

## Orville Gilbert "Bert" Brim

- Born: 4/7/1923 in Elmira, NY
- Spouse: Kathleen Jane Vigneron
- B.A. (1947), M.A. (1949), Ph.D. in Sociology (1951) - All from Yale University



### Major Employment:

- Russell Sage Foundation - 1964-72, President
- Foundation for Child Development - 1974-85, President
- Life Trend, Inc. - 1991-2002, President
- MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Successful Midlife Development - 1989-2002, Director

### Major Areas of Work:

- Life span development - constancy and change in personality from childhood through old age

### SRCD Affiliation:

- Member, 1956-Present
- Governing Council, 1957-61
- Consulting Editor - Child Development, 1958-61
- Long-Range Planning Committee, 1971-75

## SRCD ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

### Orville Gilbert "Bert" Brim

Interviewed by David Featherman and Deborah Phillips  
Vero Beach, Florida  
January 17, 2009

Featherman: So we're starting with Society for Research in Child Development oral history interview of Orville Gilbert Brim, known fondly by virtually everyone as Bert Brim. And today is January 17th, 2009 and we're in his wonderful home in Vero Beach, Florida. And I'm joined today by Professor Deborah Phillips from Georgetown University, who will help me try to elicit from Bert the rich and wonderful life story and his professional career that we hope can be entered into the Oral History Project of the SRCD.

Featherman: Speaking for myself, Bert, I've known you for nearly 40 years and over that period your public identity, your self that's presented, has evolved, as has your prominence as a renowned social scientist, as a foundation executive. After all, you were president of the Foundation for Child Development, as well as the Russell Sage Foundation. You're an elected fellow of national academies and a Basic Books author often quoted in the *New York Times*. Interesting and probably not at all accidentally, in 1984 you published on the phenomenon which you called "changes in self in adulthood." So tell us to start with, how do you think of yourself or present yourself at this stage in your life?

Brim: After our conversation yesterday, I realized that my so-called career is more checkered and disrupted than I had realized. I knew there was no continuity that I could find, no single thread that tied aspects of my career together the way it does with many others who continue in the same line of work their whole lives. So I sometimes, as I said yesterday, and you mention later, maybe feel concerned that I kept moving around from one aspect to another, so that no particular line of endeavor

was cumulative in its effect. It was different segments. I think that it could maybe be divided up in earlier work on socialization and social role learning in child development, and then of the other general works on human development. It was not oriented to or influential on sociology, which does not really study individuals so much as institutions. We mentioned that the work on delinquency and individual delinquents was unusual in social science, that the rest of the materials were on units like families, businesses, schools.

And then later in some way growing out of this I became interested in the capacity of humans to change through their life span and began to state that the effects of child development were not enduring through life, but that personalities can change, people can create their own new beings. And then another segment was I somehow became concerned with the self-image that people have, and that became a kind of focal point of what I was interested in in changes through the life span. Why I picked on that I don't know. It just was an interest of mine. As I said yesterday, it could have been--it might as well have been aggression or prejudice or some other aspect of human personality.

And then I can see some continuity between those four, that they're linked, that they grow out of each other, but they're not the same. They have different topics. What I don't understand is where my interest in adjusting to winning and losing came, that book of mine about ten years ago. It's a study of--I think as I look back on it now it would be, indeed, a study of how individuals change their aspirations during their lives depending on whether they're successful or unsuccessful. And that's the best I can do. So that was a book about how they do it, what happens and what kind of mechanisms or processes that people use in adapting to the circumstances of life that affect their wins and losses. And implicit in there was an assumption about human beings, that they're always pressing the limits to do more than--to keep testing the limits, which in retrospect may or may not be true. But that was a theme and so your adaptations, if you're winning, to raise your sights, and if you're losing, to lower them, not particularly new.

And then this other book, the book called *Look at Me: The Fame Motive From Childhood to Death* and what happens to people with the fame motive, which I've been working on for 10 years. I cannot link that at all to anything that ever went before. So now I think of myself is somewhat confused about my past, but not sorry that I didn't stay with one thing. I wasn't meant to be a foundation executive for all my life. That was not a career. So I'm enjoying so much being with you and looking back at these past events and pondering them, sorting them out. As I said half an hour ago, I want to resort this stack of publications and books into categories, basically the ones that I just mentioned to you.

Featherman: Well, that's a wonderful way of getting started. Of all the people I know the issue of continuity and change in one's life, professional and otherwise, are so manifest in your own professional and private life to the extent that I know the latter. I wonder if you could tell me a little bit more about this most recent book, which will come out later in 2009, published by the University of Michigan Press, with this intriguing eye catching title *Look at Me!* Tell us a little bit about the major ideas in that book. What's its major thesis?

Brim: Well, the subtitle maybe is important, which now is *The Fame Motive From Childhood to Death*. And it's not about famous people. There are a lot of books of famous people. This is a book about the four million people and adults in this country that say that becoming famous is their number one purpose in life. That's roughly 2 out of every 100 random people at a cocktail party. Right?

Featherman: Right.

Brim: Probably more at a cocktail party than two.

Featherman: Yeah. At least the cocktail parties I've been to.

Brim: And I just do not understand how I got started on this, but the thesis is very simple. The human beings have a natural desire for acceptance and approval, to belong to a group. It's a genetic

endowment. Those who don't fall into a group die soon. Those who do are protected as children and the like. But there are individuals who, for whatever many reasons, are rejected by their parents, often their mother, by adolescent peers, sometimes in adulthood and never get the sense of acceptance or approval that's basic to their human desire. And in place of this comes a motive to be famous, i.e. recognized, talked about, sought. But it's not the same. It's a desire that, I argue in this book, is never satiated, it cannot be. The achievement of fame can never replace or fulfill the unfulfilled basic need for acceptance and approval. So I cite lots of cases. There's no study of this. These are individual cases. Sue Bloland's brief biography of her father, Erik Ericson, describes in some detail how his enormous desire for fame came from his abandoned childhood, a father that he never saw and his mother never told him who it was. And there are many cases like that.

So that's kind of the basis of my argument. And then I take it on to consider the difference between the fame motive and desire for money and power. That needs to be cleared up and I think I do that. And then I talk about how to choose an audience, how the audiences are selected, that people are out there and that's not straightforward. It's accidental sometimes. And then the second part of the book is how people deal with it, deal with their selves through the life span, how they choose a path to fame, whether they're famous for name, face, voice, how they seek--if they become famous, to maintain their fame, and how if they're not famous they try for a posthumous fame. It's surprising to me how many persons believe they'll be famous posthumously. A couple of classic articles about sociologists some time ago that, out of a sample of 10 thousand sociologists, something like 2 thousand said they would be remembered after death as among the 200 most famous sociologists.

**Featherman:** Sociologists are known for more unrealistic aspirations.

**Brim:** And then moreover if people are famous and want enduring fame they don't want to lose it; they strive very hard not to lose it during their lifetime. And if you're wealthy and have power you build enduring posthumous monuments to yourself. But then in the final section I deal with what happens when people realize that they're coming to the end and they're never going to be famous and how they adapt to this. Now what's different about this book and my earlier works is my assertion that this motive endures through life and cannot be changed and that's a kind of radical departure in my thinking. And I've sought a lot but I've decided that there's no evidence to show that it ever disappears. And even the studies of people who are famous, sometimes greatly famous, show they still want more fame still afterwards. Arthur Clark is one of my favorite examples, being the most famous author of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has a room on Sri Lanka, where he lived, which is filled testimonials and everything. He calls it his "ego chamber." And interviewed he said, "I'm now writing a book called *3,001*, the book that will really make me famous."

**Featherman:** There you go.

**Brim:** So then you have to readjust at the end of life or whenever this realization comes to you that you're not going to make it. And I cite a half dozen kind of psychological mechanisms to help adjust, like simple ones, sour grapes, downward social comparisons, conflict resolution, whatever. But in the end you might feel a little better, but you're not well. And so at the end of the book I refer to the fame motive as a cancerous growth on the normal human desire of affection and approval.

