



Honorary doctorate for Mary Main at University of Gothenburg

MARY MAIN received her doctorate in 1973. Focusing on the sequelae to differences in early security with the mother, Main's dissertation was entitled "Exploration, Play and Cognitive Functioning as Related to Infant-Mother Attachment". That same year she became a professor at the University of California at Berkeley, where she has remained.



Ainsworth originally identified one secure, and two insecure patterns of infant-mother attachment. In her early work at Berkeley, Main focused especially upon infants found "unclassifiable" in Ainsworth's original system, and found that the great majority displayed disorganized/disoriented behavior with the parent under stress. A system for reliably identifying disorganized (D) infants was then developed, and extended to older children. The chief import of this discovery lies in the now established relationship between early D-attachment and later social and mental health difficulties (e.g., vulnerability to psychopathology in childhood and adolescence, particularly to dissociative tendencies, and hostility towards partners in young adulthood).

Searching for ways to study the roots of maternal sensitivity, Main developed the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI). One striking aspect of this language-based technique lies in its power to predict an adult's future relationship with his/her, as yet unborn, infant. Main's development of the Adult Attachment Interview has propelled the field of study beyond simply a behavioral depiction of attachment to a representational one—involving language—whose properties can be empirically studied, with reliability and replication. The discovery of the AAI opened the door to the investigation of attachment in adults and to life span effects of attachment histories and its transmission across successive generations. The citation of Main and co-workers article "Security in infancy, childhood, and adulthood: A move to level of representation" (1985) exceeds the record of top cited papers in psychology, psychiatry, and social science. It is rare that a psychologist can claim to have made truly fundamental discoveries, but Main's work on understanding (a) the so-called 'disorganized attachment' status, and (b) patterns of attachment representation in adults are both revolutionary.

The cooperation between Mary Main and University of Gothenburg has enabled researchers from different faculties (social science as well as Sahlgrenska Academy) to learn and use new research methods. This has given University of Gothenburg a unique opportunity to profile it self in research as well as teaching based on attachment theory. It has also made it possible to build a bridge between basic and clinical research within psychology and psychiatry within University of Gothenburg.