

**AGE DIFFERENCES IN ATTACHMENT ORIENTATIONS  
AMONG YOUNGER AND OLDER ADULTS:  
EVIDENCE FROM TWO SELF-REPORT MEASURES  
OF ATTACHMENT**

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**ABSTRACT**

The attachment patterns of younger and older adults were studied using two-dimensional self-report measures of adult attachment. Community-dwelling younger ( $n = 144$ ,  $M = 22.5$  years,  $SD = 3.6$ ) and older ( $n = 106$ ,  $M = 68.6$  years,  $SD = 8.3$ ) adults completed the Measure of Attachment Qualities (MAQ; Carver, 1997) and the Relationship Style Questionnaire (RSQ; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Although the MAQ and RSQ are believed to be measuring similar constructs, they are derived from different theoretical perspectives. Correlations between the two measures were in the expected directions proving modest evidence for their convergent validity. Regarding cross-sectional results, as was expected, older adults scored lower than younger adults on the ambivalent-worry attachment scale of the MAQ and the preoccupied attachment scale of the RSQ. There were no age differences regarding secure, avoidant, and dismissing attachment. It appears that older adults experience anxious types of attachment less frequently than younger adults. Although these results primarily speak to age differences and possible cohort effects, they also provide some support for socioemotional selectivity theory and its hypothesized improved relationships in later life.

Attachment theory and its applications, derived and popularized by British psychoanalyst John Bowlby in his seminal writings (1969/1982, 1973, 1980), have enjoyed continued popularity in the fields of human development and psychology. Questions remain, however, about the extent to which attachment remains stable or changes across the adult lifespan. Within attachment theory, there is some debate about the continuity and flexibility of one's working models (typically defined as internal representations of the self and world), and thus one's attachment orientation. Bowlby (1973) theorized that working models remain consistent throughout the lifespan, believing that initial experiences with significant others from relatively early in life form stable and enduring personality traits. In contrast, Bretherton and Munholland (1999) conceptualized working models as largely unconscious, interpretive filters that are used to sort perceptions and emotions, appraise and shape expectations, and influence beliefs and attitudes, which are continuously revised and updated throughout development. According to this model, attachment behaviors fluctuate due to different types of relationships (e.g., one's relationship with one's parents compared to one's relationship with a spouse or child). Indeed, because working models represent both sides of the attachment relationship and take into account how people perceive themselves and others, the models are likely influenced by the specific and changing relationship in which individuals engage.

Empirical support exists on both sides of the controversy over working models' variability and continuity and appears to largely depend on how attachment is conceptualized and measured. For example, Klohnen and Bera's (1998) longitudinal study investigated attachment patterns in adult women. Their study of 142 women spanned 31 years, but began in early adulthood at age 21. They found that behavioral and experiential aspects of the women differed significantly with attachment style, but their working models of self and others remained relatively consistent. However, only securely and avoidantly attached women were assessed because their sample of preoccupied participants was too small for analyses. In a large nationally representative sample of adults, Mickelson, Kessler, and Shaver (1997) found that anxious attachment was significantly negatively related to age, with 17% of individuals in the 15-24-year-old range having an anxious attachment compared to only 8% in the 45-55-year-old group.

The Minnesota Parent-Child Project (MPCP), a 26-year longitudinal study, is one of the few the U.S. studies following individuals from infancy into adulthood addressing attachment research (Roisman, Padrón, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2002). Reports from this impressive database have indicated that attachment patterns in early childhood fluctuate throughout one's development (Carlson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2004; Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005). Participants were assessed in a variety of ways using a conglomeration of attachment orientation measures, interviews, and observations. According to Sroufe et al. (2005), attachment orientation seems to fluctuate based upon one's life experiences. Variations in how people experience attachment bonds seem to be directly related to how they

conceptualize the world and how they perceive themselves, and both of these processes likely evolve and change over time.

Whereas the previously mentioned studies focused on the stability or change in attachment across childhood and middle age, studies of attachment patterns in older adults have revealed that the patterns may not conform to the distributions found in younger adults. Specifically, Magai et al. (2001) measured attachment by self-report among an urban sample of economically disadvantaged and ethnically diverse older adults. They found that the vast majority (78%) were classified as having a dismissive attachment, with only 22% having a secure attachment. In contrast, Diehl, Elnick, Bourbeasu, and Labouvie-Vief (1998) conducted a cross-sectional study of community-dwelling younger and older adults, finding that 16% of the younger adults were dismissing compared to 37% of the older adults.

In both of these studies, a potentially important factor was that attachment was conceptualized and measured as a categorical construct—that is, individuals were placed into one category of attachment based on their responses to the attachment measures. In contrast, several researchers (e.g., Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Collins & Read, 1990) have strongly advocated an alternative viewpoint, namely that attachment should be viewed as a continuous construct and thus should be measured dimensionally. In their thorough review, Bartholomew and Shaver (1998) point out that although there is some general convergence among different measures of attachment conceptualized from different perspectives, some important differences nevertheless remain.

In a dimensional model, individuals would receive a score from low to high on each facet of attachment. Indeed, Fraley and Waller (1998) conducted extensive taxometric analyses of attachment data from a large sample of young adults and concluded that adult attachment is best measured and conceptualized in terms of dimensions not as a categories. Although categorical measures are easy to administer and simple to interpret, several serious problems arise when a categorical measure is used to describe what is in reality a continuous variable. For example, when categories are used, there is a corresponding loss of available detail in the raw data, reduced statistical power, and reduced scale reliability. In addition, the boundaries created by imposing a typology can be arbitrary, artificial, and further may be different for subtly different measures. Indeed, cases on the “border” between one category or another are actually more similar than a categorical approach implies. Finally, in a categorical approach, marginal cases in one category are treated as no different than extreme examples of that particular classification, whereas a continuous approach makes no such assumption.

Given the relative dearth of studies of attachment in later life, especially wherein attachment is conceptualized as a dimensional phenomena, the first aim of the present study was to evaluate the convergent validity of two self-report measures of attachment that conceptualize attachment from a dimensional perspective. Indeed, Bradley and Cafferty (2001) emphasized the need for validation

of various measures of attachment for use with older adult populations specifically. The second aim was to further explore attachment orientation as assessed dimensionally using a cross-sectional design to compare younger and older adults.

## METHOD

### Participants and Procedure

Undergraduate students were recruited from psychology classes. They received extra credit for their participation or for their recruitment of older adult family members. Older adults were also recruited through senior centers and newspaper advertisements. Participants ( $N = 250$ ) provided written consent, completed anonymously a questionnaire packet, and were debriefed upon completion of the study. This study was approved by the university review board. Two groups were formed based on age.

#### *Younger Adults*

This group ranged from 18 to 34 years of age ( $n = 144$ ;  $M$  age = 22.5 years,  $SD = 3.6$  years; 67% female). Their ethnicities were reported as follows: 77.5% Caucasian, 9.9% Hispanic, 2.8% African American, 4.9% Asian American, 1.4% Native American, and 3.5% other. Education ranged from 11 to 16 years ( $M = 14.0$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ ). Level of income was reported as follows: 28% earned less than \$9,000; 17% earned \$9,000-\$19,000; 23% earned \$20,000-\$39,000; 18% earned \$40,000-\$75,000; and 14% earned more than \$75,000.

#### *Older Adults*

This group ranged from 60 to 96 years of age ( $n = 106$ ;  $M$  age = 68.6 years,  $SD = 8.3$  years; 56% female). Their ethnicities were reported as follows: 83.8% Caucasian, 6.7% Hispanic, 1.0% African American, 1.9% Asian American, 2.9% Native American, and 3.8% other. Education ranged from 8 to 24 years ( $M = 13.9$ ,  $SD = 2.9$ ). Level of income was reported as follows: 9% earned less than \$9,000; 10% earned \$9,000-\$19,000; 27% earned \$20,000-\$39,000; 43% earned \$40,000-\$75,000; and 10% earned more than \$75,000.

## Measures

### *Measure of Attachment Qualities (MAQ; Carver, 1997)*

The MAQ is a self-report measure of adult attachment with four scales assessing *secure*, *avoidant*, and two ambivalent attachment patterns (*ambivalent-worry* and *ambivalent-merger*). Each scale contains three to five items rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *I disagree a lot* to (4) *I agree a lot*. Participants receive scores on each of the scales and thus the MAQ yields a