**Featherman:** That's--I'll call it a very strong indictment, a statement--that's not a value judgment. But I think it's a very strong statement. It's likely to gather lots of attention. When you were writing this book what audience did you have, what audience of readers did you have in mind? Were these academics? Were these smart people buying off the shelf of Borders or whatever and hopping on a commuter train someplace? Just who was the audience?

**Brim:** Well, I've always since high school days wanted to be a famous writer. And that's not the case, but even in this latter part of my life I'm still thinking of a larger popular audience until I realized that--see, I was turned down by a dozen publishers.

Featherman: For this particular book?

Brim: Yes. Commercial publishers said, "No, if you're going to write about this we want a story, take one person to write about that person," which would have been good. You could have made up a story about a person trying to be famous. I could have done that. But it's not my bent. I can't do that. And the academic publishers said, "This is not an academic book. If you told me that University of Michigan Press (my publisher) said, "This is a weird book."

Featherman: Yes, I told you that. But when I used "weird" it was intended as a loving "weird," okay? The weird maybe in the publisher's comment was a little skeptical "weird."

Brim: But he took it on anyway.

Featherman: He did, indeed.

Brim: But the academic publishers said, "This is not a scholarly book." So I was in danger of it falling between the chairs. Right? No audience. And God bless University of Michigan. They decided to gamble on it so we'll see what happens.

Featherman: Certainly, we'll see what happens. My speculation is that it will get wide attention, in part because you are a very perceptive, insightful person. You bring the best of that sort of social, psychological, analytical eye to what I will call the experiences of everyday life, although they're not common experiences. They are experiences out there in real peoples' lives. And you have a way of presenting them, which are really just quite, I think, both provocative, clear and engaging. So my guess is your audience will be fairly wide. We'll see.

You talked a little bit about the prior book, the book *Ambition, How We Manage Success and Failure Throughout Our Lives* and you said that when you were referring to that earlier book, which was, by the way, published by Basic Books, that you didn't necessarily see a connection between *Ambition* as the book and the book on fame that we've just been talking about.

Brim: That's right.

Featherman: So you really see nothing in particular in your own mind that connects the two, except that you are the link? Somehow, the way you see the world is a link, but it's inexplicable.

Brim: *Ambition* was about dealing with success and failure in a general framework, no particular motive under study. This book is a book about a particular motive and its success or failure, so in a way it's a study of a particular kind of some of the general points made in *Ambition*.

Featherman: Okay.

Brim: That's as close as it can be, but it was not created for that purpose. It just happened.

Featherman: There's an interesting juxtaposition, though. And I'm coming back to a very important point, for me anyway, that you made in talking about the book on fame, and that is that you see the fame motive as one of those enduring features of a person's outlook or motivational system if we may call it that, whereas *Ambition* seems to be more about adaptive capabilities and it emphasizes change over continuity whereas--

Brim: It certainly does.

Featherman: --fame--

Both speaking at once

Brim: --and I think the two--

Featherman: --those are two themes that have been in your work both continuity and change but in different degrees in different publications perhaps.

Brim: My view of humans when I was writing *Ambition* was that they're changeable. Their desires are changeable. You can change your desires. You can raise them or lower them. They're not fixed. The position about the fame motive is contrary. You can't lower it. You can't get rid of it. You're stuck with it. And it's about dealing with wins and losses, but it's a different view of the human animal. If a person has these unfortunate early experiences in life he's fixed with this through no fault of his or her own.

Featherman: It's interesting and I think to your credit that you're not doctrinarian on this issue of constancy versus change, but rather you're looking at a phenomenon for what it is, and characterizing it for what it is without necessarily biasing your characterization to emphasize the doctrinaire position that you may take with respect to lifelong continuities or lifelong plasticity. We've seen, I think, all of us in the professional world of human development people who are quite doctrinarian.

Brim: Oh yes, right.

Featherman: Our colleague, Bert Brim, is not one of those. And I think these two works are good examples of how you approach these kinds of complicated issues.

Brim: David, this is the first time I've really thought about the relationship between the two bodies of work in this way. I knew that the work on the fame motive was different from what had gone before, and I say as much in my introduction to the second part. I say, "What I'm proposing here is quite different than what I've said in earlier works." So I do say that. But I don't say why or whatever. I do say I have looked everywhere to find studies of changes or continuity in a particular motive through the lifespan such as power, for example, good works, and there are no studies of a single motive through the lifespan. This is the only study like this in history.

Featherman: I think that's right.

Brim: So I quote Heinz Heckhausen and that wonderful phrase about nobody knows what happens to overriding motives. I think I'm pretty clear on what I say. Give me a minute.

Recording paused and then resumed

Featherman: So we're going to resume the recording. At the outset I forgot to identify myself. I'm David Featherman, Professor of Sociology and Psychology at the University of Michigan. And the next thing I wanted to ask you, Bert, is connected to how I first got to know you when I was a graduate student at the University of Michigan, this joint program, doctoral program in social psychology. This was during the middle 1960s and I got to know you through your scholarly publications. At that time and maybe even a little bit before that you were writing mainly for academics and on topics like socialization, a term that is more commonly used by sociologists than psychologists, and especially on the topic of socialization after childhood, that is for example, adolescent and adult socialization as opposed to child socialization. And you used the phrase, which others picked up and now is, I think, no longer used very frequently except perhaps by a few sociologists such as myself, who grew up in this era professionally, the phrase socialization through the life cycle. So to continue the phrase socialization through the life cycle, even earlier you wrote books and scientific papers on topics such as education for child rearing, that is learning to be a parent, child development and its social indicators, and on topics like intelligence and its testing. I would like to ask you about this interest in socialization that you had pretty early in your

professional scholarly career. You were, of course, a graduate student and completed your PhD at Yale. Was that sort of at the time that this interest in socialization emerged or can you trace that interest to any particular individuals who were influential in your thinking?

Brim: I don't know where it came from.

Featherman: Fair enough.

Brim: That's what I think I said the other day. And somehow in my work in sociology at Yale I became interested in cultural change but had written papers on that, I think, in graduate school. Where that interest came from instead of something else I don't know. I don't recall anybody at Yale involved in that to tell you the truth. But I switched it. In graduate school I took a couple courses in social psychology with Leonard Doob, who helped me with my thesis I guess. And how I got this graduate thesis on changing feeding habits in child health stations in New York I don't have a clue.

Featherman: That was your dissertation topic?

Brim: Except in retrospect it had to do with the fact that there were differences between Jewish and Italian mothers and their ability to change their behavior towards their children. So there you are.

Featherman: Okay.

Brim: An intersection of culture and so on.

Featherman: This phrase, socialization through the lifecycle is something that very few of you-- and I think the "you" being you and maybe John Clausen--maybe a few others were using in that time to talk about what today might be called a life course or a lifespan perspective. Did you have any sense at the time that you were running against the grain of the thinking that perhaps everything is over by the end of childhood and that socialization or development, depending on your preference for one term over the other, was something that should be attached to the adjective child development, child socialization? But after a while you could let go of the child because everybody knew it was just about children. In your case it wasn't just about children. How aware were you at the time that you were saying something different?

Brim: I was not aware of it. I might have been aware, but it was not on my mind. I was not in the field of child development. I was at the Russell Sage Foundation. I was writing the book on parents and parent behavior and changes in parent behavior.

Featherman: Were you also active--if I may interrupt--were you also active--you were--we'll get to the issue of sort of a bit of employment history just for the record in a little while--so you were at the Russell Sage Foundation at the time you were doing this kind of writing and there were a number of people at RSF I guess who were interested in socialization as an area or was this kind of you?

Brim: I was at University of Wisconsin teaching.

Featherman: Right.

Brim: Kathy missed her east coast family. Somehow Russell Sage Foundation was supporting this book on parent education at the Child Study Association and they needed somebody to do the study and somehow they found me and it must have been because of my PhD thesis. So I was invited to come to New York and do this. And it wasn't a job. I didn't have a clue as to what this was about. But we went back east and I was estranged at that time from everybody. I mean, and I thought, it's not too late for me to go into social work, you know? And then Leonard Cottrell, who was at Russell Sage, said, "Why

don't you join us here at Russell Sage Foundation?" He was there. The boss was Don Young, whom you know from SSRC.

Featherman: Yes.

Brim: Don Young, Leonard Cottrell, who Don had hired to help him, and Ed Borgatta, a colleague of mine.

Featherman: I'm not sure. I'm not sure.

Brim: Well, he went to University of Washington.

Featherman: Yes, that's right.

Brim: And then I'd finished this book and, as I've said yesterday, I do not remember what I was supposed to do or did around Russell Sage Foundation except I wrote this piece on Helen Koch's data. Cottrell who had started a journal--sociology maybe--and published it.

Featherman: Yes, that's right. It was a--

Brim: Anyway--

Featherman: --journal on social psychology, yes.

Brim: And how that came about, I don't know. And then I wrote two or three other things on socialization.

Featherman: Right. But let me come back. I'm fishing here for some possible other contexts also that might have been sort of in play for you and maybe even in your thinking at that time that you're talking about right now. When did you get involved with SRCD, Society for Research in Child Development? Was that sort of in this same time period?

Brim: I don't remember.

Featherman: Okay.

Brim: That's embarrassing. I'd have to look in my--

Featherman: Oh, your résumé?

Brim: Yes.

Featherman: Actually, it says 1956 onward.

Brim: Yes. Well, that would be when I came back to New York, so--

Featherman: Yes.

Brim: --oh, I know, because there was some interest in my parent education book among child development people.

Featherman: Sure.

Brim: And I think I was invited to some events to speak about it.

Featherman: Yes. Well, what--

Brim: So that must have been it.

Featherman: --well, that would make sense. Again, I was just looking backwards, myself curious where this dialectic between the child development, the developmentalists and the heavy emphasis on what happens in the earliest years contrasted to what happens in adolescence and beyond and those who--mostly sociologists--are looking at various important contexts like work, family and so forth as socialization or developmental contexts in later life. That dialectic between it's early, it's late, it's both, and the lifespan being kind--of the perspective being the kind of umbrella in which some grand synthesis of both early and late is made. I'm just sort of curious where the conversations were about this issue of "it's early, stupid" versus not, where that stood during that period of time and whether you were aware of it, and again, back to my question of socialization through the lifecycle is for child developmentalists of maybe that era, a kind of really foreign idea.

Brim: Well, at that time I didn't know anything about child development. I don't think I'd ever read a book on child development. It was foreign to my field. I was a sociologist, social psychologist. And coming across some of it, people recognized I'd written a few things and I was invited to some meetings like this big meeting in Texas that was very famous some time ago, and a few invited papers and I think some of them were child development people. I'm sure they were. Harold Stevenson, Ira Iscoe, and the others, right?

Featherman: Right.

Brim: But I myself was not aware of any tension or conflict.

Featherman: Right, right.

Brim: I was just doing my thing.

Featherman: Sure.

Brim: And I don't think I was thinking. I wasn't lecturing to child development people. I didn't know them.

Featherman: When did you first encounter them as such that you remember?

Brim: Well, I don't know.

Featherman: It's a hard question.

Phillips: Do you remember the early years in child development, who you met? You mentioned Harold Stevenson.

Brim: Yes.

Phillips: I'm wondering, of course, with parenting it'd be Eleanor Maccoby--

Brim: Yes, of course.

Featherman: We'll come back to that story if you're willing to tell it about constancy and change, you and Jerry Kagan and the Eleanor Maccoby--

Brim: I must have known them, Deborah, but I don't recall how that came about. Brewster Smith reviewed my parent education book for Russell Sage, but he's a social psychologist. We would--see that would be the years from '55 to '64. I mean, that's a long period of time.

Featherman: It is. Yes, it is.

Brim: I don't--

Featherman: Yes.

Brim: --it wasn't until after that, I think, that Stan Wheeler came to RSF and we wrote that book, you know, that early book with Basic Books?

Featherman: The Basic Books one being the--let me see. Let me just see.

Brim: Two essays.

Featherman: Oh right, Brim and Wheeler, *Socialization Across*, yes, right. Brim and Wheeler, right. Let me just see.

Brim: Down at the bottom.

Featherman: Right. Came out in '66.

Brim: Yes, okay.

Featherman: *Socialization After Childhood: Two Essays* with Stanton Wheeler.

Brim: Yes. Well, see, that was after I'd become president there and started to do some interesting things. Stan came to join the staff and that's when the first conferences went on in '64, '65, so that period before then what I--from '57 on after I finished the parent education book is kind of a gray area. I don't know how I got into writing about--

Featherman: Right.

Brim: --socialization.

Featherman: Well, fair enough. I mean, I--

Brim: And I don't recall contacts with child development people.

Featherman: --well, certainly by 1980, the end of the '70s and by 1980 you clearly were. We talked about your collaborative work with Jerry Kagan to bring together some wonderfully provocative and influential essays in your book, *Constancy and Change in Human Development*, which was published I think by Harvard.

Brim: Yes, it was.

Featherman: And it provides really a framework in which the duality of constancy and change over time and by domain looks different, an openness as we commented before to both possibilities.

Brim: Here's a story for you. Eric Wanner at that time was working for Harvard University Press. Eric came to--

Featherman: He's now president of the Russell Sage Foundation.

Brim: --and Eric read the manuscript and he wrote back. He said, "When are you two guys gonna make up your mind?"

Featherman: Is it constancy or is it change?

Brim: Right. And that's when I wrote that first introductory chapter--

Featherman: Yes.

Brim: --to make up my mind and stated our case.

Featherman: Right.

Brim: And I remember it clearly. Eric was right. We hadn't said anything yet.

Featherman: Right. Well, I want to ask you about that, because I think you shared a story with me yesterday--and you may not want it to be on tape here--where you and Jerry went to Stanford and you talked about your book.

Brim: We were at a meeting--

Featherman: --at Stanford.

Brim: It might have been an SRCD.

Featherman: And a prominent developmental psychologist, a child developmental psychologist, was in the audience. And she rose in indignation as I recall your story.

Brim: My dear friend, Eleanor Maccoby.

Phillips: Yes, I could guess that.

Brim: She was a close personal friend. I've stayed at her home many times, supported her work. To my surprise, she stood up in the audience and said, "You and Jerry Kagan are fouling the nest of child development." And the audience all went like this [applause].

Featherman: So there clearly has been this tension among child developmentalists about admitting to change after childhood.

Brim: But I had not detected that. I was surprised. I was really surprised.

Featherman: And, obviously, you and Eleanor have remained good professional friends throughout. But do you have a sense of this--you can't possibly speak for her--but do you have a sense whether her view moderated at all after--

Brim: I haven't seen her.

Phillips: Eleanor was my undergraduate mentor at Stanford and we've stayed in touch over the years. Her views about both lifespan development and public policy have, indeed, moderated over time.

Featherman: So let me come to some other experiences here, which I think are important in understanding the many ways in which you've made contributions to understanding the complexities of development. You and I actually met--rather than through your writings--but

personally when you chaired a Social Science Research Council Committee on Work and Personality in the Middle Years, and then again in the 1980s a decade later as co-members of the SSRC's Committee on Life Course Perspectives on Human Development. Out of these experiences perhaps emerged an opportunity for you to inspire and lead a MacArthur research network on successful midlife development. It was really a very fertile, generative, interdisciplinary conversation. Tell us a little bit how this opportunity to become a MacArthur research network director emerged.

Brim: I've said it's like a three ball combination shot into the side pocket. Bill Bevan was a friend. I was very much involved in the Center for Creative Leadership, Greensboro, the Smith Richardson Foundation. I was on the board. And we fired the then director of the Center and I arranged that they met and eventually hired Kenneth Clark from the University of Rochester to be head. And so they did that, and Kenneth Clark lived near me in Connecticut and we were friends. I'd visit him. And then we added William Bevan to the board. He was in Washington as Executive Director of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. And then the MacArthur Foundation needed a vice president and I was helpful in getting them to look at Bevan, so Bill went there. And then whoever started--whoever's idea it was to have a health program that involved human development I don't know. Denny Prager would know. I don't know. I believe it was Bill Bevan. They had research groups on childhood and adolescence. But when they started to put together the research group on successful aging, of which you were a member.

Featherman: And John W. Rowe was the chairman?

Brim: Yes, and I was a member.

Featherman: You were, indeed.

Brim: I was a member because of Bill Bevan's adding me to the list. I don't think--Jack never knew what to do with me. He assigned me the job of writing minutes on the meetings.

Featherman: Well, your role was much more elaborate than that. You're being a little bit--

Brim: Well, I remember when we were trying to put together part of the research on social personality aspects that I was working with Norm Garmezy, who kind of had a lock on that area, but we unlocked and took it away from him. I remember very vividly. But anyway, then I said, "It's obvious," I said to Bevan, "You guys are missing the whole midlife period. I mean, it's not there. You need a network on midlife development." And he said, "Okay." So for about a year I guess we worked together. I put together a fairly comprehensive proposal for such a network that he liked, and we had two or three possible meetings of possible members and drafted, again, a proposal that he took to his board and it was funded so it was me and Bevan.

Featherman: Can I just stop you at this point and maybe have you comment if you can--if you know and you want to--in a sense this was a proposal that said, among other things, midlife is "a time of life that needs more scientific understanding than it's currently getting."

Brim: Exactly.

Featherman: It could be a "new development period." Maybe those were not your words or--

Brim: Yes. I called it "the last un-chartered territory in human development."

Featherman: --the claim you were making as such, but it kind of looked like that.

Brim: I said there's a lot going on in midlife--

Featherman: Right, and it's got to do with health issues, but it's got to do with other issues fundamentally. Developmentalists would want to understand this area better. Did you have a sense of whether there was resistance to that idea?

Brim: It took them a little while before I heard back. It was a true story--somebody was slow on the board--

Featherman: --the unadorned history of how these things happen--

Phillips: But David, can I just go to your question? It sounds like there must have been some resistance then at MacArthur--

Brim: Oh yes.

Phillips: --to this idea of kind of enthroning--

Brim: Oh thank you, yes, right.

Phillips: --the middle stage of life as a developmental period.

Brim: Yes. They had the aging committee. They understood that. They had a child committee. They had an adolescent committee that Dick Jessor ran that they didn't understand. And there's a lot more to that story. Dick was doing a good job, but he was done in by people at the MacArthur Foundation, including Adele Simmons. But it was a good group. So they would say, "We've got aging. We've got child development. We've got adolescence. What's this other stuff?" For example, midlife crisis was then, and always will be, a popular myth.

Featherman: It's a journalistic phrase, it is thrown around by all kinds of clinicians making a buck, but your point is that--

Brim: That does not exist.

Featherman: So you did some myth busting.

Brim: Oh yes, I looked at the original proposal. There were something like six myths. Maybe I showed you that document yesterday.

Featherman: Yes. So when you think about the legacy of that research network, and I think it went on for something like 13 years, it was until 2002 perhaps. It was really quite a long run as these things go.

Brim: Oh yes.

Featherman: What do you see as its major accomplishments? We talked about the myth busting stuff, get this out of the journalistic influence and talk about what we can really say from the science. So what do you see the legacy to be?

Brim: There are two parts to an answer. I want to take the easy one first. The continuity of this program at Wisconsin under Carol Ryff's direction--Carol has an NIH grant, 28 million dollars, and has added another 5 thousand subjects, health exams, Japanese samples.

Featherman: These are large population samples in which issues of midlife development and health are the central focus.

Brim: For the first time they added to the work that we did earlier on the sociology, and psychology, and demography of midlife, health metrics, to relate them. And this is without doubt the most important study of midlife ever and probably ever will be, because it's still going. It's going to go another ten years. So that's the legacy. And so we did enough good work that NIH asked if they could continue. You know? So the midlife network--MIDMAC--must have done something right. Well, I think we showed in our research, as you know, that the midlife period, particularly the 40- to 60-year-old period, was indeed the happiest period of the life course.

Featherman: So there goes the crisis.

Brim: Right. Of course, people have crises, but it had nothing to do with being midlife crises. They were crises the same as you had in old age and teen age. And that was what made the headlines and the three huge newspaper releases. As I think back now midlife crisis does not exist. I remember that in *USA Today*. That morning it was on the *New York Times*'s website. And so by 7:00 that morning--7:00 a.m.--I'd had phone calls from the three major networks to do interviews, and they all came in that day, three different crews and shot the film right here.

Featherman: Here in your house?

Brim: Yes. So that was a big event coming out at that--not necessarily the most important but it sure was newsworthy.

Featherman: Well, there are not too many social and behavioral scientists who can influence public awareness so rapidly and so profoundly, so this is, indeed, part of an important legacy, not only of that project, but of the way you had practiced your professional life.

Brim: Thank you, David. I don't think it's lasting. I think it's like punching a pillow. Oh my, yes. Midlife crisis keeps popping up. It's--

Featherman: It's too familiar and comfortable an idea to let go--

Brim: There are articles, you know, on the midlife crisis in dogs and--well, let's see. What else did we do? You were involved, David.

Featherman: Well, I was one of the members of that MIDMAC network. That's true. That's right. And Ron Kessler I think was very, very important, it seems to me, as a colleague with Carol Ryff and her colleagues taking what you began into this next round of expanded surveys.

Brim: Ron was a very powerfully effective member of that team.

Featherman: Now at Harvard in psychiatry.

Brim: I couldn't have done it without Ron. He is the one that put together the survey materials. He's the one that arranged the contracts. He's the one that arranged getting the DNA samples, which are still at Virginia Medical unused, because it turns out now that the approval that they got then such as it was is no longer adequate to the U.S. Public Health Service. It's just extraordinary. They have these seven thousand DNA samples they can't use at Virginia Tech, Virginia--what is it--Virginia Medical Center.

Featherman: I mean, that's a profoundly important thing to put into the record because this was one of the first studies that was able to get over the threshold of institutional review boards in the social sciences to take cheek swabs and blood assays.

Brim: From a national sample it's never been done before.

Featherman: And now that resource is in a sense lost in the necessary documentation and what that documentation must satisfy on legal grounds, no doubt.

Brim: Carol Ryff and her team have gone back to the original sample in the Wisconsin extension, so they're in touch with them. They could find them.

Featherman: The Wisconsin extension is based on an original sample of high school--the state's high school graduates in 1957 that was begun aggressively by the late William H. Sewell, a sociologist at University of Wisconsin and then pursued by his colleague, Robert Hauser, and then more recently in collaboration with Carol Ryff just for the record.

Brim: Well, we did other things. Included in the survey that we had were major appraisals of subjective well being for the first time showing gender differences in the panels and, of course, throughout showing the age differences in subjective well being. It showed the great variability in definition of midlife, which I think is as much as 15 years difference between what the 35 year olds say and what the 65 year olds say.

Featherman: I can understand why, having recently been one and more distantly the other.

Brim: And it was mainly to, I think, legitimize the field of study called middle age in this country. It's now not odd to be studying midlife.

Featherman: Well, that's quite an achievement. I mean to be able to say that this enterprise initiated in many ways by your foresightfulness and persistence has established the legitimacy of a new developmental life period that is supportable by scientific differentiation. It's not just a label attached to a piece of something on a continuum, but it is there. It exists. For the record, some of these findings are reported in a book published by the University of Chicago Press in 2004 under the title *How Healthy Are We: A National Study of Well Being at Midlife*, which Bert Brim, Carol Ryff and Ronald Kessler co-edited. I wonder if we could just say a few words if you want about the MacArthur network model as a model of organizing science that has the potential for such profound influences? Can you reflect on your experiences in the successful aging network and the midlife network, to say something about it as a working model for organizing intellectual work?

