

Using adult attachment theory to differentiate adult children's internal working models of later life filial relationships.

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Abstract

During the past fifty years, research based on attachment theory has found that when relational partners' attachment systems are activated, significant differences emerge between the ways individuals respond to each other. These different attachment styles are related to the ways individuals characterise and conceptualise close relationships generally, referred to as "internal representations". Internal representations of close relationships depend heavily upon whether individuals have a secure or insecure attachment style. Until recently, most attachment-based research has focused either on the parent-child relationship during infancy, or on adult romantic relationships. Attachment researchers are now turning their attention to the parent-child relationship during the later stages of life. Later life filial relationships are of intrinsic interest to attachment researchers because they concern the same adults who were

instrumental in forming the attachment organisation of the young child. This study considers filial attachments from the perspective of the adult "child". Twenty-four participants were selected using the *Attachment Style Questionnaire* (ASQ) to include equal numbers of the three main attachment organisations. Six robust factors emerged, accounting for 71% of the variation. *Confident Resolution* and *Resolved Yearning* incorporated the secure attachment organisation. *Distant Irritation* and *Dutiful Loyalty* captured the insecure-avoidant style, with *Unresolved Yearning* and *Entangled Resentment* comprising insecure-ambivalent individuals.



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Keywords

Later life filial relationships; Adult attachment theory; Q-methodology; Internal representations of close relationships

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