dimensional evaluation of attachment. In the present study, internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha) was analyzed for each MAQ scale in the full sample (*Secure*  $\alpha = .76$ , *Avoidant*  $\alpha = .77$ , *Ambivalent-Worry*  $\alpha = .79$ , *Ambivalent-Merger*  $\alpha = .66$ ), among younger adults (*Secure*  $\alpha = .76$ , *Avoidant*  $\alpha = .78$ , *Ambivalent-Worry*  $\alpha = .84$ , *Ambivalent-Merger*  $\alpha = .73$ ), and among older adults (*Secure*  $\alpha = .76$ , *Avoidant*  $\alpha = .77$ , *Ambivalent-Worry*  $\alpha = .66$ , *Ambivalent-Merger*  $\alpha = .55$ ). In general, these results showed adequate reliabilities for each MAQ scale in each sample with the exception of the ambivalent-merger scale among older adults. It should be noted that these scales are comprised of five items or less, thus artifactually lowering Cronbach's alpha. Despite this potential handicap, the MAQ generally exhibits acceptable internal reliabilities.

*Relationship Style Questionnaire*  
(RSQ; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994)

The RSQ is a self-report measure of adult attachment patterns and is comprised of 30 statements drawn from three other attachment scales (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). The RSQ has four scales: *secure*, *preoccupied*, *fearful*, and *dismissive* attachment. Each scale contains four to five items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *not at all like me* to (5) *very much like me*. The RSQ, a dimensional measure, provides scores on each scale. The prototypical attachment qualities measured by the RSQ are as follows. *Secure* attachment reflects a positive view of both self and others. *Preoccupied* attachment reflects a negative view of self combined with a positive view of others. *Fearful* attachment reflects a negative view of both self and others. *Dismissive* attachment reflects a positive view of self and a negative view of others. In the present study, internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha) was analyzed for each RSQ scale in the full sample (*Secure*  $\alpha = .40$ , *Fearful*  $\alpha = .74$ , *Preoccupied*  $\alpha = .58$ , *Dismissive*  $\alpha = .65$ ), among younger adults (*Secure*  $\alpha = .53$ , *Fearful*  $\alpha = .79$ , *Preoccupied*  $\alpha = .58$ , *Dismissive*  $\alpha = .66$ ), and among older adults (*Secure*  $\alpha = .18$ , *Fearful*  $\alpha = .65$ , *Preoccupied*  $\alpha = .52$ , *Dismissive*  $\alpha = .63$ ). In general, these internal reliabilities are adequate for the Fearful and Dismissive scales in each sample but not for the Secure and Preoccupied scales in each sample.

## RESULTS

### Equivalency of Groups

To determine whether the two age groups differed in terms of gender, ethnicity, education, and income levels, a series of analyses were conducted. The two groups did not significantly differ regarding gender,  $\chi^2(1, N = 250) = 2.69, p = .10$ , and ethnicity,  $\chi^2(1, N = 247) = 1.22, p = .52$ . Additionally, younger adults ( $M = 14.0, SD = 1.3$ ) and older adults ( $M = 13.9, SD = 2.9$ ) did not significantly differ in their

level of education,  $t(129.47) = .54, p = .59$ . Regarding income levels, the age groups did show a significant difference,  $\chi^2(4, N = 250) = 24.91, p < .001$ . Thus, the two age groups were similar regarding gender, ethnicity, and education, but the income categories were not equal. Correlations between income levels and the scales of the MAQ and RSQ in the full sample showed generally weak relationships (MAQ scales ranging from  $r = -.20$  to  $r = .05$ ; RSQ scales ranging from  $r = -.16$  to  $r = .06$ ).

### Comparison of the Two Attachment Measures (Convergent Validity)

The convergent validity of the MAQ and RSQ was assessed using correlational analyses between the scales of the two measures in the full sample (Table 1) and separately for younger adults and older adults (Table 2). Due to the study's large sample size, a stringent alpha level ( $p < .01$ ) was selected for correlational analyses so that only medium to large effects were considered statistically significant.

Results for the full sample show that the two measures were correlated in the hypothesized ways. It was expected that the Secure scales in both measures would be positively related, and results showed that they were positively, significantly correlated,  $r = .27, p < .01$ . It was also expected that the Avoidant scale of the MAQ and the Dismissive scale of the RSQ would be positively related, and results confirmed this hypothesis,  $r = .33, p < .001$ . Interestingly, the Fearful scale of the RSQ, which was conceptualized as a more avoidant attachment orientation, was strongly and positively correlated with the two ambivalent scales of the MAQ (Table 1). These results may indicate that the Fearful, Ambivalent-Worry, and Ambivalent-Merger scales were measuring similar constructs. However, the Fearful scale (RSQ) was also strongly, positively correlated with the MAQ's

Table 1. Pearson Correlations between Scales of the Measure of Attachment Qualities (MAQ) with Scales of the Relationship Style Questionnaire (RSQ) in the Full Sample of Younger and Older Adults ( $N = 250$ )

RSQ	MAQ			
	Secure	Avoidant	Ambivalent-Worry	Ambivalent-Merger
Secure	.27*	-.52**	-.52**	-.35**
Preoccupied	.21	-.08	.55**	.54**
Fearful	-.21	.65**	.49**	.41**
Dismissive	-.24	.33**	-.07	.23

\* $p < .01$ ; \*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 2. Pearson Correlations between Scales of the Measure of Attachment Qualities (MAQ) with Scales of the Relationship Style Questionnaire (RSQ) Among Younger Adults ( $N = 144$ ) and Older Adults ( $N = 106$ )

Younger Adults				
RSQ	MAQ			
	Secure	Avoidant	Ambivalent-Worry	Ambivalent-Merger
Secure	.17	-.48**	-.49**	-.33**
Preoccupied	.28**	-.13	.45**	.54**
Fearful	-.22*	.66**	.43**	.40**
Dismissive	-.25*	.34**	.12	.25*
Older Adults				
RSQ	MAQ			
	Secure	Avoidant	Ambivalent-Worry	Ambivalent-Merger
Secure	.19	-.35**	-.23*	-.21
Preoccupied	.03	-.04	.36**	.24*
Fearful	-.33*	.50**	.37**	.11
Dismissive	-.08	.17	-.07	-.09

\* $p < .01$ ; \*\* $p < .001$ .

Avoidant scale. These data suggest that the Fearful scale of the RSQ measures both avoidant and preoccupied attachment experiences. The pattern of relationships between the two measures provides generally modest evidence for their convergent validity. As can be seen in Table 2, the pattern of correlations were generally similar for the younger adult sample and the older adult sample, again providing modest evidence for the convergent validity of the measures in the two age groups.

### Cross-Sectional Analyses

Independent  $t$ -tests with an alpha level of .01 were conducted on mean MAQ and mean RSQ scale scores among younger and older adults (see Table 3). Results found partial support for this study's hypothesis that younger and older adults would differ in the distributions of their attachment orientations. It was predicted

Table 3. Age Differences in Attachment Styles Based on the Measure of Attachment Qualities (MAQ) and the Relationship Style Questionnaire (RSQ)

Scale	Mean and <i>SD</i>		<i>t</i> -Test	<i>p</i> -Value	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	Younger ( <i>n</i> = 144)	Older ( <i>n</i> = 106)			
<b>MAQ</b>					
Secure	10.4 (1.07)	10.3 (1.8)	0.21	.84	.03
Avoidant	9.8 (3.2)	10.2 (3.3)	-0.80	.43	-.10
Ambivalent-Worry	6.4 (2.5)	5.2 (2.2)	3.99	<.001	.54
Ambivalent-Merger	5.9 (2.0)	6.1 (1.7)	-0.79	.43	-.10
<b>RSQ</b>					
Secure	16.4 (3.3)	16.6 (2.6)	-0.50	.62	-.06
Preoccupied	11.7 (3.0)	10.0 (2.8)	4.57	<.001	.59
Fearful	10.6 (3.6)	9.8 (3.0)	1.87	.06	.24
Dismissive	12.8 (2.9)	13.0 (3.3)	-0.32	.75	-.04

that older adults would score lower than younger adults on preoccupied attachment (RSQ) and on both ambivalent attachment scales (MAQ). It was also expected that younger and older adults would not significantly differ on secure attachment. In support of the predictions, older adults scored significantly lower than younger adults on the Preoccupied scale of the RSQ,  $t(248) = 4.57, p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = .59$ , and on the Ambivalent-Worry scale of the MAQ,  $t(242.63) = 3.99, p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = .54$ , both with medium effect sizes. In contrast to the prediction, however, the difference between younger and older adults on the Ambivalent-Merger scale of the MAQ was not significant,  $t(248) = -.79, p = .43$ , Cohen's  $d = -.10$ . Younger and older adults also did not differ significantly in their scores on secure attachment from either of the two measures. Even with different conceptualizations of secure attachment working models, secure attachment appears to remain relatively consistent with advancing age. There were also no significant age differences in avoidant attachment from the MAQ and dismissive attachment on the RSQ. Finally, regarding fearful attachment on the RSQ, there was a trend for the older group to be lower than the younger group ( $p = .06$ , Cohen's  $d = .24$ ) with a small effect size.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study were informative in several areas. The exploration of the psychometric properties of two dimensional self-report measures of attachment showed generally modest evidence of convergent validity for the MAQ and



RSQ among the full sample, younger adults separately, and older adults separately. Specifically, the correlational analyses between the MAQ and the RSQ illustrated generally expected patterns between the two measures on most scales. Scales measuring secure and avoidant/dismissive attachment styles were positively correlated. The Preoccupied scale of the RSQ was positively related to both the Worry and Merger scales of the MAQ. Interestingly, despite the Fearful scale of the RSQ being conceptualized as a form of avoidant attachment, it was positively related to the scales of the MAQ measuring ambivalent attachment (Worry and Merger). The Fearful scale is believed to encompass people who generally have a negative view of self and a negative view of others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). However, although individuals high in this style of attachment view others as unreliable, they also seem to be highly dependent on others for feedback about their self. Thus, they experience a high need for acceptance and experience anxiety within relationships. The description of this style seems to be synonymous with a more ambivalent conceptualization of attachment, which this study's findings illustrated.

However, the pattern of relationships between the measures in this study also indicates that there may be some important differences. For example, according to Carver (1997) the MAQ differs from the RSQ in that the MAQ has a more clear, affirmative measure of the appreciation of having a perception of safe haven and a secure base. The MAQ also more clearly divides the construct of ambivalent attachment into two distinct aspects (Worry and Merger tendencies; Carver, 1997). In the present sample, the internal consistencies of the MAQ scales were adequate in both younger and older samples, and they were generally superior to those of the RSQ scales. These results indicate some psychometric advantages of the MAQ compared to the RSQ for further investigations of attachment orientations across the lifespan.

An examination of age differences in attachment suggests that there are some potentially important distinctions between younger and older adults. The results found support for lower levels of preoccupied attachment and ambivalent (worried) attachment in older adults, replicating and extending the findings from Mickelson et al. (1997) who found lower levels of anxious attachment in a middle aged group compared to a young adult group. Our finding regarding preoccupied attachment is consistent with results from Zhang and Labouvie-Vief (2004), who found in their longitudinal-sequential study that older people reported lower preoccupied ratings than younger people at the later assessment points in the study even after controlling for initial attachment ratings.

Our finding regarding no age differences in dismissive attachment stands in some contrast to the highly elevated levels of dismissive attachment reported by Magai et al. (2001) (although no direct age comparisons were made in the study), the higher levels of dismissing attachment of older adults compared to younger adults reported by Diehl et al. (1998), and the significant increases in dismissing attachment with age found by Zhang and Labouvie-Vief (2004). However, some

important differences regarding the samples, methodologies, and assessment strategies in the prior studies compared to the present study are apparent. Specifically, the sample in the Magai study was more ethnically diverse and economically disadvantaged compared to the present sample, a factor likely to influence attachment behaviors. Additionally, in both the Diehl et al. (1998) and Zhang and Labouvie-Vief (2004) studies, attachment was measured categorically. As noted earlier, when dimensional constructs are artificially divided into discrete categories, the resultant loss of data can yield unreliable and potentially invalid conclusions. In any case, possible age-related differences and age changes in dismissing types of attachment should be explored in further studies using diverse measurements and conceptualizations of attachment.

Most importantly, due to the cross-sectional design of the present study, it is likely that the attachment differences found are a consequence of the unique social, cultural, and historical forces that have affected differently the two cohorts represented in this study. Indeed, Cole's (2005) review of the important differences in attachment orientation across cultures (e.g., United States, Israel, Germany, Japan) highlights the intimate connections between culture and development. Perhaps the present generation of older adults experiences less anxiety and ambivalence than the present generation of younger adults due to historical, generational, contextual factors. Indeed, the current cohort of younger adults is known to have higher rates of mental illness than the current cohort of older adults, and they are expected to bring these elevated rates of illness with them to later life (Jeste, Alexopoulos, Bartels, Cummings, Gallo, Gottlieb, et al., 1999). Another possibility reflecting a cohort effect is that individuals in the current cohort of older adults may be less inclined to report anxious and ambivalent feelings in relation to their intimate relationships because they were not socialized as much as those in the younger cohort to identify and share feelings. Longitudinal studies are certainly needed to clarify whether the age differences found in the present study are generational or maturational effects and to document more clearly the extent of change or stability in attachment across the adult lifespan.