Brim: The networks were very carefully hand picked by the person designated as the leader of the enterprise.

Featherman: We're talking about who would serve as members of the network?

Brim: Yes. For example, the aging network that Jack co-chaired was carefully assembled by him with consultation and approval of MacArthur, but it did not name any members for these networks, nor did they name any members to my network. And there was very careful selection. Ron Kessler, for example, I called our friend, Ron Abeles at NIA, and asked him his opinion on Abeles and another name, I've forgotten who, also mental health demographers. And Ron Abeles said, and I quote, he said, "The boys like Ron." That was it. So it went on like that. Paul Cleary at Harvard was an obvious choice and Paul Baltes, I said, "Why don't you join us?" Paul wanted to be a member of the aging network very much, but Jack Rowe did not want him. He said he's too opinionated, which is true. When I asked Paul, "Would you join the midlife network?" he said, "Are you sure you want me?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Do you think my opinions would be too strong for you to manage?" And I said, "What?" But getting to some of the reasons why the networks are successful, because I think originally the very careful choosing of the people who were leaders and their specific subtopics and making sure you have the different aspects properly represented.

Featherman: I think that's a very important insight.

Brim: We did not have anyone in cognitive development. And that was a deliberate decision after talking with Carol and a few others, who said, "We already know more than we need to know about cognitive development. That's not where the action is."

Featherman: The concept of these networks probably evolved over time within the Foundation before either of these two we've been talking about, the one in aging and the one in midlife were created. William Bevan was certainly a key part of establishing these networks. Then later Denis Prager, a friend and colleague of ours, no longer with the Foundation, was also very much a part of it. But I am just curious if you see something unique in the way MacArthur went about allowing this process to evolve from the way that SSRC committees were formed and functioned, or the way that the Russell Sage Foundation or the National Academy assembled people, or is it just a variation of the same theme, or is there something different about the MacArthur?

Brim: I think it was non political--

Featherman: At MacArthur?

Brim: --yes. I think some of the other organizations have their eye on representation of political bodies, foundation preferences. I think I mentioned to you yesterday that the first child development committee at MacArthur brought many expressions of anger in child development saying, "You've appointed this group without asking for suggestions or volunteers from the academic community." So they ran an ad after that saying, "If you're interested, send us your name." If you'd done representation, it wouldn't have worked. You'd have people representing different constituencies. And also the networks gave them a lot of free money. I mean, they didn't--

Featherman: Order of magnitude?

Brim: --12 mill--no, 9 mill for midlife.

Featherman: For how many years?

Brim: I think it was more like 10 or 11.

Featherman: So a million bucks a year roughly speaking. That's not pocket change. That's substantial working capital or venture capital to get novel work started. There were honoraria--

Brim: --10 thousand dollars a year. Rowe once asked Prager or Bill Bevan, "Could we double the stipend?" and they said no, which was the right thing to do. But that was a lot of money, so that left 900 thousand dollars a year and you could do anything you wanted to with it. You didn't have a proposal that you had to follow unlike these other places where you had a project and a year's report and all that.

Featherman: Well, it's interesting--

Brim: And I guess it's freedom, David--

Featherman: --yes, it is freedom and I think it's a point that's well worth making in the history of how social science, behavioral science evolves, that at least in a period of history, of recent history--I'm not sure it still exists in the here and now at least to the extent--but in this period of time bridging the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the role of private foundations, particularly foundations like Russell Sage where you were president, and particularly when you were president, but subsequently as well, MacArthur in the form of these research networks were profoundly influential in creating new research capacity in defining and refining concepts and fields of work, bringing fields of work to fruition. I think the life span field is not just a function of a Warne Schaie or Paul Baltes in psychology or, for that matter, a Bert Brim or a John

Clausen or a Glen Elder in sociology. It's a function of the enabling force of these foundations to bring those people together, to give them resources and to publish defining pieces of work. When you were president of the Foundation of Child Development you created the child supplement to the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. And it became kind of the benchmark, the beginning of a way to create a database about childhood that now has been morphed into something that Deborah is helping to shape in the National--what is it called?

Phillips: The Nahmal Children's Study.

Featherman: But the idea was yours. The enabling of it to prove itself was made possible not by government money, not by some good idea that came from some individual investigator initiated RO1, but it came from the foundation world.

Brim: Yes.

Featherman: And that's something that I think we're missing these days. And MacArthur has kind of gotten away from it.

Brim: Yes.

Featherman: And Russell Sage Foundation may be the only game left in town in the foundation world.

Brim: MacArthur did great--I forgot to say, one of the major achievements of this mid life network was training maybe 40 or 50 junior scholars in the field.

Featherman: And you and Deborah might want to talk a little bit about that for the record, because it's not just the scholars. That was important. But it's also the scholars interested in interacting with the policy world too.

Brim: Yes, yes.

Phillips: So do you want to talk a little bit about that vision of--

Brim: I was talking--at that time--but yes, I do. I was talking at that time about MacArthur Foundation and the free money that they gave and the fact that out of that network--through associates with that network, not necessarily supported, but brought into the network were 40 or 50 young people. And the archives from that 10 years at MacArthur are now, with Carol Ryff's program, open to the public. They're part of the Michigan survey database, and are getting 100 to 200 requests a year to use the data to do studies.

Phillips: That's fabulous.

Brim: It is. That's very important. So when David talks about defining a field, this is a way in which--this is the concrete evidence that it's being done.

Phillips: --so you both created the data resources and the human resources--

Brim: Probably one of the most extraordinary successes of the midlife network was the training of 40 or 50 people plus Carol says there are a couple hundred a year that apply to use data in storage and write papers.

Featherman: Right, the archive from these studies?

Brim: So now if we talk about fellowships and scholarships this is more--

Featherman: It's a huge legacy.

Brim: But now this is both FCD and--

Brim: --and Russell Sage Foundation, right?

Phillips: Right.

Brim: But mainly FCD?

Phillips: Well, so somewhere along the line you recognized how important it was to help the next generation of scholars.

Brim: Yes.

Phillips: So you did that in a variety of ways, so maybe it would be good to hear about the different ways in which you did that. And it wasn't just purely within the academic world, which is also, I think, quite unusual for its time--

Brim: I know.

Phillips: --and controversial. Because I think--I mean, I'd like to hear your perspective on this, but at the time the academic world--I mean, even in the early '80s when I was coming of age--was not particularly enamored of the idea of hands on public policy involvement.

Brim: I'm a bit hazy on this, but didn't APA have congressional fellows?

Phillips: APA had fellows.

Brim: I think that's where I got the idea to have child development fellows. So that seemed--that's where that came from so to speak.

Phillips: Well, and AAAS had fellows but no one focused on child development.

Brim: And did we announce the program?

Phillips: You funded SRCD to do the program.

Brim: Oh, okay.

Phillips: Yes.

Brim: No kidding?

Phillips: Yes. No kidding. And it was a couple years before my time so this was mid to late '70s when you were at FCD.

Brim: Oh, I went to work there in '74 and we might have got started in '75 or '76. Heidi Sigal was a big help in working with the younger people. So there were those fellowships. Then we had actual junior fellowships--

Phillips: Young scholar awards directly through FCD--

Brim: That was a good program to support research. That's where we were picking and choosing our own, right, without regard for geographical representation?

Phillips: Yes.

Brim: I remember the congressional fellowship program, and that was--who else was involved? Do you know anybody else?

Phillips: The fellows themselves?

Brim: Yes.

Phillips: Oh, many people. So you would remember Lindsay Chase Lansdale.

Brim: Oh, sure.

Phillips: Yes.

Brim: Of course, I remember her, right.

Phillips: And actually, SRCD does have a really nice history of the fellowship program.

Brim: Oh, good.

Phillips: That's been done, documentation of all the fellows.

