise Reasoning Scale (SWRS): a retrospective assessment of the extent to which one engaged in wise reasoning during a conflict with a friend with 5 subscales (rated from 1=*not at all* to 5=*a lot*):
  - 1) Intellectual Humility, 2) Involved Person's Perspective, 3) 3<sup>rd</sup> Person's Perspective, 4) Consideration Change, and 5) Compromise / Conflict Resolution.
- (W1) The Big-5 Inventory
- (W1 and W3) HEXACO PI-R: 10-items assessing honesty-humility
- (W1 and W3) Davis Interpersonal Reactivity Index: 14-items assessing empathy

## Analyses and Results

- In partial support of H1, paired samples t-tests revealed trend-level significant increases from W1 to W3 in SWRS Composite score  $t(40)=1.95$ ,  $p=.058$ , and Intellectual Humility  $t(40)=1.75$ ,  $p=.09$ . We found a significant increase in taking a 3<sup>rd</sup> person's perspective  $t(40)=2.67$ ,  $p=.01$ .



- In partial support of H2, correlational analyses suggest that Trait Openness and Empathy may moderate changes in aspects of wise reasoning

Wave 1 Trait	Residualized Change Scores in Situated Wise Reasoning Scales					
	Composite	Intellectual Humility	Involved Person's Perspective	3rd Person's Perspective	Consideration of Change	Compromise / C.R.
Openness	0.22	.46**	.28^	0.18	0.14	0.02
Honesty-Humility	0.03	-0.06	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.11
Empathy	-0.03	0.09	-0.03	0.36*	0.2	0.04

## Conclusion

- Surprisingly, mean SWRS scores, which were not correlated with social desirability, reveal a positive view of wise-reasoning in mid-adolescence. On average, teens report behaving wisely in the context of salient social conflicts.
- Our pattern of findings suggests that teens increase in aspects of wise reasoning during mid-adolescence.
- Incipient wisdom may be real, especially for teens who are more empathic and open to experience.

## Example Wisdom Narrative from a Teen Who Scored 1 SD above Sample Mean Empathy at Wave 1

*“There are some people at my school who like to dress in their own sort of style which isn't considered “good” to beauty standards. People also at my school are not very accepting and very much believe what men used to think like in the olden times such as men are superior over women and it isn't okay to be anything but a straight white men (sic). In my art class there is a man who is transgender (I don't know if that is the right way to say it but he was born a female and is transitioning into a male). In that class we were supposed to do a project on world problems and this male decided to do his on abortion. His project was pro-choice and I had told him that I liked his project because it was very detailed and showed a big cause. One of my male white friends laughed about it while he was presenting his project and my friend and his other male friends were laughing about it as well. I told my friend to shut up and respect her choices. I think that the reason him and all his friends didn't want to listen to him was because of the way he dressed and the topic he choose to present.”*

## Limitations

- This was an exploratory study. Our findings are based on a small and not diverse sample of teens. Replication is needed with a larger, more diverse sample in a pre-registered longitudinal study using behavioral and self-report measures of wisdom.

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Poster available here:

