

The old and the new in later life:

What place attachment?

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Declaration of Interest

- none except I am older than I was and hope to grow older

“When people start writing they think they have to be definitive - I think that is fatal. Rather it should be, I have quite an interesting story to tell. Anyway I hope someone will be interested, it’s the best I can do for the present”

John Bowlby 1980

“every man desires to live long;
but no man would be old.”

Jonathan Swift 1772

AGEISM

- society
- self
- patient

Eight Ages of Man

Basic Trust vs Basic Mistrust

Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt

Initiative vs Guilt

Industry vs Inferiority

Identity vs Role Confusion

Intimacy vs Isolation

Generativity vs Stagnation

Ego Integrity vs Despair

(Erikson 1959, 1966)

Bowlby 1969/1982 proposed that the attachment system is influential 'from the cradle to the grave'

What do we know?

Are attachment styles stable?

- bereavement reaction *Parkes & Weiss '83, Sable '89*
- adaptive coping and affect regulation *Mikulincer & Florian '98*
- secure attachment relatively stable *McCartney & Davies '03*
- but does not protect against PTSD *Harari et al '09*
- older widows - dismissive attachment *Magai '08*
- attachments improve resilience *Cicerelli '10*

- security of attachment can increase
- security of attachment can be predicted
- attachment relationships more variable
- evacuees
- childhood holocaust survivors
- those in a close relationship are more secure *Van Assche et al'13*

importance of symbolic attachment

- deceased attachment figure *Mikulincer & Shaver '08*
- a God *Cicerelli '04*

Why do we know so little?

- few longitudinal studies
- definitions of old age vary
- confounding factors
- ?construct validity
- ?specific relationships

- ?attachment to places and animals
- cohort effects
- parable of the blind sages and the elephant (Rumi 1207-1273)

Dementia studies

- decreased intimacy — carer-spouse depression
- low levels of positive interaction predict residential care and death of spouse *Wright '91 & '94*
- closer relationship associated with lower decline *Norton '09*
- attempt at communication ?BPSD
- insecurity, separation, disruption of bonds *Browne & Shlosberg '06*

- parent fixation - an equivalent of attachment behaviour *Miesen '92 &'04*
- hallucinate the object
- mutuality *Ablitt et al '09*
- belonging, reciprocity, continuity *Wadham et al '16*

Carers

- secure - sensitive to needs
- anxious - excessive caregiving
- insecure - further difficulties
- avoidant - denial of problems

Van Assche et al '13

- attachment avoidance in adult children - parents more likely to be institutionalised *Karantzas '10*

Institutional care

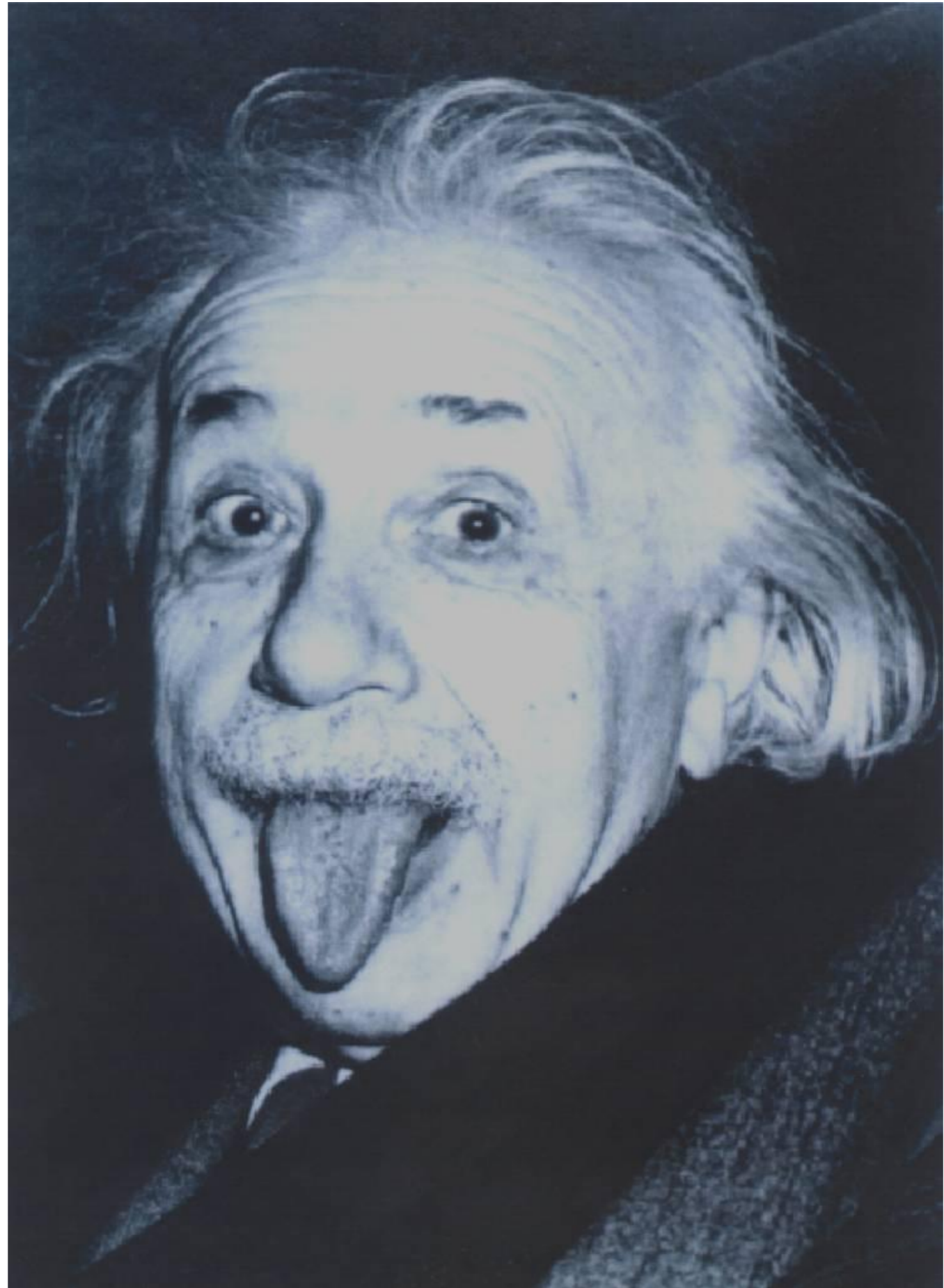
- admission due to family care difficulties *Evans in press*
- projections
- containment *Bion 1970*
- non-verbal communication
- poorly supported, trained and paid carers

- decoupling of 'task' from 'care' *Garner '14*
- reflective supervision *Menzies-Lyth '59*
- trust
- touch
- attachment figures, a source of comfort and of threat
- external cues

Attachment based treatments

none reach RCT standards

- oxytocin *Finger et al '15*
- reminiscence therapy
- simulated presence
- increasing touch/physical contact
- couple therapy *Balfour '14 & in press*





‘losses and mourning strengthen and develop the individual’

Isca Salzberger- Wittenberg 1970

vectors of change

- neuroplasticity
- self-discovery
- resilience and fortitude
- development
- further relationships
- few regrets *'the road not taken'*

“.....we should regard old age as the fruit of our
creative actions”

Limentani 1995

Life threatening illness and impending death

- *“I am restored by my decline and the harsh awakening it brings”* Clive James
- *“A creative spirit revived by illness”* Frank Ormsby

Conclusions

- attachment 'influences' us into old age
- not prescriptive
- history surfaces in response to dementia
- mutative effects of subsequent relationships, involvement of father, education & experience, art, music, literature and poetry

‘Either the Darkness alters..
Or something in the sight
Adjusts itself to Midnight...’

Emily Dickinson 1830-1886
‘We grow accustomed to the dark’