Brim: Well, then it should be noted that we got that started.

Phillips: It is. John Hagen played a really instrumental role in making sure that was well documented. And it continues to this day--

Brim: Who was that when we had the fellows. So that was a successful program you think?

Phillips: Highly successful.

Brim: One of our better deals at FCD.

Phillips: And continues to this day.

Brim: At Russell Sage Foundation I made grants to SRCD to produce two volumes of essays or works for something and I can't find them anywhere. They were publications. They had an editor and they might have been select advances in child development or maybe they were essays on policy. But I know that they were from--I remember very much giving the money to SRCD from Russell Sage Foundation, which is interesting. So I was clearly involved in SRCD before I left the Russell Sage Foundation--

Phillips: This might have been when Harold Stevenson was president of SRCD, I believe, one of the two volumes was edited by Stevenson and Siegel (A) in 1984: *Child Development Research and Social Policy*, published by the University of Chicago Press.

Featherman: So let's come back to your career again. And I'll note that one of the reasons that we're doing this interview right now is in anticipation of a set of essays that are being written for the journal, *Research in Human Development*. Deborah and I are writing one. Others are being written by Carol Ryff, Jutta Heckhausen, Paul Cleary, Lonnie Sherron and their collaborators for a special issue that will attempt to sort of capture some of these important influences that you had on us as professionals, as individual professionals. But of course, on the broader field of human

development it's also a reflection of your having gotten, unsurprisingly, two lifetime of distinguished contributions awards, one in 2005 from the Society for the Study of Human Development, and one 15 years earlier from SRCD, more or less the same career of distinguished achievement. Of course, these aren't awards for the same body of work. They're separated by 15 years, a very fertile 15 years. So in a sense your career has generated a number of awards for outstanding and continuing achievement. So let's just have you reflect a little bit about your corpus of work, your body of work in its entirety, not just singling out the stuff that is in the books, the recent books, or singling out necessarily the midlife work in the MacArthur network. So as you look back over your professional career is there one prominent features that--in your mind, to your thinking--immediately come to your mind, things that perhaps are especially pleasing to you?

Brim: Sure, of course.

Brim: Creations that I like consist of the first book with Stan Wheeler about socialization after childhood. That sold 40 thousand copies. It was a very influential piece of work.

Featherman: As well it should be.

Brim: I'm pleased with an article I wrote with a man named Oscar Ruebhausen, a lawyer, called *Privacy and Behavioral Research*, which was in the *Columbia Law Review* and republished in APA journals, that was the opening definitive work on privacy and behavior research. I'm pleased with a book I did with Jerry Kagan--

Featherman: *Constancy and Change*.

Brim: --I think that was an important book. I'm pleased with our fellowship and scholarship programs, very much so, because we needed to get people started. As I said to you yesterday, cognitive psychology was strangling the field of child development and we needed something else to get going and we did.

Phillips: Social and emotional.

Brim: I'm proud of the work that Deborah Phillips and I did together. As I said, it's too good, too smart for people to understand. I'm very pleased with the work I did on social indicators that I had said I brought with me from Russell Sage Foundation into the child development field and got started the child social indicators movement, which resulted in the study "Child Trends" in New York, which is famous, and led to the establishment of Child Trends, Inc. in Washington DC.

Phillips: Still thriving.

Brim: Well, and just looking at all the work I did on adult socialization in particular reference to self image theory, a lot of that. I'm very, very pleased with the--happy about the SSRC various committees that we put together. They were a major influence in this country's research work for a while.

Featherman: Irreplaceable.

Brim: Of course, *On the Properties of Life Events*. This is an early paper.

Featherman: Those are, I think, wonderful, discrete links in a body of work that in its collectivity makes a lot of coherent sense to many of us, even if sometimes--

Brim: Yes.

Featherman: --when you think about it, you see more dots unconnected than connected.

Brim: Okay. That's well said.

Featherman: But let me ask you, I mean, this is a kind of difficult question always to ask. We talked about things that have worked out really well, publications that have come together and have been influential to--profoundly influential, programs begun, fellowship programs and so on and so forth. Is there anything in your body of work that sticks out in your mind because it didn't pan out, because there were ideas that you put forward but after they were out there on reflection you just thought you had it the wrong way around?

Phillips: Or maybe ahead of their time would be the--another--

Brim: Well, I read your question this morning and studied it, and I thought, and I must be pretty well protected, because I can't think of any.

Featherman: That's good. That's all right. I wish I could say that.

Brim: I'm sure there are some that others would say was a big mistake and it didn't work. But I seem to have screened them out pretty well. I really thought about--I could have given it more thought--

Featherman: No, no, no, it's fine. I mean, I think it's a wonderful fact of one's life interpretation that you come to that recognition that bad things--really bad things--didn't happen for a variety of reasons. But you've said something very important, that you're well protected. And in some ways that means--I'm translating this--this is my interpretation and then I'd like to have yours of what you meant by protected--that you've been smart enough to collect some really helpful counselors as friends and you've used that system to sort of vet ideas. That's where the counselors come in. So let's talk about the counselors and friends and so forth. You've worked with many people--Deborah is one of them--over the course of your life, some for long periods of time, others for quite episodic short periods of time. Are there particular individuals who come to your mind as influential, more so than others, or around a particular issue that was pivotal? So let's talk a little bit about people, important people in your intellectual life.

Brim: I've never thought about that until this morning in a systematic way. You and Deborah Phillips would be on the list.

Featherman: We're honored.

Phillips: Oh, very.

Brim: Okay? Heidi Sigal, my colleague at FCD, Stan Wheeler, my coauthor, our colleague Paul Baltes, Eleanor Sheldon, Pat Gurin, Jerry Kagan, Howard Freeman--it's a name that you know, David, sociologist, very famous. Howard was at Harvard and he was a student of mine at NYU, went to Harvard. Then he went to run the Ford Foundation Latin America program. Then he went to run the Social Research Center of UCLA. He and Peter Rossi, they were collaborators. And Howard was a big martini drinker. And Howard died on the flight from Washington to Los Angeles. When they arrived in Los Angeles he was dead in his seat.

Featherman: I never heard that story.

Brim: And his wife--his second wife--said, "Howard would have wanted it that way."

Inaudible comments

Brim: And he was on my staff. He flew down from Boston to Russell Sage Foundation for years. David Goslin, another fellow at Russell Sage Foundation.

Featherman: Russell Sage Foundation and then he went to the National Academy and worked with you on the *Handbook of Socialization Research*.

Brim: Then he went from the Academy to--I moved him over to take over American Institutes for Research, where I was Chairman.

Featherman: AIR The Washington office, yes.

Brim: And then a few years later, after I had left, they fired him, because he was too arrogant. In fact, Patricia Gurin fired--Patricia is another one who was a wise friend. Pat is my colleague at Michigan in psychology, but now retired. And Bill McKeachie--

Featherman: William McKeachie, also at Michigan in psychology, now retired.

Brim: Bill Sewell was always a help. You recall; we had Fellows come to stay in New York for a year at Russell Sage Foundation.

Featherman: Yes, yes.

Brim: And the year after Bill was president he came. I said, "You need some time off. Come to New York."

Featherman: Yes. He had a rough time as chancellor at the University of Wisconsin Madison during the student riots in the '60s, the protest years and the explosion at the Math Research Center when people were killed.

Brim: He was a friend of mine the three years I was at Wisconsin. He was the only one there that understood what the word socialization meant now that I think back on it and because he wrote about children.

Featherman: And an early essay in which he was at the throat of psychoanalytic theory of childhood. It's a collection. It's a wonderful collection--

Brim: Diverse, right?

Featherman: --a very diverse, very multidisciplinary, different, that's right, and different--

Phillips: It's a lifespan developmental group.

Featherman: It's a whole convoy of counselors, so in your words the protective environment of well chosen colleagues.

Brim: Okay.

Featherman: That's nice.

Brim: Yes.

Featherman: I like that.