Despite the aforementioned important caveats about cross-sectional results, the findings of the present study may hint at the possibility of other influences, including a possible shift toward less ambivalence and preoccupation in relationships with advanced age. According to socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999; Carstensen & Turk-Charles, 1994), as adults age they begin to shift toward maintaining relationships that primarily assist them in their emotional regulation. They are less likely to maintain a relationship with someone for intellectual growth, status gain, or other reasons found in younger adults. Instead, they focus upon nurturing relationships that have intimate, emotional meaning for them. Perhaps as this process develops in older adults, relationships that elicit ambivalence and unhealthy preoccupation are trimmed away.

The understanding of attachment and its psychosocial impact in later life is an emerging and important area for further study. Indeed, recent research has examined the role of attachment in caregiving relationships with older persons, either focusing on attachment from the caregiver's perspective (Steele, Phibbs, & Woods, 2004) or from that of the care recipient (Cheston, Thorne, Whitby, & Peak, 2007; Magai & Cohen, 1998). Attachment has also proven useful in understanding the emotional experience of older adults (Magai, Consedine, Gillespie, O'Neal, & Vilker, 2004). The strong relationship between secure attachments and emotional well-being found among middle aged adults (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) has also been extended to those in later life (Magai & Passman, 1997). The protective function of attachment bonds in later life have also been well-documented, especially in Antonucci's (1994) influential research indicating that the increasing number of attachment relationships acquired by adults over time constitutes a "convoy" that accompanies each person throughout life. An important function of this social convoy is that it offers protection and security needed to confront life's challenges, including the vicissitudes of older age.

The present findings, although limited by their cross-sectional nature, are possibly suggestive of the idea that positive or secure attachments may remain stable across the adult lifespan, whereas there may be a diminishment of sorts in preoccupied and worried forms of attachment. This hypothesis comports with a recent study by Segal, Coolidge, and Mizuno (2007) whose cross-sectional results of defense mechanisms were suggestive of a general stability of adaptive defenses across the lifespan but a lessening of maladaptive defenses with advancing age. Research has also documented lower levels of psychological distress and better dispositional coping among older adults compared to younger adults (Segal, Hook, & Coolidge, 2001), which taken with the present findings suggests a host of adaptive psychological processes that may be characteristic of experiences in later life.

Several shortcomings of the present study should be mentioned. First, the present study included a non-clinical sample of convenience, which limits potential generalizability to diverse samples of younger and older adults with clinically significant psychiatric problems. Studies of attachment in these groups should be conducted. There was also little ethnic diversity in the sample, and certainly, future studies should investigate the effects of ethnic identity and specific cultural experiences on attachment styles (e.g., Cole, 2005). Finally, as we have highlighted, it is also imperative that we do not confuse our cross-sectional findings, which speak to age *differences*, with longitudinal studies that more explicitly assess age *changes*.

Further research on attachment and its impact in later life might focus on the relationships between attachment and psychological well-being, and alternatively various forms of mental illness. In this vein, a series of reports by Webster (1997, 1998) provided evidence that attachment styles were significantly related to

experiences of emotional well-being among older adults. Should attachment be found to be robustly related to diverse psychiatric problems in later life, intervention models based on attachment theory might reasonably be applied and subjected to empirical evaluation. This type of research would build on the application of attachment theory to older people in couples and family therapy (Bradley & Palmer, 2003) and the use of attachment theory to understand reminiscence functions in older adults (Molinari, Cully, Kendjelic, & Kunik, 2001). The relationship between attachment and diverse models of personality functioning in late life is yet another area deserving of research attention. Yet another important line of research is to improve our understanding of the precise factors or mechanisms by which one's attachment orientation may change. A final topic of potential importance is to examine relationships between attachment and suicidal behaviors, and alternatively, resilience to suicide among older adults, a group known to be at disproportionately elevated risk for completing suicide (National Institute of Mental Health, 2008). Studies in this particular area are already underway in our laboratory. In conclusion, the nature of the stability and shifts in attachment styles over time offer important information about how humans relate to one another throughout the full life-course of development. Our further understanding of attachment styles in later life is likely to be of significant value in improving such relationships.

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