Phillips: Well, and to whom you gave at least as much back in the way of counsel--

Featherman: There's no doubt about that.

Phillips: --always very reciprocal.

Featherman: So let's move into that part of your biography that is some combination of personal and professional. We won't get too personal about this, but again, for the record you were born in Elmira, New York in 1923 and went off to Yale as an undergraduate. But that experience was interrupted by World War II. And in World War II you flew a B-24 as second lieutenant in the army air force. Thinking about that war experience in general, what experiences come to mind that sort of stand out?

Brim: I was only 21 and I didn't know anything about anything. I knew how to fly the airplane and that's about it. I didn't know how to deal with people at all. I shouldn't have been the pilot for 12 people. I should have been the copilot maybe. But we made it through and they all stuck together. But I think back and I am shocked by my immaturity in so many things. I don't have any experiences other than wartime experiences, but under those, the big thing that stands out is how dumb I was.

Featherman: The inexperience, I think, is profound and expectable--the experience that you had in getting into the cockpit and being responsible, as you say, for the rest of the people in there in a war situation, how do you ever get experience to do that before you do it? But thank you for that. What about the fact that the war did interrupt the flow of your educational flow? Did it have any impact on what you wanted to do when you came back from the war educationally or professionally?

Brim: I don't think so. I'd planned to be an English major. I think I fell on sociology for some reason--because it was new to me. In retrospect I should have gone into psychology, not sociology.

Featherman: And why was that?

Brim: Well, because I ended up as a psychologist. I mean, I'm more of a psychologist than a sociologist. I don't read the sociology materials anymore.

Featherman: I don't either, but that's all right.

Phillips: What does it mean when you say you're more a psychologist?

Brim: I'm interested in individuals and I think that's what I mean.

Featherman: Of course.

Brim: Sociologists aren't interested in individuals. But somehow that intrigued me as--it captured me, the sociology did. I'd never heard anyone other than like sociologists talk about cultures, and families and stuff. I wrote one paper, a long paper in graduate school--I think an essay on what's needed for cultural change. I was interested in that. And I wrote the long paper and had--it was about individuals and their role in cultural change and my instructor in the graduate course sent it back and said, "This is psychology. This is not sociology. Take this paper and rewrite it," so I rewrote the paper exactly as it was only using sociological concepts instead of psychology concepts. I'll never forget.

Featherman: Okay, let's go back to your WWII experiences for a minute. There was this wonderful episode while you were in the service that came to my eye as I was reading your biography that one of your colleagues at Yale has begun to put together, and that is that while you were flying your plane, on leave you met your future wife, dear Kathy, and after a brief courtship you were married in 1944. It sounded like it was a whirlwind courtship during wartime. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Brim: Sure. I'd graduated from flight school; I had my shiny wings and I came back to Lakeville, Connecticut and there were no men around anywhere. Of course, they were all gone. And Kathy was

there; she'd dropped out of college. She never went to college. She dropped out to help her mother in the middle of the first year because her dad had gone back in the service. And there was a dinner at the prep school just up the road, the junior prep school, and my sister, who was there, older sister, had been invited and she didn't want to go. She said, "Why don't you go?" Because the dinner was for the headmaster for his son, who had also just come back--maybe the marines or something with his wings. So it was this little cocktail party/dinner. We were all kids, 18, 19, 20 and I looked across the room, a crowded room--

**Featherman:** And there she was.

**Brim:** --so we dated for two weeks and then I went back in the service and became engaged.

**Featherman:** A man of decision.

**Brim:** That was wartime. That was wartime--wings and everything, and then so Kathy came out by train to Champaign, Illinois and I got leave from--we were based in Rantoul where the air base was, right just north where I was training so I got leave from coding class and we got married in Champaign six weeks later.

**Featherman:** A wonderful long marriage and four great kids--

**Brim:** Right, so 60 years, that was a long time--

**Featherman:** --60 years to be married.

**Brim:** --yes, wow.

**Featherman:** After such a brief courtship--

**Brim:** Yes.

**Featherman:** --what chemistry! Well a special lady. She was a very, very special lady. All who knew her loved her. Yes. So you went back to Yale and you went on to graduate school. Was that a plan for a while? I mean, did you know that you wanted to go to graduate school?

**Brim:** No. That's when I was writing my first novel. In those years--I'd forgotten that--called *Point of No Return* and I sent it in to Random House--I didn't send it in. I took it in. I had an old worn out cardboard box. I went into Grand Central, bought a new ream of paper to get a new box, threw away the new ream of paper and the old box, and took the new box up the road to Random House, and went in the door and said, "I have a manuscript," and she said, "Put it on that pile over there." It was a table this big with all of these other manuscripts.

**Featherman:** Did you ever hear back from them?

**Brim:** Yes, I got a rejection slip and J.P. Marquand took the title the *Point of No return* if you recall--

**Featherman:** Well, the title sounded familiar.

**Brim:** Of course, it is familiar.

**Phillips:** They stole your title?

**Brim:** --well, titles are not copyrighted, but the--

**Phillips:** Still--

Brim: --answer is yes, because Random House published his book shortly thereafter with that title.

Phillips: And what was your book about; what was the story?

Brim: It was a story about a--I think a guy returning from service or in service or whatever. The "point of no return" is an air force phrase when you are going from one place to another and you've gone over the halfway--

Phillips: Ah, yes.

Brim: --particularly if you're over the ocean, you can't turn around. You don't have the fuel. You run out of gas. And that didn't work, so I guess I thought I might as well go to graduate school. I'm not the only one that thought that.

Featherman: So that was a point of no return, right?

Brim: Exactly.

Phillips: Prophetic, aren't we glad it was?

Featherman: Absolutely. We were all the beneficiaries of that. Thank goodness you were initially a failed author.

Brim: Well, I was a continually failed author.

Featherman: Of that kind.

Brim: John was born at that time. He was born in November of '45. Yes. So he was around. I was studying German. Unlike you, I wasn't fortunate enough to be born to a German heritage. You had to be able to translate Lippert's book on culture, one of the earlier German anthropologists.

Featherman: Cultural research.

Brim: Obtuse. Pete Murdock (a Yale anthropologist) would open the German text at random and say, "Read this,"--I mean, translate it--

Featherman: To this day, that's how they do it. So you finished up the graduate work in four years, which is astonishing by contemporary standards.

Brim: I didn't start there until '48.

Featherman: A rate buster.

Brim: I got my Masters in '49, my PhD in '52.

Featherman: So you went off then to Wisconsin at Madison as eventually an assistant professor. And you left the professorate after a short period there and had all of this wonderfully intellectual, profoundly prolific career played out in the foundation world fundamentally, beginning with the Russell Sage Foundation. I think you told us a little bit about that transition, but maybe we could focus on it again.

Brim: Sure.

Featherman: This is the period of leaving Wisconsin now and going off to Russell Sage Foundation. Let's talk about Russell Sage Foundation, not so much the wider transition, but what made it such a sort of a fertile venue for your work?

Brim: Well, at Wisconsin for a moment I went there not as an assistant professor. I mean, I went there as an instructor. And there were three of us hired as instructors to break up an introductory course on social disorganization, which had 700 people in the lecture room. They wanted to break it into groups of hundreds. So they hired three of us. The other option was to go to Dartmouth--it's an interesting thought--go to Dartmouth and they wanted me to come to Dartmouth and they said, "Well, we'd like you here. Now, would you be satisfied just to read what's coming in and to teach it? This is the teaching school." And I thought, it's a big decision; Dartmouth is very attractive. I thought, no, I'm not a reader and a teacher; I'm a scholar. That was a defining episode. So I went to Wisconsin and I was the first one of the three instructors at the end of the first year to be promoted to assistant professor to my surprise. But I'd published an article. That meant you could teach a course in social psychology--or you could teach a course that you wanted. So I said, "I'm going to teach a course on personality," which you don't teach in sociology. The department said, "What is this?" I felt estranged from the department for that reason. I moved over--was about to move over. I worked with Jack Gilchrist in psychology and psychology was going to hire me and move me over to their department. And then that was going to be cool to do. I could have done that. But Kathy was not happy there. She liked New England. She wanted to go back east, so we went back east. And somehow, as I said yesterday, I think because of my doctoral dissertation Russell Sage Foundation was looking for someone to direct a Child Study Association program for a study they called parent education, and somehow my name came up. That was the only job offer I had in the east. And so I did that for two years and that's when I felt really out of things and I thought, I'm not too old to go into social work. I look back at that now with wonder. Later, Leonard Cottrell at Russell Sage Foundation said, "Why don't you join us at the Foundation?"

Featherman: As a staff member?

Brim: And from then on, as I said earlier, I don't know why but I was turned loose to write about socialization and development.

Featherman: But it's a good thing you were.

Brim: Yes. I think Cottrell must have had something to do with that. He was a sociologist from Chicago who studied social interaction and self-hood in the Cooley and Mead tradition. And then the rest--well, then what happened, then I was there probably six or seven years I guess and then Don Young retired--

Featherman: Then you became president? Yes.

Brim: Yes.

Featherman: Coming back to this Wisconsin situation for a moment and just an intellectual question--and it's interesting. You mentioned the course personality and self. If you had offered a course called social structure and personality do you think the reaction would have been similarly, "What is this?"

Brim: They wouldn't have liked that either.

Featherman: Mm-hmm. Well, it's interesting because a few years later that became one of the cornerstones of that department. And in fact, Bill Sewell, who has spent virtually all his professional life as a full-grown sociologist at Wisconsin, was probably most prominently known as contributing to the definition of that field of social structure and personality.

Brim: He was in rural sociology; he was not in the department at that time--

Featherman: --at that time, that's right. That's also how I began there in rural sociology and then moved to sociology.

Brim: Yes, I mean, all the good guys were in rural sociology.

Featherman: That's right. But again, in some ways I suspect it's a comment on an intellectual division of labor at a particular place, and another, it has to do with kind of intellectual blinders that are not uncommon in university--

Brim: Well, I shared an office with a distinguished colleague of yours, Howard Becker--

Featherman: Yes, of course.

Brim: --and when he saw what this course outline was, he threw it aside and said, "That's individualistic."

Featherman: Yes. Well, what's interesting is, again, in the history of the Cooley-Mead tradition in sociological social psychology.

Brim: The department at Wisconsin was sufficiently displeased with what I was doing to say there's--I think I'm quoting right in a note to the dean--"There's some doubt about the desirability of Mr. Brim's continuing."

Featherman: So you weren't going to get tenure there?

Brim: That's when I decided to switch to psychology. And I would have. As I said, except Kathy wanted to move.

Featherman: And I suppose having gone through that experience and then having gone through such a wonderfully positive experience in the foundation world and in New York there are few, if any, regrets about not having spent most of your life in universities. But are there any regrets?

Brim: Yes, there are. The regrets are quiet tree-lined streets, summers off, sabbaticals, tenure, an easy life, intellectual colleagues, which are hard to find outside universities, so those are not regrets but an alternative fantasy life that I think about but--

Phillips: Do you think you could have possibly made the contributions you've made if you had stayed in academic life? Can that be a platform for similarly influential work?

Brim: More so, I would think. You have students. If you say, University of Michigan or Georgetown, people know what that is. You're credentialized before you go. If you say Russell Sage Foundation they say, "That's the college up in Troy, right?" I say, "No, it's not Russell Sage College. It's the Foundation." They say, "Well, what is that?" So it's a very different base from which to operate, very different. I never thought about it in that sense until now, but I don't see any--if I read articles by or about people who are having interest in the behavioral sciences there aren't any based in foundations anywhere. I mean, they're all somewhere else, all at universities or somewhere, so yes, I think it was more of a struggle now that I think about it.

Phillips: Well, what's interesting--just reflecting on some of your earlier comments--is that you recreated students. I can think of myself as one of your students actually, not one of your grantees, but one of your students.

Brim: Right.

Phillips: And you also continually created your intellectual colleagues, so that you took from your academic life and recreated it in your non academic life. But then there are the things that are harder, like sabbaticals.

Brim: Well, I think it was necessary to my intellectual life to have visiting scholars at these two foundations. I made mistakes, yes, a couple mistakes in selecting scholars. I had, in successive years, Irving Kristol and Dan Bell as visiting scholars, and I've always been so naive about politics. I didn't realize what these guys were. I didn't realize. I was on the board of the Public Interest when he founded it--

Featherman: Right.

Brim: --and I didn't know what neo-conservative was. I had no idea. Those were big mistakes, but on the other hand, Bob Merton came, Bill Sewell came, lots of others, Brewster Smith came one year and then there were always young people around. But then you could go to the meetings and catch up--

Featherman: To the meetings of these various and wonderful committees and task forces and so forth that you created?

Brim: Absolutely. Yes.

Featherman: That's an interesting tradeoff. I mean, again, we each have our own way of sorting this out. But I found when I was president of SSRC that the only way that I could maintain my intellectual vitality was to participate in those committees, at least as a fly on the wall if not more intensely in a few of them where I had some prior intellectual basis for understanding and speaking out occasionally. But it is a way of--an alternative way of creating a set of colleagues and a set of opportunities for one's own intellectual exploration--I won't call it indulgence; it's not indulgence at all--but a way of exploring. And you talked about the--you used the word "fantasy" in talking about university academic life. Like many things, foundations can be horribly bureaucratic and can reduce your IQ. Being a faculty member can be horribly boring and overtaxing and reduce your IQ. There are no perfect venues.

Brim: I'm thinking that post retirement at university communities--Chapel Hill comes to mind, Ann Arbor, Madison--are great places to retire whereas if you work in New York there isn't any place to retire.

Featherman: That's right. That's right.

Brim: And it was like coming down--instead of being around Ann Arbor I'm down in Vero Beach in this intellectual desert, as I told you this morning, and you--again, you have to create your own group like I did. Interesting thought.

Featherman: Yes. So as we get near the end of our time, I just want to ask you for this record, for the purposes of this oral history project, are there issues, or experiences, or reflections, statements that you'd want to put in the record that you'd like associated with you, your thoughts?

Brim: I believe I always relied on SRCD to be the organization I could count on to help me implement what I thought were good ideas for the field of child development. I couldn't have done anything I did without SRCD.

Featherman: For the archive, and that's, of course, about SRCD, and it's important that we have that thought. Is there anything else in our effort to sort of elicit from you things about Bert Brim, and about Bert Brim's contributions, and the way Bert Brim thinks about social science and the field of development, did we miss important things that we ought to talk about for a few minutes?

Brim: David, I don't know how to answer that. I think I've been a very fortunate man to have lived during a period when midlife development, and human development, and the possibility of change, and studies in midlife occurred and to have been part of that. It's been exciting and plenty of work in human development that would not be exciting. This was exciting. I was privileged to be part of this. Since the revolution in thinking about human development--I mentioned Patty Cohen yesterday as the *New York Times* reporter who was doing a book--the book is the *Cultural History of Middle Age* and there are a couple major chapters on why did midlife become a popular subject of study in the United States in the past 40 years. And so she has recognized that something happened in this country.

Featherman: But I want to just sort of wrap things up from my point of view by saying you have said to me on one or more occasions that being famous is not the same thing as seeking fame. And of course, you're quite right about that. You are very famous, and you're made famous by the high professional regard of so many of your colleagues with whom you have worked and many of the colleagues and students who have not maybe had the privilege of meeting you, let alone working with you, but who have read and benefited from all of the things that you have either written or created like fellowship programs. And on behalf of all of us--thanks--it's been just wonderful. Thanks for doing this. I appreciate it.

Brim: Thank you, David.

Featherman: Yes.

Brim: Thank you, Deborah.

Phillips: Oh, what a joy this has been.

Featherman: Okay. This is the end of the oral history interview with Bert Brim.

End of Interview